

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.” (Acts 5:12-16)

Lesson 1 of 38

INTRODUCTION TO NEW SERIES

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.” (Acts 5:12)

At the time covered in our text, the church had been purged of Ananias and Sapphira, and the people had been seized by great fear. Judgment had begun in the house of God, just as Peter would write much later, and just prior to his appointment with death (1 Pet 4:17). The government had been placed upon Christ's shoulder, as Isaiah had prophesied (Isa 9:6-7), and He was adjudicating that Kingdom with “all power in heaven and earth,” which had been given to Him (Matt 28:18) – just as promised by Isaiah (Isa 9:6-7), and Daniel (Dan 7:13-14). Believers were “added” to the church by Him (Acts 2:47) – three thousand initially (Acts 2:41), with the next additions numbering five thousand men (Acts 4:4). Then came the removal of those who proved to be unworthy, as the fifth chapter of Acts confirms. The latter activity – removing Ananias and Sapphira – was followed by a wake of fear throughout the church, and among all others who heard of the matter (Acts 5:11). That was followed by this circumstance: “believers were the more added to the Lord, MULTITUDES both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

However, this did not bring a cessation to the working of the Lord among the brethren, as those in the flesh might be prone to think. Instead, the work seems to accelerate, now that the “old leaven” has been purged out of the assembly. When Corinth had uncomely people among their number, Paul wrote, “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7). When iniquity is found among the people of God, it is always detrimental, and must be dealt with in forthrightness and discretion. Solemnly the church is told, “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, LET IT NOT BE ONCE NAMED AMONG YOU, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph 5:3-4). If such people are found in the church, the saints are instructed, “if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? DO NOT YE JUDGE THEM THAT ARE WITHIN? But them that are without God

judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor 5:11-13). Other versions read, “but it is yours to be judging those who are among you” (BBE), “Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?” (ESV), “but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning” (NLT), “Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges” (NASB), and “Is it not those inside [the church] upon whom you are to pass disciplinary judgment [passing censuring sentence on them as the facts require]? God alone sits in judgment on those who are outside. Drive out that wicked one from among you [expel him from your church]” (AMPLIFIED).

Now, this is the church of the first century that is often referenced by many. It is the real church, with exhortations and instructions issued under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Right here, we confront a complicating factor. Under the incapable leadership and teaching of pretentious men, these texts are now strange and unacceptable to multitudes of church-goers. A religious culture has been developed, like it or not, that makes the mind of the Lord sound foreign, and unworthy of acceptance. Instead of doing what the Lord has demanded, certain men have arisen who have developed ways to keep immoral people in the church, while training them over an extended and expensive period of time, to develop new habits. But it is not new habits that they need. They need a new nature – a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). They need to be a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), and experience being God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

At the beginning of this series, I feel compelled to say that the modern church needs a massive purging. For the most part, it is now an environment God and His Son, the Holy Spirit and the holy angels, will not occupy. Many of the circumstances in the churches that grieve the hearts of the godly, are really the result of an absent God and Christ. I intend to confirm this is the case by this series of devotions – a series in which Divine manners will be seen in the real church of God.

Now, so far as our text is concerned, a purging has taken place. Now our text proceeds.

Many signs and wonders are wrought “among the people” by the apostles. There continued to be a remarkable unanimity among the people of God, as they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch, where the initial opposition arose. Fear – even trembling fear – did not stop them from assembling, being of one accord, or continuing in the apostles’ doctrine.

Then there was a sense among the general populous of the things that were occurring among the believers. Those who were not in Christ Jesus did not dare to join themselves to the church. There seemed to be a lively sense of the holiness of God upon every soul – so much so that insincere people were afraid to be numbered with the disciples. May God hasten the day when this will again be the case!

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 2 of 38

THE FRESHNESS OF NEW LIFE REVEALED, #1

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)” (Verses 12-14, Acts 5:12-16)

The freshness of newness of life is revealed in this text. There is a total break with empty ceremony and lifeless rituals. The people were gathered together in the Temple – a place noted for ceremony and ritual – yet such are not evidenced at all in their gatherings.

There are a number of firsts in this text. Permit me to mention them so they will be more obvious as we go through this series of lessons.

1. For the first time, we read about people being afraid to be identified with this body of believers (5:13a).
2. Outsiders magnified or praised the believers (5:13b).
3. People were said to have been “added to the Lord” (5:14a).
4. For the first time, women are mentioned as being added (5:14b).
5. People sought to have even the shadow of Peter pass over the sick (5:15).
6. For the first since Jesus returned to heaven, everyone was healed (5:16).

The nature of new life is clearly emerging in the book of Acts. This is what happened when people were “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). These are the results of having the laws of God written upon the heart and put into the mind (Heb 8:10; 10:16). This is what occurs when the people acknowledge the true God to be their own, and He identifies Himself with them (Heb 10:10-11). When the people know God, as everyone in the New Covenant does, these are the things that can take place. Admittedly, some of them are Divinely discretionary – like everyone being healed, and the shadow of Peter passing over the sick – but if God does them, it will be among a body of people like those described in this text.

Permit me to briefly review what has been said in the book of Acts to this point – things regarding receptive and believing hearts. These are the only kind of hearts that are honored in heaven. They are the kind of hearts salvation produces.

1. “These all continued with one accord” (1:14).
2. “They were all with one accord in one place” (2:1).
3. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (2:37).
4. “They that gladly received the word were baptized” (2:41).
5. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).
6. “Fear came upon every soul” (2:43).
7. “And all that believed were together, and had all things common” (2:44).
8. “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (2:46).
9. “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was

about five thousand” (4:4).

10. “They lifted up their voice to God with one accord” (4:24).

11. “. . . they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (4:31).

12. “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (4:32).

13. “. . . great grace was upon them all” (4:33).

14. “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold” (4:34).

15. “. . . and great fear came on all them that heard these things” (5:5).

16. “. . . and great fear came upon all the church” (5:11).

17. “. . . and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch” (5:12).

These are not things that were mandated by law, but were the responses of believing. They were not descriptive of a few of those who believed, but of them all. It is wholly proper for such things to be found among professed believers today. When people really believe and obey the Gospel, something more should happen than a slight increase in attendance and offerings.

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Lesson 3 of 38

THE FRESHNESS OF NEW LIFE REVEALED, #2

The prophets foretold that the age of the Messiah, the era of the New Covenant, would be characterized by dramatic changes. It was not to be a period of new laws, but rather of new life and holy aptitudes. The recollection of some of their statements is like holy fragrance that clears the air of spiritual contaminants.

1. A CIRCUMCISED HEART. “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deu 30:6).

2. PROTECTION IN THE MIDST OF DANGER. “And a Man shall be as an Hiding Place from the wind, and a Covert from the tempest; as Rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a Great Rock in a weary land” (Isa 32:2).

3. GOING FROM UNDISCERNING TO DISCERNING. “And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly” (Isa 32:4).
4. GOING FROM INABILITY TO ABILITY. “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert” (Isa 35:6).
5. A HIGHWAY OF ULTIMATE SAFETY. “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8).
6. MAN NO LONGER AT VARIANCE WITH GOD’S LAW. “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer 31:33).
7. FAMILIARITY WITH GOD. “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34).
8. TOTAL NEWNESS OF CHARACTER. “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in My statutes, and keep Mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19-20).
9. THE HOLY SPIRIT PUT WITHIN. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:27).
10. PURENESS OF SPEECH, AND ONENESS AMONG THE PEOPLE. “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one consent” (Zeph 3:9).

What we are witnessing in the book of Acts is the RESULT of these Divinely instituted changes. The character of the people, as well as their marvelous unity, is the result of walking in the “newness of life” (Rom 6:4). No regimented procedure could have produced such changes. This was not the result of special tutoring by the apostles on “how to live.” This is what happens when the Father and the Son take up residence in men. Jesus promised, “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23). Technically speaking, spiritual empowerment does not come because we love Christ and keep His words. It is the indwelling of the Father and the Son that follows these responses that is the source of this much-needed empowerment – not to mention the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom God has “given unto us” (Rom 5:5).

Where these traits are missing, the Divinely promised salvation is not being experienced.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

THE FRESHNESS OF NEW LIFE REVEALED, #3

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Verses 12-14, Acts 5:12-16)

When Christ and man are united by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:3), and through faith (Eph 4:13), there is an actual participation with the Lord. The only limits IMPOSED upon man relate to the choice, will, and purpose of God. No man or group of men can impose spiritual limits on people – even though considerable efforts are expended to do so. There is no point at which the Lord relinquishes the government of His Kingdom to men. Their insight and participation in the Kingdom directly relate to Divine discretion and purpose. That is why Jesus said to His apostles, “I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt 17:20). In that case, the limiting factor is faith – “according to your faith” (Matt 9:29). Valid experience before God cannot extend beyond the perimeter of ones faith.

The execution of mighty works among men is not at the behest, promise, command, or will of man. The government of the Kingdom is with the exalted Christ, not men. Nowhere is there a clear statement in Scripture that affirms a time when there will be a cessation of “mighty works,” “signs,” or “wonders.” Throughout history, there have been times – sometimes lengthy periods of time – when it appeared as though it was no longer possible for such things to take place. Gideon was tempted to think he was living in such a time. That is why he asked an angel who appeared to him, “where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of” (Judges 6:13). The angel did not tell him “the age of miracles has past” – even though it may very appeared as though that was the case.

For that matter, until John the Baptist was miraculously born, it had been centuries since any recorded miracle had taken place – and John himself “did no miracle” (John 10:41). If some twentieth century theologians had been there, they might have reasoned that the age of miracles had ceased.

All accomplishments within the Kingdom are according to Divine purpose – an “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11) – the grand master plan that drives all that God does. His will is associated with the details of that “purpose,” and nothing is accepted by Him outside the perimeter of that will. His choice involves the selection of those who become a part of what He is doing. Our text will focus particularly upon His apostles, which have been placed “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). Their office was not a temporary office, for they continue to minister to the church through records of their preaching and teaching that were written under the administration of the Holy Spirit.

When God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven – something for which Jesus taught us to pray (Matt 6:10) – the purpose of God is accomplished by His determined will being done through men of His choice. Faith is the appointed means through which it is done. This will become very apparent in this text as we behold what is done through Christ's appointed men, as well as what is done within them. It will be evident that men, so far as the Kingdom of God is concerned, cannot cause such things to happen. Apart from Christ, they are simply impossible. They are the Lord's doing, and they are "marvelous in our eyes" (Psa 118:23)!

Apostolic doctrine teaches us to rely upon a God who works miraculously, or far beyond the narrow boundaries of nature. With holy insight Paul prayed that the people of God would have the eyes of their understanding opened to see "what is the EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER to usward who believe, according to the working of HIS MIGHTY POWER, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only IN THIS WORLD, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:19-23).

How exactly does one fit the notion of "the age of miracles" into that statement? Has the Divine outlet of the expression of Christ's "mighty power" been turned off? Has the power that is toward those who believe been withdrawn? Is the glorified Christ no longer disposed to work supernaturally? Is He now confined to the working of nature? Who is the fool who would dare to speak in such a manner of the risen Christ. It is Jesus that is governing this world, not an appointed "age" or period of time. As long as Jesus is reigning, nothing is impossible. In fact, if you take the miraculous out of life's equation, there can be no more new birth (1 Pet 1:23), new creation (2 Cor 5:17), creation of a clean heart (Psa 51:10), or a work transcendent to nature. There is, then, no more healing (James 5:13-15), renewal (Rom 12:2; Tit 3:5), direction (2 Thess 3:5), Divine teaching (Eph 4:20-21; 1 Thess 4:9; 1 John 5:20), subduing of enemies (1 Cor 15:25; Heb 1:3; 10:13), the administration of spiritual understanding (Col 1:9), granting of wisdom (Eph 1:17; James 1:5), the turning of the king's heart (Prov 21:1) . . . etc. If such a withdrawal is true, then everything pertaining to life and godliness can be explained by natural processes and the wisdom of men. To say the last, we recommend that no one attempt to support such a postulate.

I am affirming unequivocally that the exaltation of Christ has not in any way been diminished. All things are still possible to him that believes (Mk 9:23), and God "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph 3:20). This is confirmed in our text. The borders of the Kingdom of God have not been reduced!

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 5 of 38

SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE WROUGHT BY THE APOSTLES, #1

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch).” (Verse 12, Acts 5:12-16)

Other versions read, “The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people” (NIV), “Now a number of signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the Apostles” (BBE), “Now many signs and wonders were REGULARLY done among the people by the hands of the apostles” (ESV), “Thus by the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders SHOWED among the people” (GENEVA), “The people saw the apostles perform many miracles and do amazing things” (GWN), “And through the hands of the apostles CAME many signs and wonders among the people” (YLT), “Meanwhile, the apostles . . . did many remarkable miracles among the people” (LIVING), “ The apostles did many miracles and powerful things among the people” (IE), “Many signs and marvels CONTINUED TO BE DONE among the people by the Apostles” (WEYMOUTH), “ Now many signs and wonders were CONTINUOUSLY being performed by the apostles among the people” (ISV), “Now by the hands of the apostles (special messengers) numerous and startling signs and wonders were being performed among the people” (AMPLIFIED), and “Many signs and wonders were now happening among the people through the apostles' ministry” (PHILLIPS, part of verse 15) .

