

LESSON THREE

(2:37-47)

Receiving God's Word 2:37-47

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." 40 And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul; and wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

V. 37 - **cut to the heart** - The verb means to sting or to cut or to pierce. It conveys the idea that Peter's words stunned them, not only because what he said was recognized as being true, but also because of the enormity of the truths presented.

to Peter and the rest - Though Peter had preached, and answers their question, the other eleven may also have been speaking. The twelve were recognized as those who would know the answers, on the basis of what had been seen and heard, and so they were asked. This is but another indication that only the twelve were recipients of Joel's prophecy, and properly the subjects being described in 2:1ff.

what shall we do - Not a rhetorical question, but one for information. They had accepted as true what Peter had said. They now believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, and that they were guilty of sin in respect to His crucifixion.

V. 38 - **repent** - The Greek word means: change your mind (and thus your life). It is a prominent N.T. theme, involved in the initial response to the gospel facts, and in subsequent Christian life. One never gets through repenting, since (like Paul in Phil. 3:13-14) one must always "press forward" in better living, higher goals, following in Jesus' footsteps.

It is a basic premise behind the N.T. epistles that those to whom they were written will conform to the stipulations therein. Hence, repentance is presumed on the part of the recipients. Stated differently, to have the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is going to demand constant mind-changing, seen in life-changing. Nothing else will suffice.

The doctrine of repentance is much more forward looking than being concerned with the past. The Christian must live in the future, not the past. We do people a disservice with our “faith”, repentance, etc.” if we leave an impression that repentance is only necessary to becoming a Christian, rather than essential to remaining a Christian.

be baptized - The second of the two commands, the results being stated next. This is the first outward action commanded, and actually the effect of faith and repentance. We are active in believing and changing our mind, and express our acceptance of Jesus as our Savior, in a way that all can see, by our obedience to the command to be immersed. By these three: faith, repentance, immersion, we are in Christ, Galatians 3:27. (See comments on 8:36 please).

forgiveness of sins - A promise to be received by faith. We cannot prove that such has been done. We accept the fact that our sins have been forgiven because of our faith in God’s character. We do what Jesus commands, and believe that God will keep His promise(s). John’s immersion was for the forgiveness of sins, but like the sacrifices of the Old covenant, depended upon the blood of Jesus (Cf. Mark 1:4), Hebrews 9:15-17.

gift of the Holy Spirit - There is so much controversy over this point (as well as the preceding ones!). The argument over the nature of the Holy Spirit, the relationship of the Holy Spirit to one’s conversion, then the subsequent effects upon that (converted) person, whether the gift is the Holy Spirit Himself, or a gift from Him - all these are at issue here. We think it is best to take the text as meaning the person of the Holy Spirit, as presented in Romans 8:9-11. So then, the person of Jesus gave his life for all our sins, the person of the Holy Spirit is given as a guarantee of our eternal inheritance, II Cor. 5:5.

V. 39 - **the promise** - Some consider this to be the same promise as in 1:4; some think it refers to the prophecy of Joel, especially that in v. 21, but not excluding the other parts of the prophecy relating to items individuals were to receive. Some also hold that the “promise” was only to the Jews, not to Gentiles, and Acts 2:38 should not be cited by anyone as applicable to this present age, considering that the “everyone” means only Jews, and that Gentiles were/are to be treated differently.

We think the “promise” means Jesus and all that he means, and is for everyone, anytime, anywhere. The rest of the N.T. never indicates anything else, or any other message. If God had intended to have another Gospel, etc., he surely did not indicate it anywhere.

It is also pertinent to remark that Peter (and the other apostles) surely said more than they understood. The term “you and ...your children, and ...all that are far off” was not thought to include Gentiles, only Jews. Hence, the experience in Peter’s life in Acts 10 was necessary to make him (and the rest of the Jews) understand that everyone was meant, not Jews only. As Peter stated, “I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him,” Acts 10:34-35. Paul, the Jew, was specifically told that he would be sent “far away to the Gentiles,” Acts 22:21. Inspiration did not extend to understanding of the revelation

which the apostles received. It was with them as it was with the men of old, I Peter 1:10-12. They were as we are: God's revelation is one thing; our understanding of God's revelation another thing. We do well to keep this in mind as we study, that we are attempting to understand God's revelation. All men are equal in this respect. It is not that God's revelation cannot be understood (and obeyed), because it can be. The point is, however, that we are humans who are trying to know what is divine. The task is great and often life's experiences are needed to understand some things in God's Word. Others may have perceived better than we, and so what others say about God's revelation might need to be considered. All need to study and keep the mind open while studying.