This is the third time in this book that miracles are said to be have done through the hands of the apostles.

1. THE DAY OF PENTECOST. “And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done BY THE APOSTLES” (Acts 2:43).
2. AT THE TEMPLE. “Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” (Acts 3:6-8).
3. FOLLOWING THE DEATHS OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA. “And BY THE HANDS OF THE APOSTLES were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch)” (Acts 5:12).

This is the second time that the apostles are said to have worked a MULTIPLICITY of signs and wonders – “MANY wonders and signs” (Acts 2:43; 5:12).

When the disciples prayed for boldness to be granted to them to speak the Word of God, they supplicated, “By stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that SIGNS AND WONDERS may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:30). NOTE: In this case, the reason for asking that signs and wonders would be done was not to validate the message the apostles were preaching, but that the Word might be spoken with “boldness–i.e. “grant unto Thy servants, that WITH ALL BOLDNESS they may speak Thy word, BY stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:29-20).

Now, that is precisely what is taking place in our text. Their supplication is being answered.

Once again, notice that their prayer was that they might be granted boldness to speak the word

through this means. In referring to such incidents, Mark says the Lord was “working with them, and confirming the word with signs following” (Mark 16:20). Speaking of this beginning of the Gospel Paul also wrote of, “so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was CONFIRMED UNTO US by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will” (Heb 2:3-4).

Further, this kind of working was not confined to the apostles, for Stephen, a deacon, “did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8). Philip, also a deacon, preached and “did” miracles among the people in Samaria (Acts 8:6). I am not attempting to justify any position, but am merely drawing attention to what has been revealed in Scripture on these matters. Our reasoning must be firmly founded on what has been revealed, not on what men have said about what is revealed.

This was not extraordinary men doing extraordinary things. Rather, it was GOD WORKING THROUGH MEN IN STRICT ACCORDANCE WITH HIS OWN WILL. That is how we must think of this text.

The Spirit is not establishing an official doctrine concerning the working of miracles, even though men have done their best (or worst) to establish such a teaching. I come from a background where the attempt was made to limit the period during which miracles were wrought. Others go to the opposite extreme, saying that it is always God’s will to work miracles, and that you ought to expect Him to do so. Neither position has been revealed from God, but is rather only the imaginations of men. These extreme positions are nothing more than the crystalization of human thought. They are not in the class of revelation.

The profit realized from this text will not be realized by thinking of it as descriptive of a certain period of time, or by treating them as Kingdom normalcy. They must be seen as the outworking of the purpose of God, and done in strict accordance with His own will and “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11). Whatever stance we take on this matter, it must not in any way be in conflict with what God said He is doing in and through Christ Jesus (Eph 3:21; 1 Pet 5:10; Gal 4:7; Eph 2:7; Heb 2:10; 4:15-16), by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13-14; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 5:5; Eph 2:22; 1 Pet 1:22), through the grace of God (Rom 4:16; 5:15; Eph 2:5,8; Tit 2:11-13; 2 Thess 2:16), and by faith (Acts 15:9; 26:18; Rom 5:1-2; 2 Cor 1:24; 5:7; Gal 3:26; 5:5; Eph 3:17; Heb 10:38). If at any point our reasoning is in conflict with what God has revealed on those matters, it cannot be correct. If it does NOT conflict with any of those realities, it will not be possible to invalidate the reasoning, or establish that God does not do such things.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 6 of 38

SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE WROUGHT BY THE APOSTLES, #2

“And by the hands of the apostles were MANY signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Verse 12, Acts 5:12-16)

Many

The word “many” comes from a Greek word meaning, “multitude, many, numerous, great . . . abundant, plenteous” (THAYER), “of extent or magnitude great, large much, many, plentiful” (FRIBERG), “for a large sum” (UBS), “a great deal of, a great number” (LOUW-NIDA), and “many, numerous, great, populous” (LEH). The idea is that of abundance, and diverse in type, class, or order, and many in number.

Throughout the history of the world, there have been exceedingly few periods of time in which signs and wonders were in plentitude.

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

The first outbreak of several miracles occurred prior to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. The epochal signs were ten in number, and unparalleled for sheer magnitude.

1. WATER TURNED TO BLOOD. (Exodus 7:14-25) – Rivers and other water sources turned to blood, and all the fish in them died, causing the water to stink. Water in all vessels was also turned to blood, and the Egyptians could not drink the water from the river.
2. PLAGUE OF FROGS. (Exodus 8:2-8:11) – The plague of frogs, coming out of the river and covering the land, and entering every Egyptian house.
3. PLAGUE OF LICE. (Exodus 8:16-18) – The plague of lice. The sand became lice throughout all the land of Egypt, covering both man and beast.
4. PLAGUE OF FLIES. (Exodus 8:21-28) – The plague of swarms of flies, filling every house in Egypt and corrupting the land.
5. LIVESTOCK PLAGUED. (Exodus 9:1-3) – A grievous plague was imposed upon on all the livestock in Egypt, including cattle, horses, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep.
6. PLAGUE OF BOILS. (Exodus 9:8-12) – The plague of festering boils that broke out upon every man and beast in Egypt.
7. PLAGUE OF HAIL AND FIRE. (Exodus 9:13-35) – Hail mixed with fire, with the hail beating down, killing every beast in the fields, and destroying all of the grain.
8. PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS. (Exodus 10:4-15) – Plage of locusts that covered the ground so the earth could not be seen. They ate every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left, and nothing green remained in the land.
9. THICK DARKNESS. (Exodus 10:21-29) – Thick darkness covered the land that could be felt. For three days the Egyptians were not able to see one another, and no one left their house.
10. DEATH OF ALL EGYPTIAN FIRSTBORN. (Exodus 11:1-12:36) – The death of all the

firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, to the firstborn of the maidservants, and of even the beasts.

These were all caused by God Himself, and were judgments against a stubborn Pharaoh and a willfully ignorant people.

Israel experienced several miraculous things in their journey through the wilderness. Daily miracles included being led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:21), the provision of manna (Ex 16:35), their clothes not becoming old (Deut 8:4a), and their feet not swelling (Deut 8:4b). There was the miraculous provision of water (Ex 17:6; Num 20:11), and the healing of polluted waters (Ex 15:25). There were also miraculous judgments, such as consuming fire (Num 11:1; 16:35), a plague of poisonous snakes (Num 21:6), and the ground opening up and swallowing rebels (Num 16:32). These, together with some great deliverances, occurred over a period of forty years. None of the reports of these occurrences were exaggerations.

Aside from these occasions, and with the exception of the prodigious ministry of Jesus, clusters of miracles were exceedingly rare. In fact, there were very lengthy periods of time during which no miracle was recorded. One such time was in the days of Gideon, during which he asked an angel, “where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of?” (Judges 6:13). However, in the book of Acts, within a period of a few days, there has already been two periods in which “many” signs and wonders have been done (Acts 2:42; 5:21). This was more owing to the time than to abilities imparted to men. God Almighty can cause such periods to occur at will. This is the God to whom we have been reconciled, and whom we serve. He is not an historical God, but a contemporary One – One that “IS” (Heb 11:6). It is possible to embrace a theology that pushes this fact into the background – a view of God that considers the supernatural something of the past, and not the working of an unchanging God.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 7 of 38

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Verse 1, Acts 5:12-16)

SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE WROUGHT BY THE APOSTLES, #3

SIGNS

The term “signs” presumes that there is some overriding reality that is being established. The “sign” is pointing to a fact that has been obscured by either circumstance or obtuseness. In this case, the reality was the Gospel itself, which proclaimed the exalted Christ and the opening of the door of salvation – neither of which could be detected by human senses. In addition to this, and in answer to the prayers of the church, boldness was granted through this means for the word of God to be preached boldly and confidently.

WONDERS

A “wonder,” by definition, is a “portent, or prodigy” – something that foreshadows a coming event (THAYER). Again, the wonder itself is not the point, but what it moves people to consider. In this case, it would be the unquestionable presence of God Almighty, to whom all men are accountable.

As is apparent, signs and wonders are not an end of themselves. That is, after they have been witnessed, they are not intended to leave the people thinking about what they have seen. Rather, the Person and Cause behind the signs and wonders, together with the message that is being declared, are to be pondered and received.

AN UNJUSTIFIED TREND

It has now become fashionable in certain “Christian” circles to speak of “your miracle” – some special supernatural work tailored particularly for you, and with your personal interests in mind. While there may be some small fragment of reality in the statement, it is exceedingly small, and much like a jewel in a swine’s snout (Prov 11:22). Such a view tends to contradict the centrality of Divine purpose, and the working of God according to His own will. Miracles have never been an end of themselves, but have always been an indication of something greater that was to be apprehended. I do not believe any person can support the statement that God wants every individual to have their own miracle. In fact, Jesus Himself contradicted this doctrine when He said in His hometown synagogue, “But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27).

God does not work with a primary interest in men, but with His own immutable purpose in mind. His works are consistently “done in truth,” not with a mind to simply please men (Psa 33:4). He is not merely sympathetic in His works, but is declared to be “HOLY in all His works” (Psa 145:17). It is never right to approach the subject of the miraculous as though mankind was at the center of Divine purpose, or was ever the sole object of His focus.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Verse 1, Acts 5:12-16)

Lesson 8 of 38

THE APOSTLES AND MIRACLES, #1

To this point in Acts, no one but the apostles have worked a sign or wonder. As I understand it, this reflects the superior rank of the Apostles as the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) – that is, they laid down the foundation upon which faith and hope would be built (1 Cor 3:10-11). In

view of their position, they were given power to confirm the truth of what they were speaking by working signs and wonders that substantiated that message (Mk 16:20; Heb 2:3-4). However, their miracles were never designed to merely satisfy the desires of any given person. They were working under Divine supervision. If resolving all human dilemmas was their objective, then the fact that they did not stamp out all illness would be evidence of a respect for persons.

Rather, the miracles that came through their hands were precisely after the manner of those wrought by the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus said of His miraculous works, “the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me” (John 5:36). And again, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). Like their Lord, the apostles did not come to satisfy the quest of men for the miraculous, or to resolve everyone’s problems. By their very nature, the working of the miraculous was always discretionary, and in strict accordance with the Divine agenda. I know of no exception, in any age, or under any circumstance, to this rule.

A FALSE VIEW OF APOSTOLIC EMPOWERMENT

During my early days, I was taught that the apostles received the “miraculous” gift of the Holy Spirit, which accounted for their ability to work miracles, while the rest of the people received the “non-miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit.” Their reception of “the gift of the Holy Spirit” was thus declared to be different from that of the ordinary believers. Of course, such a teaching is dashed to the ground in the account of the conversion of the house of Cornelius. Peter confirms that God gave the household of Cornelius the Holy Spirit “as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). Aside from magnifying God in other languages, the household of Cornelius is nowhere noted for working miracles as did the apostles – even though they received the same Spirit in the same manner as the apostles. In addition to this, Peter declared that the “gift” received by those on the day of Pentecost was available to the multitudes who heard him, and to “all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:38-39).

To my knowledge, the promised coming of the Spirit is not specifically associated with the working of miracles, as ordinarily perceived. This includes promises by the prophets, and the Lord Jesus Himself. Note the absence of any reference to the working of miracles.

1. “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3).
2. “And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:27).
3. “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28).
4. “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt 10:19-20).

5. “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16).
6. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).
7. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).
8. “And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).
9. “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14).

Later, other men will work miracles, including Stephen (Acts 6:8), Philip (Acts 8:6), and Ananias, who laid his hands on Saul, whose blindness was then ended, while he himself was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18). No apostle was there at the time, nor did any apostle have anything to do with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

Also, Paul will write, nearly three decades after Pentecost, that one of the gifts God placed in the church was “the working of miracles” (1 Cor 12:10). Paul also mentioned this gift in his epistle to the Galatians (Gal 3:5). However, even that gift, so far as rank is concerned, was put into the church only “AFTER” the gifts of apostles, prophets, and teachers had been given (1 Cor 12:28) – and then, by Divine discretion, it was given to certain individuals and not to every member.

The point here is that nothing in Scripture suggests to us that God has determined that miracles would become common among His people, so that everyone has a right to expect one to be wrought particularly for them. To begin with, that would contradict the very concept of a miracle, which is a departure from the norm.

This does not mean that God has determined a time when miracles will no longer be possible among His people on the earth. It does mean that they are always wrought in strict accordance with His will, and with His established purpose in mind. Miracles are always circumscribed by the purpose of God and the faith and spiritual condition of His people.

It might also be noted that many of the professed miracles of our time are not of the same order as those recorded in Scripture. Many of them, though they may very well involve answers to prayer, would appear out of place if they were recorded in Scripture, and called a “miracles,” “sign,” or “wonder.” This is not to be construed as a denial that the hand of the Lord is working among His people.

This rather has to do with the loose and unwarranted use of words like “miracles,” “signs,” “wonders,” and the likes. For such things to become commonplace would make them counterproductive. One of the powerful testimonies of miracles, signs, and wonders is their uniqueness. The fact that they are not common is what draws the attention of people to them.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.)” (Verse 12, Acts 5:12-16)

Lesson 9 of 38

THE APOSTLES AND MIRACLES, #2

DEALING WITH MARK 16

Following Christ's commission to “preach the gospel to every creature,” promising that “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,” Jesus gave a word concerning certain signs that would follow. “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:17-18).

All critics of the Bible say that this is not a valid text. There are also some who affirm that this is a general word to all of the churches, and is intended for every believer. It all sounds innocent enough, yet such a representation is not made by any writer of Scripture. No church was told such a thing. No new believers were promised this was intended for them— i.e., something that would follow every person who believed.

This promise does not obviate the subjection of all things to the Lord. Nothing is here sanctioned that is not in strict comportment with the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Neither, indeed, does this mean that every time anyone believes, these signs will break forth. The text refers primarily to those who preached the Gospel, and secondarily to those who believe that Gospel. The signs follow by Divine discretion, and are nowhere declared to be automatic. Even in the book of Acts, there were times when such signs are NOT said to have followed those who believed. Cases in point include the following.

1. When the Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia believed (Acts 13:48).
2. When Lydia and her household believed (Acts 16:14-15).
3. When the Philippian jailor and his household believed (Acts 16:34).
4. When certain in Athens believed (Acts 17:4).
5. When Crispus, his household, and many Corinthians believed (Acts 18:8).
6. During Paul's stay in Iconium, where several did believe, many signs and wonders were wrought by Paul and Barnabas (“they”). The record is carefully stated, and confirms the miracles did not simply take place automatically. “Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be

done by their hands” (Acts 14:3). The word “granted” is truly discretionary. It does not refer to some law or principle that had been set in motion. That ought to be apparent.

We cannot be overly simplistic in our understanding of the Lord’s words in Mark sixteen. Just as in His own ministry, the confirmation of His word was according to the strict prudence of the Father. When it is appropriate for such workings to occur, they will be done in accordance with the will of the Lord and the presence of faith. We know this did not happen every time someone believed the Gospel.

1. There is no record of any of them occurring among those who believed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-47).
2. None of them occurred when about five thousand men believed in the Temple (Acts 4:4).
3. None are recorded as being wrought by believers when the whole city of Samaria believed, where the miracles are said to have been done by Philip (Acts 8:6-7).
4. One of them took place at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:46).
5. In their report of the great conversions among the Gentiles, Barnabas and Paul made no reference to the believers themselves doing such thing, but plainly declared the “miracles and wonders” were wrought by them personally (Acts 15:12).
6. None of these miracles were reported to have happened at the conversion of Lydia’s household (Acts 16:14-15).
7. None are said to have taken place among the Philippian jailor’s household (Acts 16:32-34).
8. There is no record of them in the household of Crispus and “many of the Corinthians” (Acts 18:8).
9. Those who believed in Achai are not said to have wrought such signs (Acts 18:27).
10. One of the signs was wrought in certain disciples from Ephesus who believed (Acts 19:2-6).
11. When a goodly number of people from Ephesus believed, these signs did not follow. Instead, they burned their occultist books (Acts 19:17-20).
12. None of the Epistles contain evidence of the working of these signs among ALL those who believed. Corinth was reminded of individuals among them who were granted the gift of “the working of miracles” (1 Cor 12:10) – but were also reminded all of them had not received such a gift (1 Cor 12:29).
13. The Galatians were also reminded that certain among them “worketh miracles” (Gal 3:5), doing so according to “the hearing of faith.”

It cannot be true, therefore, that Mark 16:17-18 is intended to teach that men everywhere ought to expect the signs of reference to break out wherever men believe the Gospel. Indeed, some are bold enough to affirm that this is, in fact, what Jesus was promising. But they are not right. They are merely spouting a tradition they have received from men. How is it possible for the Head of the church to make a commitment to the church, and then the Holy Spirit omit its fulfillment in His record of conversions?

Let us thrust from us the doctrines of men, and choose to believe on the Lord Jesus, laboring in hope for Him, and, in our hearts, submitting to Him who works in accordance with His own immutable will.

There may be environments like Bethsaida in which Jesus can do “no mighty work” (Mk 6:5) –

even though there were some believers from that city (Philip, Andrew, and Peter (John 1:14). There may also be a “wicked and adulterous generation” to whom the Divine nature refuses to show a sign (Matt 16:4) – even though a holy remnant of disciples may be found within it, like the apostles themselves. We cannot afford to be naive on this matter.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 10 of 38

THE APOSTLES AND MIRACLES, #3

WHY SIGNS AND WONDERS?

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Verse 1, Acts 5:12-16)

At that time, there are at least three reasons for “many signs and wonders” being done through the hands of the apostles.

1. First, this was in answer to the prayer of the church just previous to this: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto THY SERVANTS, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy Holy Child Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30). This was taking place in a way that could not be denied. In this case, it was stimulating boldness in the brethren, particularly the apostles, to preach the Gospel. This was especially important because the apostles were the appointed custodians of the truth at that time (John 16:13), and had to be seen as such. While others prophesied and were given various insights (Acts 2:17-18), the apostles were especially appointed and equipped to lay down the Foundation, and to deliver the core message (Eph 2:20; Heb 2:3). God encouraged and validated them by “many signs and wonders.”
2. Second, they had been preaching in the name of Jesus, and these signs and wonders were an obvious proof of the truth of that claim. These were the type of works Jesus Himself did, and the association of the apostles with Him was now beyond all question. Jesus had told them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father” (John 14:12). The newness of the message, as compared with that of the Law and the Old Covenant, demanded confirmation that it was from God (Heb 2:3). This same principle took place when God sent Moses and Aaron to deliver Israel from Egypt. They gave signs to the people, confirming they had, in fact, been sent by God (Ex 4:1-9). Signs and wonders were also wrought in Egypt to confirm Divine judgment, and so the Egyptians would know the God of Israel was “the Lord” (Ex 7:3-5).
3. Third, the results of these displays, coupled with the preaching of the powerful Gospel of Christ, confirmed that this was the purposeful and timely working of the Lord (Acts 5:14). The prophets had foretold a unique time during which the New Covenant would be established, and new things would be accomplished (Isa 43:19; Jer 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-29). The time had come, and God validated it by “many signs and wonders.”

These signs and wonders were not done in order to convince the people, but to confirm the words of the proclaimers and those who believed. The scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, and rulers of the synagogues were not convinced by the working of the Son of God Himself – and they were not convinced by the powerful and confirmed proclamations of the apostles. Their absolute hardness was confirmed by their response to a certain miracle wrought by Peter, when he healed a lame man at one of the Temple gates. “What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:16-18).

When Jesus ministered among the people, “when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, WHEN THEY SAW THE MIRACLES which He did” (John 2:23). However, it was not the kind of believing that saves the soul. There came a time when those very people rejected Jesus, and cried out “crucify Him” (John 19:14-15; Acts 4:27).

Throughout the history of the world, “signs and wonders” have never been common. There have been many centuries, and even millennia, when they were not wrought at all. They have always been made known at the discretion of God, and He has never said there would come a time prior to the end of the world when they would absolutely cease.

There is also the fact that God placed a gift in the church described as “the working of miracles” (1 Cor 12:10,28-29; Gal 3:5). Stephen and Philip were examples of those receiving this gift (Acts 6:8; 8:6,13). All of this was done by Divine discretion.

Blessed is the person who has the honesty and conviction to let such things remain in the hand of the Lord.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 11 of 38

DOCTRINE CANNOT BE DEVELOPED FROM EXAMPLES AND PRECEDENTS

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Verse 11, Acts 5:12-16)

It is important to establish one more thing in regard to these matters. It is never proper to found doctrine upon examples, precedents, or human interpretation. “Sound doctrine” (1 Tim 1:10) is factual, not the result of interpretation. It consists of the affirmation of unalterable realities. True doctrine relates primarily to the Lord Jesus, and is therefore called “the doctrine of the Lord” (Acts 13:12), “the doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9), and “the doctrine of God our Savior” (Tit 2:10). If we read of “the doctrine of baptisms,” the reference is not to a network of teaching developed by men. It is rather factual Divine affirmations on that subject, such as are found in Romans 6:1-23, Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:10-15, 1 Pet 3:21, etc). You cannot compile a valid doctrine on baptism by gathering all of the examples of baptism and piecing

them together like a puzzle. It is what the Spirit has declared on the subject that constitutes the doctrine.

Those who have confused the body of Christ with their contrived teaching on miracles have harmed the people of God. They have led people to believe that miracles are common, when in all of history, with the single exception of the ministry of Jesus, this has never been the case. Even in the book of Acts, the recording of miracles being done is not an emphasis. References to them even diminish as the book progresses.

The point is that there is no apostolic doctrine concerning miracles – no teaching that unfolds the details of when, where, why, and how they operate. There is no promise to believers concerning their frequency, or guarantee of their perpetual availability. They are never an apostolic emphasis. A rebuke is never administered because they are not present within the church, and a commendation is never granted because they are present in any given assembly.

When Paul was in prison with Epaphroditus, and this brother almost died, Paul did not cry out, “Where are the miracles?” He did not claim the promise that if he laid hands on Epaphroditus he would recover. Instead, he wrote that “God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil 2:27). The mercy was probably an answer to prayer – the prayer of a known miracle-worker.

In view of this, when our text affirms that “many signs and wonders were wrought among the people” “by the hands of the apostles,” we are to understand that an unusual thing was taking place – which is the whole point of the text. This marvelous working was in answer to their prayer, and it was yielding results that appropriately glorified God. We must be willing to leave the matter there, and be confident that God will continue to work in accordance with His own good pleasure. God is too holy and too powerful for men to guess about His intentions.

The frequency of such marvelous works will not be determined by our persuasion that they CAN take place. Actually, no person who has faith in God, or knows Him, has any question about the possibility of the miraculous. To develop a theological position that boldly announces that, by Divine intention, miracles have ceased, is to betray the presence of unbelief. Men do not have a right to banter about the possibility of the supernatural, or assign time periods and limitations to the discretionary working of the Lord. If they are engaged in such efforts to neutralize what they conceive to be false doctrine, let them cast down such imaginations with the assigned spiritual weaponry provided for this purpose (2 Cor 10:4-5). If they are unskilled in the use of that weaponry, they should leave iconoclastic work to those with more Kingdom understanding, who are able to wield the appointed weaponry effectively.

Men cannot control the miraculous, or make grandiose announcements about its borders or assigned time periods to it. It will rather be governed by what God is doing in any given generation, and whether or not there are vessels present that are “meet for the Masters use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).

Some generations are being judged (Lk 21:20), while others are being blessed (Matt 4:16). The eyes of some are being opened (Acts 26:18), while the eyes of others are being shut (Isa 44:18).

Some are being awakened (John 5:25, while others are having the spirit of deep sleep poured out upon them (Isa 29:10). For some, desires are withheld (Matt 16:4), while for others, an answer to “the prayer of faith” is promised (James 5:15).

I know of no word from God that leads to the conclusion that there will ever be a time when the Kingdom of Christ will continue to function without His involvement. If that seems ludicrous, consider that such would have to happen if the miraculous were ever to cease, and things functioned strictly according to nature, and within the boundaries of human power.

Concerning the age of miracles passing away, should anyone care to postulate that such a supposition is right, they owe us an explanation of how such an arrangement brings glory to God. It appears to me that such efforts tend to glorify the institutions of men, not God. It cannot be countered that God has placed everything under men at this time. We are expressly told that this is the ultimate purpose of God, but that it is not yet being fulfilled. Thus is it written, “Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus . . .” (Heb 2:8-9).