Looking ahead to v. 42, because of the importance of the verse, an extended study is given. The reader should remember that probably the essentials of church life are stated. Even though many of the things written in the epistles may not have been known by those first Christians, they were still Christians, no more and no less. We do well to remember that when we get into discussions with others about what is essential to the Christian life, what characteristics must one have, names worn, etc.

V.40 - **save yourselves** - This command is passive: "be saved." However, it amounts to this: those listening were to avail themselves of the salvation offered by obeying the immediately preceding commands given. We would understand these instructions from the apostles as being the first fulfillment of Matthew 16:18-19; John 20:23; etc., in that the apostles were the human instruments God used to reveal his new covenant for all people, Jews and Gentiles. The apostles' word was then law in the sense that it was what God had decreed.

crooked - The opposite of straight. Philippians 2:15 has the same idea. Many different terms are used to describe people of that day: evil, adulterous, perverse; all various ways to describe sinners. The exhortation was, then, to save themselves from the state of being classed as sinners to being classed with the "saved."

V. 41 - **those who received** - Note here Hebrews 4:2, and the children of Israel of whom it speaks. Consider also the significance of the idea: "those who received." It is stated as if they had choice, rather than "had been chosen" or "were made to do so," etc.

The apostles made up the initial body to which the 3,000 were added consequent upon their immersion "into Christ" as Galatians 3:27 states. We are persuaded that no one is saved (= being in Christ) apart from believing in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, changing one's mind to conform to that fact, issuing in immersion of the person in water.

V. 42 - **devoted** - The Greek term is in a present participle form, indicating a habit of life, what was normally done or practiced, although the verb itself has that sort of idea too (it can be seen in the following contexts: Mark 3:9; Acts 1:14; 2:46; 6:4; 8:13; 10:7; Rom. 12:12; 13:6; Eph. 6:18 and Col. 4:2), indicating a perseverance in something, characterized by perseverance, loyalty, constancy, etc.

apostles' teaching - The apostles continued what "Jesus began...to teach," Acts 1:1 and by the authority he had given to them, Matt. 28: 19,20.

We can see that others taught or had a teaching in the New Testament, (I Cor. 14:6, 26; Col. 3:16; II Tim. 2:2; 4:2; Heb. 5:12, etc.) but it is also quite plain that the apostles' teaching was considered normative and authoritative, not only by themselves, but by the early Christians. (Hence, others such as the 120 were not considered by Luke in his history of the church as important enough to even mention in this respect.)

We need to think about this concept from the perspective of what the apostles taught. These first Christians adhered to the doctrine of the apostles, so that what is meant by our text is that they kept listening and wanting to be taught so that they might practice correctly. The sum total of the apostles' doctrine included many things not listed in v. 42. The epistles represent their doctrine, as well as the next three items in v. 42, namely, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

The aim and intent of any study needs to be that of understanding exactly what the apostles taught, so that we might obey it. Any claim to be a New Testament Christian necessitates such procedure. Such attempt has the distinct plus of appealing to the Bible as an objective standard. We must disclaim any other than the Bible as an authoritative guide, while believing what Jesus himself taught or through his chosen apostles as our sole guide.

However, the ideal is not so easy to accomplish as to say. Many people accuse others of having unwritten creeds plus the written one.

Consider two things as illustrations: inferences, and systems of thought or doctrine. Inferences are, by nature, not stated. Any statement would have one inference, or more. We have to be careful about how firmly we insist on inferences. If others cannot honestly see the inference we see, we should not insist they do so before we accept them. (An example might be the kind of bread to be used in the Lord's Supper, or the use of musical instruments.) If we do so, we make human wisdom and reasoning the test of brotherhood. We have no right to do that. Faith must be based upon God's revelation, not man's inferences from it.

The second point is this: deciding what is considered the doctrine of the apostles, and, upon that decision, how it is applied. The inspiration of the N.T. can be asserted with good reason. However, no one can claim inspiration for our understanding of said books, nor the particular way one visualizes their relationships. For instance, we struggle with the concept of law versus grace, and decide that grace is the system that saves us. But we still tend, for various reasons, to make the grace system a law system. There are so many areas where God has not spoken that we sometimes feel uncomfortable. We want to have a "thus saith the Lord" for any and all practices. Hence, we may be prone to see an inference where there is none, or not that which we wish to see. (Illustration: fruit of vine prohibits orange juice.) Moreover, we argue for liberty in opinions, and justly so. But liberty must be just that, not another law system, whether written or unwritten. If God had only 1) clearly revealed what of the teaching of the apostles was for "Christians only," or 2) what system to use to put things together, how much easier it would have been! Alas! we say: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where they are silent, we

are silent.” It is just as true, and maybe more needed, to say, “Where the Scriptures speak, we are silent; where the Scriptures are silent, only there may we speak.” But if so, may we respect the source, and consider it as human, not divine.

fellowship - It is all too common to consider fellowship as that which we do at meals, or at a party, etc., and not also (and more correctly) what we have in Christ. We need to stress the second, that the first may be more meaningful.