That is, the ONLY Man who presently has everything under His feet is Jesus Christ. The redeemed will have their part in that subjugation in the world to come, but not in this world.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 12 of 38

A RECORD OF THE MIRACLES REPORTED IN SCRIPTURE, #1

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Verse 12, Acts 5:12-16)

RECORDED MIRACLES ADAM TO JESUS, 4000 Years

- 001 The flood (Genesis 7)
- 002 Confusion of tongues at Babel (Genesis 11)
- 003 Fire on Abraham's sacrifice (Genesis 15:17)
- 004 Conception of Isaac (Genesis 17:17; 19:12; 21:2)
- 005 Destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19)
- 006 Lot's wife turned to pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26)
- 007 Closed womb's in Abimelech's house (Genesis 20:17-18)
- 008 Opening of Hagar's eyes (Genesis 21:19)
- 009 Conception of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:21)
- 010 Opening of Rachel's womb (Genesis 30:22)
- 011 Burning bush (Exodus 3:2)
- 012 Moses's rod turned into serpent (Ex 4:3-4; 7:10-12)
- 013 Moses' hand becomes leprous (Exodus 4:6-7)

- 014 Ten plagues in Egypt (Exodus 8-12)
- 015 Pillar of cloud/pillar of fire leading Israel (Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-20)
- 016 Israel crosses Red Sea (Exodus 14:22)
- 017 Pharaoh and army drowns in Red Sea (Exodus 14:23-30)
- 018 Sweetening of waters at Marah (Exodus 15:25)
- 019 Manna for forty years (Exodus 16)
- 020 Quails given to Israel (Exodus 16:13)
- 021 Defeat of Amalek (Exodus 17:9-13)
- 022 Moses' face glows from the Divine presence (Exodus 34:29-35)
- 023 Water from the rock (Exodus 17:5-7)
- 024 Miriam stricken with leprosy (Numbers 12:10-15)
- 025 Destruction of Korah and cohorts (Numbers 16:31-35)
- 026 Aaron's rod buds (Numbers 17:1-9)
- 027 Scourge of serpents (Numbers 21:6-9)
- 028 Destruction of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2)
- 029 Balaam's ass speaks (Numbers 22:22-30)
- 030 Jordan divided (Joshua 3:14-17; 14:16-18)
- 031 Fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:20)
- 032 Midianites destroyed (Judges 7:16-22)
- 033 Destroying hail on confederation of kings (Joshua 10:11)
- 034 Sun and moon stand still (Joshua 10:12-14)
- 035 Dew on Gideon's fleece (Judges 6:37-40)
- 036 Samson's strength (Judges 14:6; 16:3,29-30)
- 037 Samson supplied with water (Judges 15:19)
- 038 Fall of the idol Dagon (1 Samuel 5:1-4)
- 039 Cows return the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 6:7-14)
- 040 People struck with hemorrhoids (1 Samuel 5:9-12; 6:1-5)
- 041 Destruction of people at Bethshemesh (1 Samuel 6:19-20)
- 042 Uzzah struck dead (2 Samuel 6:1-8)
- 043 Jeroboam's hand withered (1 Kings 13:3-6)
- 044 Elijah fed by ravens (1 Kings 17:6)
- 045 Elijah fed by an angel (1 Kings 19:1-8)
- 046 Elijah increases widows oil/meal (1 Kgs 17:9-16)
- 047 Elijah raises widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24)
- 048 Elijah prays it will not rain (1 Kings 17:1)
- 049 Elijah prays it will rain (1 Kings 18:41-45)
- 050 Elijah brings fire on Ahaziah's army (2 Kings 1:10-12)
- 051 Elijah divides Jordan (2 Kings 2:8)
- 052 Elijah translated (2 Kings 2:11)
- 053 Elisha divides Jordan (2 Kings 2:14)
- 054 Elisha sweetens waters of Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22)
- 055 Elisha increases widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1-7)
- 056 Elisha raises Shunammite's son from dead (2 Kings 4:18-26)
- 057 Elisha heals pottage (2 Kings 4:38-41)
- 058 Elisha feeds 100 men (2 Kings 4:42-44)
- 059 Elisha cures Naaman's leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-9)

- 060 Elisha puts leprosy on Gehazi (2 Kings 5:26-27)
- 061 Elisha causes axe head to float (2 Kings 6:6)
- 062 Elisha reveals counsel of king of Syria (2 Kings 6:12)
- 063 Elisha prays eyes of his servant will be opened (2 Kings 6:17)
- 064 Elisha smites Syrian army with blindness (2 Kings 6:18)
- 065 Dead man restored when touching Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:21)
- 065 Destruction of Sennacarib's army (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36)
- 066 Shadow on sun dial turned backward ten degrees (2 Kings 20:9-11)
- 067 Three Hebrews children delivered from fiery furnace (Dan 3:23-27)
- 068 Daniel delivered from lion's den (Daniel 6:22)
- 069 Jonah in fish's belly (Jonah 1-2)
- 070 Jonah's gourd (Jonah 4:6)
- 071 Jonah's gourd destroyed by a worm (Jonah 4:7)

Number of recorded miracles – 71. Period covered – 4,000 years. Average – a miracle every 56 years, if not clustered

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 13 of 38

A RECORD OF THE MIRACLES REPORTED IN SCRIPTURE, #2

MIRACLES OF JESUS

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Verse 1, Acts 5:12-16)

In order to more firmly establish the fact that our Father God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, have “all power,” and that it has been revealed in works transcendent to nature, I am taking the time to declare the recorded miracles wrought by the power of God. This is the kind of God in whom we have faith.

- 001 Water into wine (John 2)
- 002 Heals nobleman's son (John 4:46-54)
- 003 Draught of fishes (Luke 5:1-9)
- 004 Heals demoniac (Mark 1:23-26)
- 005 Heals Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-17)
- 006 Cleanses leper (Matthew 8:1-4)
- 007 Heals paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8)
- 008 Heals impotent men (John 5:1-9)
- 009 Restores withered hand (Matthew 12:9-13)
- 010 Restores Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13)
- 011 Raises widow's son from the dead (Luke 7:11-16)
- ** 012 Heals demoniacs (Mark 3:11)
- 013 Stills the tempest (Matthew 8:23-27)

- 014 Casts demons out of Gadarene (Matthew 8:23-34)
- 015 Raises Jairus' daughter from the dead (Matthew 9:18-26)
- 016 Cures woman with issue of blood (Matthew 9:20-22)
- 017 Restore sight to two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31)
- 018 Heals demoniac (Matthew 12:23-30)
- 019 Feeds 5,000 (Matthew 14:15-21)
- 020 Walks on raging sea (Matthew 14:22-30)
- 021 Heals Syrophenician woman's daughter (Matthew 15:21-28)
- 022 Feeds 4,000 (Matthew 15:32-39)
- 023 Restores deaf and dumb (Mark 7:31-37)
- 024 Restores blind man (Mark 8:22-26)
- 025 Restores lunatic child (Matthew 17:14-21)
- 026 Tribute money from fish's mouth (Matthew 17:24-27)
- 027 Restores ten lepers (Matthew 17:11-19)
- 028 Opens eyes of man born blind (John 9:1-9)
- 029 Raises Lazarus from the dead (John 11)
- 030 Heals woman with spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:10-17)
- 031 Cures man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)
- 032 Restores two blind men near Jericho (Matthew 20:29-34)
- 033 Curses a fig tree (Matthew 21:17-21)
- 034 Heals ear of Malchus (Luke 22:49-51)
- 035 Second draught of fish (John 21:6)
- 036 Resurrection from the dead (Acts 13:30)
- 037 Many unrecorded miracles (Matt 4:24; 8:16; 14:14; Mk 1:34; 6:13; Lk 4:40; John 21:25)

Thirty-seven declarations of Jesus' miracles, some texts referring to clusters and large numbers of miracles with no itemization. All of this took place within a space of three years. Nothing of this numerical magnitude and diversity had occurred in the previous 4,000 years.

– Given O. Blakely

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 14 of 38

A RECORD OF THE MIRACLES REPORTED IN SCRIPTURE, #3

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Verse 1, Acts 5:12-16)

MIRACLES WROUGHT BY CHRIST'S DISCIPLES

- 001 By the twelve Apostles prior to Pentecost (Matt 10:1-8)
- 002 By the seventy (Luke 10:17-20)
- 003 By other disciples (Mark 9:39)
- 004 Peter and John cure a lame man (Acts 3:2-10)
- 005 By the Apostles (Acts 3:6-16; Acts 9:34-35; Acts 16:19)

- 006 Peter brings the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5,10)
- 007 Peter cures the sick (Acts 5:15-16)
- 008 Philip is carried away in the spirit, and was found in Azotus (Acts 8:39-40)
- 009 Peter cures Aeneas (Acts 9:34)
- 010 Peter raises Dorcas (Acts 9:40)
- 011 Peter and other Apostles miraculously delivered from prison (Acts 5:19-23; 12:6-9)
- 012 Paul strikes Elymas with blindness (Acts 13:11)
- 013 Paul heals a cripple (Acts 14:10)
- 014 Paul casts out spirits and cures sick (Acts 16:18; 19:11-12; 28:8-9)
- 015 Paul raises Eutychus to life (Acts 20:9-12)
- 016 Paul shakes deadly viper from hand (Acts 28:5)
- 017 Reference to apostolic miracles (Heb 2:4)

MIRACLES WROUGHT IN THE CHURCHES

- 001 The gift of the working of miracles (1 Cor 12:10,28,29)
- 002 In Galatia (Gal 3:5)

OTHER MIRACLES

- 001 Wrought by a hostile opponent of Christ, described as a “beast” (Rev 13:11-14)
- 002 The spirits of demons working miracles (Rev 16:14)
- 003 The “false prophet” (Rev 19:20)

You see how, so far as the record is concerned, the frequency and number of miracles decreased as the church developed. Also there were competitive miracles wrought by a servant of Satan, Satan himself, and demons.

An even greater work has taken place in the transformation of sinners, who are given new hearts and new spirits. In this context, the need for the additional confirmation of miracles seemed to diminish. Now there were “living epistles” of Christ who themselves became a confirmation of the truth of the Gospel (2 Cor 3:3). There remained, however, the gift of healing, which is held out to any that are “sick” among the believers (James 5:14-15). There is no additional explanation stating there would come a time when this would no longer valid.

As to the possibility of miracles, that has always been under the administration of God, and since His exaltation, of Jesus Christ. There is no detailed “doctrine” of miracles in Scripture – no particular delineation of them, or instruction in how they are to be considered or presented. There is no reference to “the age of miracles,” any more than there is to an age of judgment. Such language is purely the invention of men, who will give an account for their creation and use of such terms.

As long as there is a God, there can be miracles. As long as the Lord Jesus has all power in heaven and earth, He can work miracles. If you do not think they can take place now, there may very well come a time when you will hope to God that a miracle IS possible. Should that time come, rest assured, that the Worker of miracles is still in the throne. That prerogative has not

been withdrawn from God, either by intention, or by the imagined cessation of a period of time. Any perspective of God must not be circumscribed by interpretive limitation.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 15 of 38

THEY WERE ALL OF ONE ACCORD, #1

“ . . . and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Acts 5:12-16)

The threats of the Jewish leaders have not driven the disciples underground. Further, we are not talking about a small number of disciples. To this point, additions to the church (Acts 2:47) included three thousand (Acts 2:41), the Lord adding to the church “daily” (Acts 2:47), five thousand (Acts 4:4), and “multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). At the time of our text, there was an absolute minimum of eight thousand believers, with the probability of ten to twenty thousand, with “multitudes” being added regularly.

If this were in our time, there would probably have been at least five or ten different denominations, diverse doctrines, and fierce church competition. The difference, however, is found in the legitimacy of the conversions, the presence of the Lord, and the faithful proclamation of the truth.

These believers – real believers – having been filled with the Spirit, granted boldness, and with great grace upon them all, have returned to the Temple area with power – the very area in which they had first encountered fierce opposition (Acts 4:1-18). Further, it is not only the apostles that have returned, or the apostles with a handful of faithful ones. Multitudes were gathering, and they were all of “one accord” (Acts 2:46; 4:24; 5:12).

The word translated “one accord” {hom-oth-oo-mad-on'} has the following lexical meaning: “with one mind” (THAYER), “agreed on unanimously with one mind, with one purpose, by common consent” (FRIBERG), “agreed on unanimously with one mind, with one purpose, by common consent” (LOUW-NIDA), and “with one mind or purpose or impulse” (GINGRICH).

This unanimity extended beyond merely agreeing to meet together – an erroneous perspective presented in the following versions: English Standard, The Message, New Living Translation. The Greek word used here is also used in the following texts: Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6). The prevailing idea in all of the texts is that of a unanimity of thought which drove a single action. This is the kind of mindset that dominated the early church. It was one in which people like Ananias and Sapphira became glaring exceptions. Also, a single message was being preached and believed.

These days the professing church has degenerated into such a condition in which relatively few people in the average congregation are noted for diligence and spiritual stamina. In fact, it is exceedingly difficult, if not altogether impossible, to get all of the people together at one time. Who does not know that this is the case? Further, when they do get together, it is an exceedingly

rare thing to find them in any semblance of agreement. In some places, the only time some kind of unity is experienced is when everyone joins in the singing of a juvenile chorus that has more of an effect on the external part of man than the inward part.

However, we must not allow ourselves to look at the contemporary church scene and think of it as being ordinary or in any way acceptable. A single Savior, a single Gospel, and a unique salvation cannot possibly produce a diverse people. What we see today is NOT an appropriate view of the body of Christ, but is more of an lifeless apparition – the phantom church!

What we are being exposed to in the book of Acts is the real church. This is the authentic body of Christ, over which He presides, and in which He dwells. Their manners are the ways of “the elect of God” (Col 3:12). This is how “newness of life” (Rom 6:4) makes itself known. These people do not meet because they have been commanded to do so, but because their desires compel them to come together. They do not meet to “play,” as Israel did at the foot of Mount Sinai (1 Cor 10:7). They have a solitary focus, and one heart and soul animates them all (Acts 4:32). When we behold them, they are not a pattern of what we SHOULD be, but the evidence and confirmation of what people ARE in Christ Jesus.

These are not people who can be emulated. Their spiritual stance is too aggressive and too consistent for anyone who does not have a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). Institutional Christians are like invalids in this kind of arena. They cannot climb the mountains these people climb, or walk into intimidating areas like they do. A mind that is riveted to the earth cannot adopt the priorities of such people.

Notice the candor with which the Spirit speaks. He does not move Luke to marvel at what these people are doing. He simply reports it as a fact – and one that is not at all surprising. Yet, if the very thing mentioned in this verse was to actually take place in the average church, it would be astounding beyond all measure.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 16 of 38

THEY WERE ALL OF ONE ACCORD, #2

ONE ACCORD

“ . . . and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.” (Acts 5:12-16)

Other versions read, “And all the believers used to meet together” (NIV), “and they were all together” (BBE), “By common consent they would all meet” (CSB), “The believers had a common faith in Jesus” (GWN), “And they were all assembled together” (MRD), “One in heart, they all used to meet” (NIB), “And all the believers were meeting regularly” (NJB), “Meanwhile, the apostles were meeting regularly” (LIVING), “The apostles were together . . . they all had the same purpose” (IE), “And by common consent they all met together”

(AMPLIFIED), “and they were all of one mind” (ALT), “All of the Lord's followers often met” (CEV), and “they were all with one passion” (LITV).

This is now the fifth time believers are said to have been “in one accord” (1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12). The words “one accord” are translated from a single Greek word (hom-oth-oo-mad-on). It has the following lexical meaning: “with one mind, of one accord” (THAYER), “with one purpose, by common consent” (FRIBERG), “unanimously” (LOUW-NIDA), and “with one mind or purpose or impulse” (GINGRICH).

“One accord” is an expression for which there is no single English word that is adequate. As is evident in the various versions of Scripture, the wide-ranging meaning of the term is somewhat difficult to put into words. It should not surprise us that the extent of spiritual experience transcends the capacity of language. This is why the range of translations for this expression include “together” (NIV), “common consent” (CSB), “common faith” (GWN), “one in heart” (NIB), “had the same purpose” (IE), “one mind” (ALT), and “one passion” (LITV).

The lexical meaning of the word includes “unanimous” (LOUW-NIDA). This is a fairly good view of the meaning. The English word “unanimous” means “being of one mind.” Related words are listed as “agreed, agreeing, concordant, concurrent, and harmonious.” Contrasting words are listed as “differing, disagreed, disagreeing, discordant, and inharmonious” (MERRIAM-WEBSTER 2003).

In this particular text several versions present the idea that the people were agreed about meeting together. Although that is true, I do not believe that is what the Spirit means by being of “one accord.” This rather conveys the idea of minds that were set on things above (Col 3:1-2). These were minds that were occupied with “the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5). They were united in “the renewing” of the mind (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23). They had “the same mind toward one another” (Rom 12:16). These people had “the mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5). These were minds in which the law of God had been written (Heb 8:10; 10:16). They were “pure minds” (2 Pet 3:1). Those versions that represent this verse as accenting that they met together, and some even limiting it to the apostles, are reflecting an institutional view of things – one that lacks life.

When it comes to matters related to religion, and within the context of the modern church, the very concept of unanimous, one accord, and agreement, is staggering to consider. Often, I have heard preachers and teachers say they know of no one with whom they are in perfect agreement. The very existence of differing bodies of theology confirms that division and a lack of harmony is at the very root of institutionalized religion. Few people expect harmonious thought to ever exist among professing Christians. Therefore, all manner of approaches are taken to get people to work together, forget their differences, and try to concentrate on the few things upon which they may happen to agree. Instead of harmony, men have come to believe that tolerance is commendable, and agreement is not even expected. All of this exists in spite of the fact that “God is one” (Deut 6:4; Mk 12:29; Gal 3:20), and Christ is not “divided” (1 Cor 1:13).

After all the arguments have been presented, and the various defenses of contradicting hermeneutics have been put forward, our text thunders at us with a tone of rebuke: “they were all with one accord.” “THEY were all of one accord!” They were ALL of one accord!” They were

all of ONE accord!” They were all of one ACCORD!” In this, the prophecy was fulfilled, “they shall see EYE TO EYE, when the LORD shall bring again Zion” (Isa 52:8). Jeremiah foretold, “And I will give them ONE HEART, and one way” (Jer 32:39). Zephaniah said the people would serve the Lord “with one consent,” or “one accord” [NKJV] (Zech 3:9).

In this text, with all of the divisions within the Jewish community, there was a body of considerable size who were “all” of one accord. It is as though one heartbeat was in them all, and they were animated by a single soul. They were, in fact, a sterling example of “one body,” fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies (Eph 4:16). This is not merely what the people of God should be, it is what they are when they mortify the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13-14; Col 3:5), live by faith (Heb 10:38), walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), and put off the old man, while putting on the new man (Eph 4:22-24). If those conditions are found in our time, the very same unity and oneness will be exhibited.

If “God is one” (Gal 3:20), there is “one Mediator” (1 Tim 2:5), “one body” (Eph 4:4), “one Spirit” (Eph 4:4), “one hope of our calling” (Eph 4:4), and “one faith” (Eph 4:5), how can multiple divisions within the body of Christ be justified – or are they even possible? Paul reasons, “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:13).

At the time of our text (Acts 5:12-16), there were no divisions in the church. Some years later, because of false teaching, divisions did arise – and they were soundly rebuked (Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 3:3; 11:18).

The condition described in our text – “and they were all of one accord” – is the opposite of being divided. These people were not of one accorded because they were commanded to be so, but because they were walking in “newness of life,” which is singular.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 17 of 38

THEY MET IN SOLOMON’S PORCH

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch).” (Verse 12, Acts 5:12-16)

“ . . . in Solomon's porch.” Other versions read, “in Solomon's Colonnade” (NIV), “in Solomon's portico” (New American Standard Bible), “in Solomon's covered way” (Basic Bible English), “in the Portico of Solomon” (New International Bible), “in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade” (New Jerusalem Bible), “in the area known as Solomon's Hall” (Living Bible), and “[at the temple] in the covered porch (walk) called Solomon’s” (Amplified Bible).

This was the very area where Peter preached to the people following the healing of the lame man, and it is where the conflict with the Temple authorities arose (Acts 3:11-4:1-2). It is also a place where Jesus walked during the Feast of Dedication, when “it was winter” (John 10:22-23).

At that time, Jesus also taught in this area, as the people came to Him (John 10:24-39). It is evident that it was a place where large numbers of people could convene for a common cause. In the case of our text, the cause was to hear the apostles, for to continue “steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42), it had to be regularly heard. Here we see the people aggressive to gather together, submitting their hearts and minds to the truth as declared by Christ’s ambassadors. They did not come together to be entertained. It was not a concert they came to hear, or a play they came to see.

Solomon’s porch was of considerable size, being 800 feet long. That is 2-2/3rd football fields placed end-to-end. It was a covered area, with the covering supported by 162 Corinthian pillars. The pillars were one hundred feet high – that is equivalent to a ten story building. I do not know the width of the porch, although some have estimated it to have been about one hundred feet wide. Whatever the estimate, it is evident that it was of considerable size, and could have accommodated a significantly large crowd of people.

At this point, the people did not break up into small groups, meeting only in houses, as some have alleged. When these disciples met from “house to house” (Acts 2:46), it was apparently IN ADDITION to these general gatherings. Luke says of the believers following Christ’s resurrection, they “were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Lk 24:53). It appears that the apostles did not move about from house to house, but taught in the Temple, as they were later expressly told to do (Acts 5:20).

Some time later, Paul would teach regularly in a kind of local auditorium: “the school of Tyannus . . . continuing for the space of two years” (Acts 19:9).

Here, however, I do not wish to merely point out that the early church was not averse to meeting in buildings. The point here is that this large mass of people were “of one accord,” or “united in mind and purpose” (Complete Jewish Bible), or “they all had the same purpose” (International English). That mass of people, numbering in the thousands, were of one accord, in agreement. In fact, it was their agreement that brought them together. They did not meet together to find out HOW to be in agreement, but because they WERE in agreement.

How was such a thing possible? First, these were real converts (Acts 3:19). They had really been born again (1 Pet 1:23). They were really new creations (2 Cor 5:17). They had really been reconciled to God (Rom 5:10). They had really received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Rom 8:15). They had really received a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). They really had the law of God written on their hearts and put into their minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16). They were all made “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14). They had all been “saved by the washing of regeneration” (Tit 3:5).

In conversion, God does NOT create different kinds of people. It is true, they have differing gifts (Rom 12:6), but those gifts work harmoniously together.

Of course, at this time there were not yet differing “denominations,” sects,” or “divisions.” They would be introduced later, and would be soundly rebuked (1 Cor 1:10; 3:3; 11:8), and saints told to avoid those who caused them (Rom 16:7).

The condition of the modern church is the result of what men have done, and in the kingdom of God, WHAT MEN HAVE DONE CANNOT BE UNDONE BY MEN. No matter how often they meet to resolve their difference, and caucus to find ways to unite, it will be in vain. That simply is not the way divisions are resolved. The focus of attention has to be shifted to the Lord Jesus Christ, for it is only as we behold His glory that we can be changed (2 Cor 3:18). When people are of “one accord” in Christ, division becomes repulsive, for it contradicts the Godhead itself, that is perfectly united. The holy angels are also united. The spirits of just made perfect are united, and those who are walking by faith are united.

There is nothing about salvation that encourages division. There is nothing about the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes for division. There is nothing about faith that contributes to dividing those who possess it. The hope of glory does not divide those who have it. The only reason division among professed believers continues is that men have become accustomed to it. A lot of religious careers and positions depend upon it. Countless religious businesses and enterprises count on it. At the appointed time, God will bring down this corrupt monster, and then the merchants and kings of the earth will lament (Rev 18:1-18).

If the modern church wants the unity the early church had, it must have its focus, its life, its doctrine, and its intention. Their objective must be the same as the early church. They must be looking at the same glory, basking in the message, and determined to reach the same goal. Of course, if that does not happen, God Himself will exclude them from participation in what He is doing. That is how serious He is about this matter.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 18 of 38

FEEDING THE FLOCK

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)” (Verses 12-14, Acts 5:12-16)

Concerning the feeding of the people of God, there can be no question about its necessity. Jesus said to Peter and the apostles, “Feed My lambs,” “Feed My sheep” (John 21:15). Paul taught, “feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Peter taught, “Feed the flock of God which is among you” (1 Pet 5:2). Where this is not being done, leaders have been disobedient and unfaithful stewards. The seriousness of being such is seen in the eternal destiny of unfaithful stewards (Matt 25:26).

In the early church, before it was penetrated by charlatans, converts did not go on their way, resuming their lives as they were lived before. Now they were alive unto God (Rom 6:11), and that life could not be sustained independently of the Word, as expounded by the apostles. It is true, “That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Lk 4:4). Neither,

indeed, did the converts return to take up the Scriptures (Moses and the Prophets) and begin deciphering them for themselves. Spiritual babies can no more eat properly than babies in the flesh, They must be “fed” by someone who can properly dispense spiritual nourishment (John 21:16-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2). This was particularly true before the apostles’ doctrine was in written form. The body of Christ could not be established by independent thinking and the voicing of varied opinions. The people had to be subject to the teaching of those who had themselves been taught by God, and knew whereof they spoke.

How would the people know of the cessation of the sacrifices and the necessity of circumcision as a sign of the covenant? How would they learn of the leading of the Spirit and the implications of the newness of life. What person would be able to comprehend as they should the truth of justification, the presence of the grace of God, and the existence of a High Priest in heaven? Are such things simply discovered along the way without due proclamation? That such a thing is theoretically possible with the writings of the apostles cannot be denied. There have been a few noble souls who have found the truth in that manner, but it was generally preceded by a very lengthy period of heart-wrenching searching, during which there were very fundamental flaws in their thinking.

The point to be seen here is that the people were conscious of the need to be fed with knowledge by men of spiritual understanding. Thus the word of Jeremiah would be fulfilled, “And I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15). Here were people who were hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Together, and with one accord, they purposefully assembled in Solomon’s commodious porch to hear the word of the Lord.

The apostles were especially guided into all truth (John 16:13) for the purpose of putting the church on a solid foundation. This is the reason for the common consent of the people to gather in the Temple – not merely for informal fellowship, but to hear the word of the Lord from the apostles. The word, as our text affirms, was attended by many confirming “signs and wonders” that were wrought by the hands of the apostles. Mark says that as the apostles preached, God worked with them “confirming the word with signs following” (Mk 16:20). Paul also testifies of those early days when the apostles, who had personally been taught by Jesus, continued to deliver His word. It is said of that time that God Himself was “also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will” (Heb 2:4).