Any first discussion of this subject, however, even if the above is granted immediately brings up the issue: who is in Christ, or, God is father of what person? Though it is true that everyone who is in Christ is also in fellowship with everyone else, we individually decide those whom we consider to be in Christ. By this action, we thus choose with whom we have fellowship.

One of the questions that may be asked about our text specifically is this: if fellowship is “automatic”, why did Luke state that they “continued” in it, much as they continued in the other things? It seems that continuing in teaching, etc., would automatically maintain the fellowship. Hence, the term may have been used merely to state what was true, rather than to indicate something the Christians did.

Christians share in the grace of God, and in the lives we live by His grace and His Spirit being in us. God commands us all to take care of one another in love, which is everyday fellowship.

A study of the words in the N.T. related to fellowship yields an idea of commonness, hence of mutual relationships, then the results from the relationship. The opposite concept would be attention to that which is one’s own, or concerns on an individual level rather than a collective level.

The definition of fellowship is having things in common, being partners or sharing interests and efforts toward a common goal, in some way or degree belonging to one another. Christian fellowship is the partnership of duties, interests and of destiny which is peculiar to the church of God, which is the brotherhood of those who are in the family of God by new birth in Christ. See Acts 2:42; Gal. 2:9; Phil. 1:5; 2:1; I Cor. 1:9.

We see some practical outworkings of the recognition of commonness in Acts 4:32-37. This was not an example of a planned economy, nor of a legal requirement, but rather brotherly love expressed. Jesus and his disciples had a common treasury, but Judas was greedy/covetous, the opposite of the right attitude. Jesus taught that we must deny self, and make the way of the cross our desire. In so doing, we participate with him, and have fellowship with others of like mind.

A Christian is not to share in things of the world, but separate self from those, that he/she may share in all things of God. Hence, the “holy” and the “common” are yet facts of life of the Christian, though the terms have changed somewhat from O.T. usage.

For the Christian, the concept of fellowship will be sometimes expressed by the Greek preposition that means “with.” See here Rom. 6:4, 6; 8:17; Phil. 3:10; Col. 2:12, 13; Philemon v. 1,2, where the ideas of fellowship are expressed.

breaking of bread - Many things the apostles taught are interesting, but none are more so than our subject, nor none more controversial. Many positive things can be said which would include the following:

- 1) Jesus instructed it
- 2) To be done by Christians in remembrance of Him
- 3) Until He comes again
- 4) It is to commemorate his death (i.e., his body, given for us; his blood, shed for remission of sins).
- 5) It has been practiced as an integral part of Christian worship even from the beginning (steadfast continuance at the start).
- 6) It is identified as “breaking of bread” and “Lord’s Supper.”
- 7) It should correctly be observed, lest we condemn ourselves.
- 8) Jesus used simple symbols, bread and fruit of vine, to begin it. (The same symbols have been continually used, showing the general consensus of understanding within the Church. Doubtless, simple and common things were used to help us get our minds off of them, and on Him to whom they pointed).
- 9) Each was to partake of it, individually, yet as a collective body. That it is a memorial, a proclamation, a fellowship and a covenant seems clear.

There are some things not so clear, however, and require consideration, since many are divided over one or more of the following:

- 1) How often is “often”?
- 2) How does the Lord’s supper relate to worship (not to worship services, but to worship)?
- 3) What about the elements? Must they be identical to, or similar to, those used by Jesus?
- 4) Is the “breaking of bread” in our text actually equal to the Lord’s supper?
- 5) How necessary is it for the individual Christian to participate?
- 6) How does one correctly observe it?
- 7) If one correctly observes the Supper, what benefits accrue if any?
- 8) Who may officiate at the table?
- 9) Who may participate?

Christians have never been united on these matters, maybe because the Scriptures are not clear or for other reasons. No discussion of these points can be done without a reflection of one’s theology. Stated another way, one’s religious background will determine one’s answers on individual religious matters. Any answer, therefore, simply must be taken with these things in mind. Additionally, as mentioned above, we must take care that God’s system of grace is not transformed into a system of law. Because of the limitations of space, only the first item will be discussed, but similar discussions are possible on the other items.