Our text is relating one of the historical occasions when these things were taking place. The people were being established in the faith through the words of God-ordained men of understanding, and God was verifying their word by an outburst of many signs and wonders. All of this was done in answer to their prayer. The Divine confirmation of what the apostles preached establishes how necessary it was to hear “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42).

For some decades now, “the apostles’ doctrine” has not been declared with any consistency or perception. There are staggering numbers of professed “Christians” that are fundamentally ignorant of “sound doctrine.” There is confusion in cardinal subjects like the atonement (Rom 5:11), reconciliation to God (2 Cor 5:18-20), the new birth (1 Pet 1:23), the contention of the

Spirit with the flesh (Gal 5:17), the intercession of Christ (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25), the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13-14; 15:13; Gal 5:5; 1 Pet 1:22), justification (Acts 13:39; Rom 5:1; 8:30; Tit 3:7), sanctification (1 Cor 1:30; 1 Thess 4:3-4; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2), glorification (Rom 8:17,30; 2 Thess 1:10), fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph 1:3), God working in us both to will and to do (Phil 2:12-13) – and a whole lot more.

The lack of “sound doctrine” (2 Tim 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:1) in these, and other similar areas, is a major contributor to the staggering number of divisions that exist in professed Christendom.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 19 of 38

THE NEED FOR THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE TODAY

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)” (Verse 12-13, Acts 5:12-16)

While there is a sense in which the Spirit does direct people into the truth today (John 16:13; 1 Cor 2:10-13; 1 John 2:20,27), it is not in the precise manner as He directed the apostles. No man can find the truth of JUSTIFICATION (Acts 13:39; Rom 3:20-28; 4:25; 5:1,9; Gal 2:16), SANCTIFICATION (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Tim 2:21; Heb 2:11; ; 10:10,14,29), TH COMING OF THE LORD (2 Thess 1:10; 2 Pet 3:3-13; 1 John 3:1-3; 2 Thess 2:8; Heb 9:28), or THE HOPE OF GLORY (Rom 8:24-25; Col 1:27; Gal 5:5; Col 1:5,23; 1 Thess 5:8; Heb 3:6; 6:18) independently of the doctrine of the apostles!

If you are ever going to learn of the struggle of the flesh and the Spirit, you will have to become familiar with what the apostles said about it (Rom 7:15-25; Gal 5:17). If you want to know what really took place when you were baptized into Christ, you will have to sit at the feet of the apostles (Rom 6:1-23; Gal 3:26-27; Col 2:12-15; 1 Pet 3:21). If you desire to know the rationale behind fleeing from fornication, you must be subjected to the apostles doctrine (1 Cor 6:18-20). Where else can you learn about “the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:10-18), the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23), our spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:1-3), or the continual change that is wrought within the saints by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18)?

The ministry of the apostles has not been given to anyone else. Respecting doctrine, they are still the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20). If a person chooses to neglect apostolic doctrine, spiritual ignorance WILL prevail. It simply is not possible to grow up into Christ while neglecting the “apostles’ doctrine.” Their doctrine, or teaching, is what reveals what was accomplished by the death of Christ, His resurrection, His ascension, and His enthronement at the right hand of God. The true nature of spiritual life is opened up in their doctrine (Gal 5:15,26; 1 Cor 1:9; Eph 4:11-16). We learn about the devil and his devices in their doctrine (1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:26; 1 Pet 5:8).

The absolute necessity of apostolic doctrine is confirmed by the general condition of the professed church, together with the vast majority of its ministers. There is such an abysmal level of ignorance concerning the apostles' doctrine that it is mind-boggling. This gross deficiency of understanding has given rise to a plethora of religious charlatans. Their air waves, religious book stores, and schools of purported higher learning are filled with their flawed and misdirected teachings – and, as it was in Israel, men “love to have it so” (Jer 5:31).

However, in our text, these conditions did not yet exist. The conversions were unquestionably genuine. When pretenders surfaced, they were at once known, and God dealt with them (Acts 5:1-10; 8:13-24; 1 Cor 5:1-5). The people had a faith that could not be suppressed, and a love of the truth that dominated their hearts and minds. They loved each other, and came together to be taught “the truth as it is in Jesus” (Eph 4:20). They did not come together to be entertained. They did not come together reluctantly, or because they were forced to do so. One heart, one soul, and common consent brought them together – a common faith, a single hope, and a love of the truth.

NOT INTENDED TO BE UNIQUE

Do not think that this was something intended to be unique to the first century! This very same thing has happened throughout history when the apostolic doctrine was again found and treasured. That doctrine presents a precise picture of Jesus and His great salvation. Once believed, all of heaven becomes involved.

Our times are much like those that existed in Israel during the reign of Josiah. In the eighteenth year of his reign it was determined “to repair the breaches” of the house of the Lord. As they went about their work, Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord!” The book was read before the king, and it registered upon his heart. Upon hearing the words, he knew at once that the nation was living in contradiction of their God, and he set out to obtain more of the mind of the Lord on the matter (2 Kgs 22:8-20).

Today, within the average church, “the apostles' doctrine” is lying dormant in sectarian ruins. The people do not even know what the doctrine says, much less what it means. For this reason nothing significant can be built for God where this condition exists. The foundation of the apostles is not there, and thus the house cannot be built. The question must be asked of this generation, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psa 11:3).

The conditions of the church in the book of Acts cannot be replicated independently of the causes behind them. It is not possible to have the blessing without the Blessor, or the gifts without the Giver. Understanding cannot be had without God-sent teachers. Organization cannot achieve these things. Any effort to do so cannot possibly succeed.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 20 of 38

AMONG THE REST, NO MAN DARED TO JOIN THEM, #1

“And of the rest durst no man join himself to them . . .” (Verse 13, Acts 5:12-16)

Real disciples are always observed. Further, the nature of what they possessed is, to some degree, sensed by those who watch them attentively. What happens among Christ’s followers eventually gets out – just as it did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:6). In our text, word had circulated about these people, what they said, and what took place among them.

This was not the result of promotion. It was rather the revelation of the nature of new life in Christ Jesus – which life tends to manifest itself. It obtains the same nature as the Savior Himself, who shed light wherever He was. Life in Christ Jesus emits a certain glory that cannot be hidden. Paul said of the Philippian brethren, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). That is, when our walk is in the Spirit, our light will shine! When it is not “in the Spirit,” no light CAN shine.

If we devote ourselves to the proper priorities, a godly influence will come from us that cannot be hidden. Paul referred to this condition when speaking of certain traits of the New Covenant. He applies this truth particularly to himself, and the preaching in which he was engaged. The principle, however, is also woven into the very fabric of the life that is in Christ Jesus. “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and MAKETH MANIFEST the savor of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, AND in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:16). In the place of “savor,” other versions use “aroma” (NKJV), “fragrance” (NASB), “smell” (NIV), “sweet perfume” (BBE), “sweet odor” (DARBY), “sweet wholesome fragrance” (LIVING), and “pleasant smell” (IE).

In the above passage, there are several different recipients of the “savor,” or fragrance.

1. TO ALL WHO HEAR THE GOSPEL. “. . . God . . . maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place” (2 Cor 2:14). The Gospel of Christ is like the pervading aroma of a powerful incense. Wherever it is preached in truth, people become keenly aware of a non-worldly influence – one that is not found in the common course of life in the flesh.

2. TO GOD HIMSELF. “We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ” (2:15). The faithful heralds of the Good News are themselves a sweet and pleasant aroma of Christ to God. That is, it is Christ in them that brings great pleasure to the Father. Further, that presence is something that is not taken for granted. Jesus does not remain where He is not wanted, or is stifled. He Himself affirmed that He manifests Himself only to the ones who love Him. He further defined that love as having His commandments and keeping them, or maintaining a hold upon them (John 14:21). It is the manifesting-Christ who causes us to emit a pleasant odor to the Living God.

3. TO THE PERISHING. “To the one we are the savor of death unto death” (2:16a). To the ones who are perishing, the fragrance of the godly appears as the offensive stench of death. It is not pleasant to them at all. In fact, it only serves to drive them still further from the Lord. That is,

it is the smell of death that moves them deeper into spiritual death.

4. TO THOSE WHO ARE SAVED. “. . . to the other the savor of life unto life” (2:16b). The very same fragrance that is offensive to those who are perishing, is most pleasant to those who are being saved – pleasant in the same sense as it is to God. Instead of driving them further from the Lord, it brings them closer to Him.

Our text will show us the response “in them that are saved, and in them that perish” (2 Cor 2:15) – a fragrance that repels, and a fragrance that draws. No one will be neutral, for in spiritual life, there is no such thing as neutral. As Jesus Himself said, “He that is not with Me is against Me” (Matt 12:30). And again He said, “he that is not against us is for us” (Lk 11:23).

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 21 of 38

AMONG THE REST, NO MAN DARED TO JOIN THEM, #2

“And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Verses 13-14, Acts 5:12-16)

THE REST

“And of the rest . . . “ Other versions read, “Yet none of the rest” (NKJV), “No one else” (NIV), “The others” (BBE), “None of the other people” (GWN), “The other believers” (LIVING), “Not one of those on the outside” (WILLIAMS), “And none of those who were not of their number” (AMPLIFIED), “But as far as the others were concerned” (PHILLIPS), and “No one outside their group” (CEV).

There are varied opinions within the Christian community concerning the identity of “the rest.” Lightfoot, a notable commentator, says it refers to “the remainder of the 120 disciples of whom Ananias had been one; and that they feared to put themselves on an equality with the apostles.” A cluster of commentators, including Pricaeus, Morus, Rosenmuller, Schleuser, and others suppose “the rest” refers to “the rich men, or people of authority and influence among the Jews, of whom Ananias was one.” In this case, no one from this group stepped forward to donate proceeds from the sale of their goods. John Gill believes “the rest” refers to the rest of the real Christians who did not dare “to come nigh to the apostles, or familiarly converse with them, much less put themselves on an equal foot with them, but with great reverence of them kept their distance from them.” A more reasonable explanation is given by the commentator Calmet who observes “that the Jewish nation was then divided into many different sects, who entertained widely different opinions on various articles. The apostles adopted none of these jarring sentiments, and none of the different sects dared to join themselves to them; neither Pharisees, Sadducees, nor Herodians, as such, were found in this uncomplicated, holy Church.”

I am not satisfied with any of these explanations. With the exception of the last one, they appear

to be said to justify a theological persuasion rather than open up the text. To me, it is clear that “the rest” refers to those who were not “of one accord” (5:12). The Living Bible could not possibly be more wrong in its representation of this verse – “the other believers.” If that is a proper rendition, then those who believed were not of “one accord.”

The word “rest” comes from a word meaning, “the remaining . . . the rest of any number or class under consideration” (THAYER). At this point a comparison is not being made to the apostles, for the subject of reference is “all the church” (5:11). Further, it does not do justice to the text to imagine that it was only, or even primarily, the apostles who were meeting in Solomon’s court, working signs and wonders among themselves. This is the view represented by the International English Version: “The apostles were together in Solomon's Porch; they all had the same purpose” (IE). Such a view is utterly foolish!

The main subject of the verse is those who “were all of one accord in Solomon’s porch.” However, they were not the only ones in Solomon’s porch. Verse fourteen will affirm that, as a result of the apostles’ words and works during this occasion, “multitudes” believed. There were, then, others who were also hearing and observing what was taking place. Those who were not “of one accord” constitute “the rest,” or “the others.”

You will note that nothing about the text suggests that these gatherings were tailored for “the rest.” That does not mean that words were not addressed to them. It does mean that the purpose was to separate themselves from that unholy number, not cater to them while they remained there. It was the believers who convened this meeting – those who “were all of one accord.” The purpose of their gathering related primarily to them. Otherwise the expression “the rest” makes no sense. The term “others” presumes a core group, of which such people were of no part.

I know of no text that directly states or infers that believers ever purposed to gather together with “the rest,” or with outsiders. The presence of an “unlearned” people, or “unbelievers” is considered something unusual – something that is part of an “IF” factor (1 Cor 14:23). It is quite true that in an institutional setting, such people are critical to success, for the aim is generally numerical growth, which is a primary means of sustaining the institution. Some have even invented a gathering-formulae that postulates the necessity of a considerable percentage of the people being “unbelievers.” In one suggested survey (2007), the ideal number of unbelievers present in an assembly is 25% – that is, an ideal church gathering is constituted of 75% Christians and 25% non-Christians. Paul presented a suggested scenario where “ONE” “unbeliever” or “unlearned” person was present in the assembly (1 Cor 14:24). It is the saints that are admonished not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Heb 10:25).

Together with this concept of an admixture of believers and unbelievers comes the necessity to dumb-down things that take place in the assembly. This is done to make an appeal to people who really do not have a preference for the things of God. In order to dumb-down things relating to the Lord, you must mix them with the things of this world. This may be done by simply speaking more about human experience than the truth, or by modifying the truth itself in an attempt to shape it so it is not offensive.

The transgression of this approach is this: as soon as something from man is theoretically

mingled with the truth, the truth loses its power, and is no longer truth. It is the same principle that was made known under the Law. When building the altar of God, there could not be a stone in it that was hewn, or fashioned by man's hand. No matter how skillful the stone-worker may have been, his work could not be included in God's altar. Therefore the Law reads, "And if thou wilt make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it" (Ex 20:25). Moses faithfully commanded the people on this critical matter. "Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaster them with plaster. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them" (Deut 27:4-5). Upon entering into the promised land, Joshua built an altar to the Lord, faithfully adhering to Moses' word. "Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings" (Josh 8:30-31).

Carrying this idea even further, Paul affirmed that he took care in the presentation of the Gospel not to mingle it with the wisdom of this world. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God . . . And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:1.4). This was not something Paul thought up on his own. He makes clear that Jesus sent Him to preach the Gospel, but NOT with wisdom of words. "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: NOT with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" (1 Cor 1:17). He also declared that he preached only the Gospel, without human additives, "That your faith should NOT stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:5).

In view of these things, transgression is involved in the effort to attract sinners by anything other than the Gospel and a godly life. I understand that it is not fashionable to speak in this manner. Many men would have very little, if anything at all, to say if they could not speak in the jargon of this present evil world. However, such a posture cannot in any way be dignified. If it is declared that the people doing this mean well, we simply reply that this cannot be supported. How can a heart be pure when it adopts a manner that conflicts with the revealed purpose of God?

The church must learn to think in terms of "the rest," thereby placing the accent on the people of God's choice! God has made known the people who are preeminent before Him. This is made clear by such expressions as "the elect of God" (Col 3:12), "God's elect" (Tit 1:1), "a peculiar (special [NKJV] people" (Tit 2:14), "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet 2:9), and "the people of God" (1 Pet 2:10). These are the only people on the face of the earth He has washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11). They are the only people to whom He has given "His Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 4:8). The intercession of Jesus is only for these people (Heb 7:25). Only these people have been given "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3). These are the only people who are "led by the Spirit" (Rom 8:14). They are clearly the people God prefers.

Who is the person who has the audacity to call a meeting of these people, and then speak to someone other than them? Where is the professing minister who would stand before these people and throw out carnal trivia in an attempt to impress the ungodly? Words fail me to emphasize the seriousness of such folly. In such a setting, the saints become conceptually “the rest,” when all of heaven knows they are really the primary people in the world! There are significant numbers of God’s people – true saints of God – that have, at the very best, spiritual pablum set before them in the assembly. Those who are pretending to be their ministers would do well to fulfill the mandate of the King, and Head of the church: “Feed My sheep!”

Every gathering of God’s people must be one in which those who are of one accord and those who are “the rest” should be evident.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 22 of 38

DURST NO MAN JOIN

“And of the rest durst no man join himself to them.” (Verse 13, Acts 5:12-16)

Other versions read, “dared to join them” (NKJV), “dared to associate with them” (NASB), “dared join them” (NIV), “in fear, kept back from joining them” (BBE), “no one ventured to come near them” (MRD), “was daring to join himself to them” (YLT), “dared to attach themselves to them” (WEYMOUTH), “dared to join and associate with them” (AMPLIFIED), and “was daring to be joining himself to them” (ALT).

And, what of “the rest” of those found in Solomon’s Porch? How did they feel about this impressive and growing body of people who were exuding the very life of Christ? Were they attracted to their size? It was sufficient to get anyone’s attention – 3,000 + 5,000 + multitudes of both men and women. Did the signs and wonders being wrought by the hands of the apostles compel them to be part of what was happening? An institutional man might imagine this to be an ideal setting to attract outsiders. But that was not the situation at all!

These “rest” did not dare join this number of disciples – “durst no man.” They stood aloof from believers, not finding any particular thing to criticize, as did the Temple authorities, yet afraid to be identified with them. The word “durst” comes from a Greek word that means, “not to dread or shun through fear . . . to be bold, bear oneself boldly” (THAYER), “being bold enough to defy danger or opposition” (FRIBERG), “be brave” (UBS), “to be so bold as to challenge or defy possible danger or opposition” (LOUW-NIDA), “to undertake, take heart either to bear or do anything terrible or difficult” (LIDDELL-SCOTT), and “to have courage, to be brave enough” (GINGRICH). In the English, the word means, “to confront boldly: invite the opposition fearlessly” (MERRIAM-WEBSTER). In other words, “the rest” did not have the courage to join these disciples. It took a lot of boldness to do so, and they did have such courage!

In the context of the nominal church, this verse sounds exceedingly strange. Why would anyone

be afraid to join a body of people who were being blessed by the Lord – a people whose sins had been forgiven, preached a glorious message, and among whom all manner of signs and wonders were being wrought? It just does not make sense to the carnal mind, and it is not considered an appropriate response to a modern church – perhaps a mega-church. Of course, the church to which we are being introduced was, by modern standards, a mega-church, consisting of several thousand active and participating members, and growing rapidly. However, Divine judgment had also taken place in this assembly (Acts 5:1-10).

“JOIN HIMSELF TO THEM”

The expression “join himself” comes from a single Greek word which means, “to glue, glue to, glue together, cement, fasten together, hence universally, to join or fasten firmly together” (THAYER). This word is used several times in Scripture. The manner in which it is used clarifies precisely what is meant in this verse.

1. The prodigal son “JOINED himself” to a citizen of “that country” in which he had squandered his living (Lk 15:15).
2. The Spirit directed Philip to “JOIN thyself to this chariot,” in which the Ethiopian eunuch was riding (Acts 8:29).
3. Following his conversion, Saul of Tarsus made an effort to “JOIN himself to the disciples” in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26).
4. When Peter met Cornelius he told him that it had been “an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to KEEP COMPANY, or come unto one of another nation” (Acts 10:28).
5. Following Paul’s preaching in Athens, “certain men CLAVE UNTO him, and believed” (Acts 17:34).
6. Concerning the responsibility of believers toward the good, Paul wrote, “CLEAVE TO that which is good” (Rom 12:9).
7. A description of what occurs in regeneration is, “he that is JOINED to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17).

As is apparent from these texts, joining is not merely being added to a roster, or obtaining a kind of formal identity with a group. It has to do with actually being a functional part of that to which one is joined. It includes participation, and a bodily presence. There is a oneness of the individual with the group which includes both his heart and mind. This is quite different from the concept of being a member of a given church, yet rarely meeting together. That concept is one borrowed from the world.

When it becomes evident that God Almighty is working in any given group of believers, those who love the world and are immersed in sin will not want to be identified with that assembly.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 23 of 38

TWO KEY FACTORS

“And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.” (Verse 13, Acts 5:12-16)

There are at least two factors that caused “the rest” to draw back, not daring to be identified with those early disciples. Both of them are very intimidating to an unbeliever. Remember, those who are not in Christ have themselves as their primary interest, while believers have the Lord as their fundamental concern. They are aggressive in crucifying their flesh, denying themselves, and taking up their cross to follow Jesus. In our text, for those who lacked these higher motivations, there were two insurmountable conditions.

1. First, the Jewish authorities opposed these people. The priests, captain of the Temple guard, and Sadducees opposed them (Acts 4:1-3). The Sanhedrin, consisting of Jewish “rulers, and elders, and scribes” also opposed them (Acts 4:5). In addition, the high priests Annas and Caiaphas, together with a key man named John, Alexander, and the kindred of the high priest opposed this body of people (Acts 4:5-6). This conglomerate of Jewish authorities did not approve of the message of these people, and had issued an ultimatum for them “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). When they finally let the spokesmen Peter and John go, they “further threatened them,” being unable to find a technical point that would justify punishing them (Acts 4:21). To those who had “the fear of the Jews” (John 7:13), and were afraid of “what man shall do” unto them (Heb 13:6), such circumstances made them draw back from godly affiliation.

2. Secondly, it was now general knowledge that dishonest people did not fare well among these believers. Ananias and Sapphira had been stricken dead after hearing a pointed word of rebuke and exposure by Peter (Acts 5:1-10). Such an assembly was not at all attractive to “the rest.”

Given these two arresting factors, all interest in this assembly disappeared among those who did not have honest and good hearts. The “rest” had an unlawful respect for the religious leaders, and a fear that their ways would be discovered, should they join themselves to this number. Lacking faith, persuasion, conviction, and a preeminent love for God, such people are content to be separate from those who have been knit together, and are serving the Lord alone.

It should be noted that it is foolish to avoid the body of Christ out of a fear of being judged. In view of the fact that God will ultimately judge every individual, it is far better to repent and seek His face NOW. In this time, before Jesus returns, a person can call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13). However, when the Lord appears in all of His glory (Matt 24:30; Col 3:4), no such opportunity will be granted. The fear one may entertain now about being judged by the Lord is nothing to compare with the experience of facing the glorified Christ without having been justified and made accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6). God is going to judge all men “by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in

that He hath raised Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). At that time, and without a single exception, God has decreed that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11). For those who have lived out of synch with such a confession, it will be the prelude to condemnation. There will be no negotiating at that time.

Men have an entire lifetime to seek the Lord (Acts 17:26-27), call upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21), believe and be baptized (Mk 16:16), present their bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1-2), live by faith (Heb 10:38), walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), all the while living “unto Him “who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). The Lord will respond to those who seek Him, sending them a “preacher” (Acts 16:9; Rom 10:14-15), providing a minister through whom they can believe (1 Cor 3:5), and sending the Holy Spirit to convict them (John 16:8-10).

As if that was not enough, for those who believe “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11), everything that is required to culture and maintain spiritual life, thereby enabling growth and spiritual maturity has been given. God has provided “ALL spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3), and “ALL things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet 1:3-4).

Those in Christ also are provided a faithful and consistent Intercessor in heaven, who can be “touched with the feeling of their infirmities,” guaranteeing that they can “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:15-16). Add to that the marvelous benefit of the Holy Spirit Himself, interceding from within (Rom 8:26-27), through whom “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

When the Lord Jesus appears in His own glory, the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy angels (Matt 16:27; Lk 9:26), Isaiah’s word will realize complete fulfillment: “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isa 33:14). Then, those who have spurned the Savior, and refused identity with “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph 3:15), will say “to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev 6:16-17).

Of course, sinners do not refuse to join themselves to a powerless and lifeless church, or one that carries upon itself the stench of this world. The modern church is not vigorously opposed by the world, and its message is quite palatable to worldly people. Some are opposed to the church only because of its stand on political or social issues. The Scriptures, however, provide no example of this kind of opposition to believers. It is a modern day phenomenon that reflects the adoption of distorted priorities by the professing church. It also ought to be noted that the spirit of Constantine is running rampart among many professing Christians. He made “Christianity” the religion of the Roman Empire – not because of a compelling persuasion to please God and

prepare to confront Him, but because he thought it would bring advantage to an empire that was beginning to crumble. However, it is still true that such a cause is not big enough embrace the Christ. If what men want in Christ is a united home, a united country, a happy family, and a stable career, they will have to go elsewhere, for that is not the kind of work Jesus is doing – and He told us so (Matt 10:34-39).

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 24 of 38

SOMETHING THAT IS DANGEROUS

“And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Verses 13-14, Acts 5:12-16)

A word also ought to be said about the danger of an academically-based religion – that is, a message and stance that is based upon scholarship, research, statistics, and the likes. Scholarship can neither produce nor maintain faith, without which it is not possible to please God (Heb 11:6). This may be said of any approach to the things of God that does not absolutely require faith.

Faith is the catalyst for all effective understanding (Heb 11:3), and spiritual advancement (2 Cor 5:7; Gal 3:11; 5:5; Eph 3:17; 2 Tim 3:15; Heb 6:12; 1 Pet 1:5). It is the appointed means by which we perceive (Eph 3:17-18), will (1 Cor 9:16-17), and do (1 Tim 1:4; Heb 11:29).

Furthermore, faith cannot be passed from one person to another, or from one generation to another. God has no grandchildren. This is why religious movements, as generations pass, most generally lose their power, and emphasis. Succeeding generations simply do not see what their fathers saw. Each person, and each generation, must obtain the faith themselves. Just knowing what the fathers of the movement taught is not sufficient. In any valid movement of God, each succeeding generation must perceive the truth their predecessors saw. They must also advance in the truth, for the truth of God never is encased in a static creed.

What is declared to be truth must be put to the test by every generation. It must stand the test of Scripture, and the test of spiritual power. Can what a person or a collection of persons believe be stated in precise Scriptural language. Does it produce a valid perspective of God, Christ, salvation, the church, the world to come, etc. Are the people who embrace the accepted doctrine holy (1 Pet 1:15-16)? Are they a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)? Are they living by faith (Heb 10:38), and walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16)? Is hope the anchor of their soul (Heb 6:19). Have they presented their bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1-2)? Can the grace of God be seen in them (Acts 11:23)? Are they seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). Can their faith and love be perceived (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; Phile 1:5)? Are the people continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42)?