The texts that seem to bear most heavily on the frequency of observance are Acts 2:42; 20:7; and I Cor. 11.

Some would also include the type in the Old Covenant, the bread of the presence (“shewbread”), arguing that as it was to be changed and eaten each week, so must this antitype the Lord’s Supper. It seems to be true from 2:46 that the early Christians observed the Supper daily - why not? Acts 20:7 simply presents the practice of one congregation at Troas. We don’t know if all congregations did so or not, or if the Apostle Paul approved or not (silence proves little). The evidence is that one congregation did so - that is all we have. We may suppose that they were instructed by an apostle (perhaps Paul) but that is not explicitly said. There is little argument about the practice - the argument is: does one conclude that all did because some did? I Cor. 11 does not state how “often” is often. If one attempts to cite early church history, a reasonably good case can be presented for a weekly observance. What about type and antitype? The Hebrew epistle does not say how much the “copy” and the “copied” were to resemble each other. Any student of types knows that, except Scripture precisely states what is typified, anything can be (and has been) argued. In our case, one might well ask about having at communion time twelve unleavened loaves, or a type with no liquid attached to it being a type of something with a liquid as major factor. There are significant differences between the two things, and no Scripture states just exactly what the type foreshadowed. It is then a matter of opinion on most things.

If God’s Word has said: do this weekly, on Sunday, using only grape juice and unleavened pieces of baked dough, we might have something more substantial than we do. It does not so say. We are then in the position of arguing the most of our position from inference. Let us be careful how we draw our lines.

prayer - This is a concept that is like the last three. All were and are but facets of the doctrine the apostles taught. Prayer is taught in the O.T. and a privilege for every Christian. We are not told how God hears any and all prayers, or answers them, or a dozen other things we would like to know. We are told to pray, believing, always. Those things are clear and all God saw fit to reveal to us.

V. 43 - **fear came** - The state of mind described as fear probably varied from person to person, since it may run the gamut from a state of terror to that of great respect. The last is the healthy and desirable frame of mind in reference to God, the first, what should not be true. God wants everyone to honor him as God, but view him as our loving gracious Father.

many wonders and signs - This will be a recurring idea in Acts, since God worked often and mightily through the apostles.

V. 44 - This verse, and v. 45, illustrate a part of the fellowship in which the first Christians continued. See the same idea in II Cor. 8 and 9.

V. 45 - This will happen again as seen in chapter 4. No one was commanded to do so, or even encouraged to do so. Possessions were shared as the need or desire arose, quite in contrast to a forced compliance, as by a ruler or state.

V. 46 - **attending the temple** - The temple area was the common area for the church to meet, since it was easily accessible, and provided both shelter and a rich mine for evangelism.

breaking bread - More than likely the Lord's Supper. There would be little point in remarking about what went on everywhere by everybody, Christian or not. The last part of our verse and the opening phrases of v. 47 probably were written to show in what attitude of mind the early Christians lived.

V. 47 - **God added** - This text again highlighted the way that God was connected with the Church, that it might be more clearly perceived by all. The text stated this fact: God, not man, adds to the Church, because the church is divine, not human in origin. Many other scriptures bear on the same general point, and are listed with comment.

1. Jeremiah 31:31-34, quoted in Heb. 8:8-13. The text in Jeremiah comes from the midst of a revelation by the prophet, which concerned God's future plans for Israel. He promised to restore them to their land, and bring good times back to them. One of the blessings of restoration was the promise about a new kind of covenant relationship between God and his people. Jeremiah's text as quoted in Heb. 8 is in the middle of a discussion about the old and new covenants revealing that Christians were the intended recipients of the new relationship God had promised by Jeremiah. Hence, the privilege of covenant relationship as enjoyed by Christians was a direct result of God, who brought the new covenant into existence. As Paul said in I Cor. 2:9: the covenant was not of man - it was of God, a mystery hidden for the ages (Rom. 16:25-27) but revealed in the last days through the apostles. Cf. Eph. 3:3-6.

2. I Chron. 17:7-14, in Luke 1:30-33. The text in I Chron. is from a revelation to Nathan by God, as God unfolded his future plans. Among the things promised were:

a) a "name" for David to be fulfilled in his offspring (note that the Messiah was to be the "Son of David," and the many times Jesus accepted that expression; and that opening verse of Matthew pinpoints the relationship God had promised.)

b) that God would bring about a new place for his people Israel (tie in with Daniel 2:44-45, and Hebrews 12:18-28)

c) a house and throne for David that would never end. The text in Luke 1 directly states that Mary's son was the fulfillment of that promise.

3. Ephesians 1:3-14, 22-23 is replete with the idea that God had always intended for Christ to come, that redemption might be provided for everyone, and that Jesus was the head of the Church. Colossians 1:15-20 has the same basic ideas.

4. Ephesians 2:19-22 underscores the new relationship of those whom God has saved by grace through faith, since they are fellow citizens (note the fellowship) and parts of the holy temple of God. The text of I Peter 2:9-10 is pertinent to this text.

5. Ephesians 4:11-16 again helps us to see the active planning of God for the Church, and includes the basic provisions for all its members, said provisions to bring each one to maturity in Jesus, which is God's ordained design.

6. Matthew 16:13-19 covers the ground from Jesus' own understanding, in that the knowledge of his divinity, upon which fact the Church was to be built, was of God, not of man (i.e., God originated the plan for the Church). The text also reveals Jesus' place in the establishment of the Church, and that death (representing any or all enemies) would not end the existence of the Church. Romans 16:25-27 ties in at this point.

7. I Cor. 3:10-17 emphasizes, among other things, the place of the apostles in revealing the character of the Church, which was to be built upon Christ; and that the Church is a holy temple of God, under his protective care.

8. I Tim. 3:14-16 brings in the idea of "household" as being one way to view the ekklesia (church/assembly) of the living God. This text also brings before us several important ideas about Jesus (in whom we dwell/live, and who dwells/lives in us, John 15:5-16). Hebrews 3:1-6 can be used in this regard (i.e., God built the "house").

9. Titus 2:11-14 can profitably be used to show the ownership of those in the Church. The text in I Peter 2:9-10 makes the membership belong to God, thus showing the unity of God and Christ in regard to the Church. (John 17:20ff. shows this also.)

10. Hebrews 9:11-28 has much to offer along these lines of thought. For instance, that God instituted a new will/covenant at the death of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. The eternal nature of the sacrifice of Christ as it related to sin's forgiveness is shown, at the end of the age (of the Old Covenant age and beginning of the New Covenant age).

11. I Peter 1:3-12 nicely reveals what things God has done for those who are living stones in the Church, through whom God promised those things, and what he does continuously for those about whom he planned. (The remaining verses of the chapter are likewise valuable, emphasizing the eternally-destined sacrifice of Jesus for sin.)

12. Revelation 19:1-9 text reveals the ultimate end of the Church as God has planned it. It will help us live better because we, as part of that Church, await our hope which is founded in Christ Jesus. Note the text of I John 3:1-3 here.

Many other scriptures might be given, but these present clearly the fact that God planned to send Jesus in the fullness of time, to die for the sins of the whole world, and to establish the Church which is to continue until the second coming, at which time the present earth will be destroyed and a new heaven and earth begin, II Peter 3; Revelation 21-22.

QUESTIONS

23. What two things did Peter tell people to do? What results did they get?

24. Do you do what the early Christians did?

25. Why did Luke tell us that God added people to the church? Do you know any Scriptures that tell about men adding to the church?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

1. What does the verb for “cut to the heart” mean, and what idea does it convey (Acts 2:37)?

2. What two things were commanded of the seekers for salvation on Pentecost (Acts 2:38)?

3. What does the word “repent” mean?

4. How do we express our acceptance of Jesus in a way that all can see?

5. What two things are promised to those who repent and are baptized (Acts 2:38)?
6. Complete the following statement: “By these three: _____,
_____,
_____ we are in Christ (Galatians 3:27).”

7. Why is the person of the Holy Spirit given to those who repent and are baptized?

8. What is significant about the words “those who received” in Acts 2:41? What does it indicate?

9. How many repentant believers were baptized on Pentecost?

10. What does the word “devoted” mean and indicate (Acts 2:42)?

11. What is the “Apostle’s teaching”?

12. Provide a definition of the word “fellowship” (Acts 2:42).

13. What is “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42)?

14. List nine positive things regarding the “breaking of bread”.

15. What texts in the New Testament seem to bear most heavily on the frequency of observing the “breaking of bread”?
16. What privilege is shared by all Christians (Acts 2:42)?

17. According to Mark 10:45, why did Jesus come to earth?

18. Who adds to the Church: God or man? Explain your answer.

**AT THIS TIME, PLEASE REFER TO PAGE 93 FOR
A SPECIAL STUDY ON BAPTISM!!**