If these traits cannot be found, then what kind of message have the people heard and embraced? Has the Gospel diminished in its power (Rom 1:16)? Has the Holy Spirit cease to convict (John 16:8-10)? Is living by faith no longer effective (Heb 10:38)? Has the devil ceased to flee when he is resisted (James 4:7)? Who would be so foolish as to embrace such absurdities?

Are there divisions among them (1 Cor 1:10; 3:3; 11:18)? Are there an inordinate number of people who are living “disorderly” lives (2 Thess 3:11)? Are they noted for their squabbles (James 4:1-4)? Is the work that is taking place in them that of the devil or the Lord Jesus? Such things must be detected and corrected before death, or the Lord’s appearing – which ever comes first. The bride of Christ will not be a bungling, stumbling, uninformed, and non-growing people! When Jesus presents the church to Himself, it will be “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). The salvation of God is what produces such a people – in this world, and before they disembark from it!

Real faith cannot be derived from a theological system, or identification with an historical religious movement. If faith could not be produced by those who were scholarly experts in a revealed religion – like the Law of Moses – you may be sure it cannot be produced by contemporary experts in some systematic theology invented by men. Faith simply cannot be commenced or maintained from the wellspring of this world’s wisdom. That wisdom is too shallow, and its waters are stagnant.

The remarkable productivity of the early church was owing to its separation from the world, and the awareness of its complete dependence upon the Lord. During those early days the truth itself was the point, and not a particular view of it. However, when a spirit of laxness began to enter, the door was opened for charlatans, other Jesus’, and a false gospel. O, that men would realize this! When the church is not what it is intended to be, the devil sees it, and takes advantage of its ignorance and disinterest. He cannot make such inroads where the whole counsel of God is declared, embraced, and lived out in the lives of the people. Until the modern church makes an about face, gets back to “sound doctrine” (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:1), an emphasis on the Lord’s Christ (1 Cor 2:2), and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14), the professed church will be nothing more than a faithless harlot, courting the favor of the world (Rev 17:1-6,15-18; 19:2).

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 25 of 38

BUT THE PEOPLE MAGNIFIED THEM

“ . . . but the people magnified them.” (Verse 13, Acts 5:12-16)

Other versions read, “but the people ESTEEMED them very highly” (NKJV), “even though they were HIGHLY REGARDED by the people” (NIV), “but the people held them in HIGH HONOR” (RSV), “but the people MADE MUCH OF THEM” (BBE), “but the people PRAISED

THEM highly” (CSB), “but the people were LOUD IN THEIR PRAISE” (NJB), “but all of the people were SAYING GOOD THINGS about them” (IE), “even though their general popularity was very great” (PHILLIPS), and “even though everyone liked them very much” (CEV).

Here is a third observation made of the people within Solomon’s court. First, there were the believers who were all of one accord. Second, there were those who were afraid to join themselves to the believers. Third, it is said that “the people” magnified the believers, even though many, if not all, of them did not dare to join them.

I am of the persuasion that here, the expression “the people” equates to “the common people” of the Gospel account of Jesus’ ministry. It is written, “and the COMMON PEOPLE heard Him gladly” (Mk 12:37). At that time, Jesus was teaching in the Temple. A number of people were listening to Him, among whom were the Sadducees, some scribes, and others (Mk 12:1-36). Everyone did not receive His words. In fact, some even sought to take hold of Him (12:12), while others sought to trap him with crafty questions (12:13-28). When, therefore, the Mark text refers to “the common people,” it is referring to the remnant of the people who were not sceptics, or seeking to trap Jesus.

That is the kind of thing that is involved here. “The people” are those who were not opposed to the apostles’ preaching, as were the Temple authorities. And, while they did not rush forward to join the disciples and continue in the apostles’ doctrine, they saw something good in the people, and therefore “magnified them.” In this they fulfilled the word of Jesus, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).

The word “magnified” is an aggressive one, meaning, “to deem or declare great, i.e. to esteem highly, to extol, laud, celebrate” (THAYER), “pay great respect to, highly honor”(FRIBERG), “Praise, hold in high honor” (UBS), “exalt, glorify, praise, extol” (GINGRICH). In other words, the people “were saying good words” about the believers (IE). They “esteemed” (NKJV) them, “highly regarded” (NIV) them, “spoke highly of them” (GWN), and “their general popularity was very great” (PHILLIPS).

This is the kind of thing that first occurred on the day of Pentecost when the believers were “having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). This also had particular regard to the teaching of the apostles, which sharply contrasted with that of the scribes and Pharisees. This same kind of response also occurred when the lame man was healed. As it is written, “for all men glorified God for that which was done” (Acts 4:21).

When men participate in the traits of the Kingdom of God – “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” [NKJV] (Rom 14:17) – there is a comeliness to it all that appeals to good men. Thus it is said of such people, “For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men” (Rom 14:18). That is, there is nothing about spiritual life that contradicts the general consciousness of honesty and goodness. Thus believers can commend themselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God, knowing that grace works nothing in the heart that is inherently wrong or offensive. Those who oppose the people and work of God do not do so because of any fundamental flaw in them, but because of their own love for the

world and consequent hatred of God and rejection of the Gospel.

I understand that such a condition does not always prevail – a circumstance where the people of God are being praised and respected. There have been times when holy men have been “defamed,” and made “the filth and offscouring of all things” (1 Cor 4:13). However, the majority of the opposition against the church, that is recorded in Scripture, has come from religious men, as confirmed in Moses, the Prophets, the Lord Jesus, and the apostles.

There are records of persecution against the following Christians: the whole Church (Acts 8:1; 9:1-3; Gal 1:13), James (Acts 12:2), the apostles (Acts 4:1-5:52), Peter (Acts 5:3-9), Stephen (Acts 6:9-15; 7:1-60), Paul (Acts 9:23-29; Acts 16:19-25; 20:23-24; 21:27-28; 23:10-15; 2 Cor 11:23-33; 2 Tim 3:11-12), the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:14); Timothy (Heb 13:23), John (Rev 1:9), Antipas (Rev 2:13), the church of Smyrna (Rev 2:8-10), and the church of Philadelphia (Rev 2:9-10). Most of these oppositions were generated by either Jews or idolaters – religious men. This was also generally true of the persecutions prior to Christ, with proportionately few exceptions. Even in the bloody persecutions of the Roman empire, religion was the issue, as the believers would not bow to Caesar, even as Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego would not bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s image.

The point to be seen here is that true believers have never been opposed because of immorality, covetousness, a lack of goodness, or fundamental inconsideration. They have never been noted for being bad citizens, or being an essential hindrance to the welfare of humanity. Those who were aggressive against the saints had to generate false reports about them, and raise spurious accusations. The strength of their morality, and their devotion to their God was never the issue. When the church was spiritually strong, as in our text, those things were always apparent.

In our time, and in our country, Christians, as a whole, are not well spoken of – at least not in the sense of our text. They do not have a good reputation in the financial world, or in the business world. Often they are associated with slothfulness, questionable appearances, and misrepresentation. Their distinctiveness, if, indeed, they have any at all, is not generally found in the domain of wisdom, spirituality, or good works. Some professing Christians are noted for their social oddity, others for their flamboyance, and still others for their political persuasions. Some are only noted for their institutional prominence, impressive building structures, and social involvements. Among professed Christian experts there are those who deal with marital life, economic issues, motivation, and even health. Proportionately few Christian leaders are noted for their expertise in the word and ways of God, or their insightful exposition of the Scriptures.

It is not that these are all unlawful areas. Rather, it is that they are not primary, or fundamental domains of spiritual thought and deed. None of them require a strong faith, everlasting consolation, or good hope. They are all on the periphery of life, and not at its center.

The church of our time has been led into inordinate involvement in extracurricular activities, which they have been taught to view as primary. The result is that its spiritual light has dimmed, if not gone out altogether. It is associated too much with “this present evil world,” from which Jesus is said to have delivered us (Gal 1:4). In our text, the Herodians, a political branch of the Jews (Matt 22:15-16; Mk 12:13) were not inclined to join themselves to the disciples – at least

not in the capacity of Herodians. The Zealots, particularly promoting Jewish Law and Institutions, did not set up camp in the church – even though one of their number, Simon the Zealot (Lk 6:15) was called to be an apostle – but not in the capacity of a Zealot.

The point is that the light of the church shines most brightly in its unwavering commitment to the Lord and its obvious separateness from the world. The more intimately it becomes involved in the affairs that are limited to this world, the less its light shines. I understand that the modern church sees involvement with the world as a means through which its light shines more effectively. That view, however, contradicts the affirmation of Scripture: “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty (influential, NIV), not many noble, are called” (1 Cor 1:26). This is the call that comes from God Himself! He has not called many who are great in the flesh. However, if the postulate that spiritual light is shed more profusely within the framework of worldly involvements is true, this text could not possibly be right. Nothing in Scripture remotely suggests that the conversion of prominent worldly men and women will result in more godly influence. If that was the case, God would call a lot of them, not a few!

In this text, the people did not praise the believers because they were great athletes, businessmen, entertainers, or politicians. It was because of the spiritual and moral nobility that was evident in their lives, just as it is in believers today! Of course, it will not be possible to exploit this condition for personal advantage. No person can gain worldly prominence by being holy, spiritual or heavenly minded. Furthermore, the objective of holiness, godliness, righteousness, etc., is not to qualify for worldly prominence.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 26 of 38

MULTITUDES OF BELIEVERS WERE ADDED, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, #1

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Verse 14, Acts 5:12-16)

Wisdom is “justified of her children,” or “vindicated by her deeds” [NASB] (Matt 11:16). That is, the results of wisdom confirm that it is, in fact, true wisdom “from above” (James 3:17). In our text, the manner in which the church was proceeding was confirmed to be the God-ordained one, for the work of the Lord was being made known through their activity. Lest we forget, permit me to once again set before you what these holy brethren had been doing.

HERE IS WHAT HAD HAPPENED

1. Prior to Pentecost, the disciples had first met and prayed together (1:14).
2. On the day of Pentecost they were all together in one place and in one accord (2:1).
3. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured forth, resulting in the supernatural speaking of the “wonderful works of God” (2:4,11).

4. When a crowd of people gathered, Peter stood up and delivered a word that precisely told what had happened when Jesus died, and how He had been exalted to the right hand of God (2:14-36).
5. When the people inquired what they should do, they were told to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and for the remission of sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:37-39).
6. With many other words, Peter exhorted the people, telling them the promise was for them, and that they should save themselves from that wayward generation (2:39-40).
7. The word was gladly received and obeyed (2:41).
8. The disciples continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (2:42).
9. Great fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles (2:43).
10. All that believed were together and had all things common (2:44-45).
11. They continued daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house (2:46).
12. When healing a man lame from birth, Peter again gave an insightful summary of the death and exaltation of Christ (3:12-18).
13. He told the people to repent so their sins could be forgiven, times of refreshing would come to them, and God would send Jesus to them (3:19-26).
14. Peter and John preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead (4:1).
15. About 5,000 men believed the preaching (4:4).
16. When questioned by the Temple authorities, Peter delivered a stirring exaltation of the Lord Jesus (4:8-12).
17. When released, Peter and John reported to the church how they were threatened, and they immediately prayed an insightful prayer, asking for boldness to preach the Word (4:23-30).
18. When they had prayed, the house was shaken, they were all filled with the Spirit, they spoke the word of God with boldness, the apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of Christ, and great grace was upon them all (4:31-33).
19. No one among them lacked, as those who were possessors of lands or houses, sold them and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution (4:34-36).
20. Ananias and Sapphira were stricken dead for lying to the Holy Spirit (5:1-10).
21. Great fear came upon the whole church, and as many as heard what had happened (5:11).
22. The disciples gathered with the apostles, and in one accord, in Solomon's porch, where many signs and wonders were done by the apostles (5:12).

In all of this there was a holy progression that led to "the unity of the Spirit" (Eph 4:3), and "the unity of faith" (Eph 4:13). There was a purging of old leaven (1 Cor 5:7,8). There was a fear fostered among both believers and unbelievers (Acts 2:43; 5:5,11). The selflessness of the people was confirmed in their lives (1 Cor 10:24). The world and worldly events played no part in their fellowship (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 6:14; 1 John 1:3). It was obvious that the quest of the people was for "the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt 6:33).

These were holy beginnings, and were not an end of themselves. They were intended to lead to spiritual maturity (Eph 4:15), and due preparation to confront the Lord boldly (1 John 4:17), and be joined to Him as His bride (2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7). Unless God has changed, and He cannot

do so (Mal 3:6), we have every right to expect things of this sort to take place where the Gospel is faithfully preached, and men are laboring together with God.

With God beginnings are not an end of themselves. They are actually small in comparison to what will ultimately take place (Zech 4:10) – whether we are speaking of individual believers, or a congregation of them.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 27 of 38

MULTITUDES OF BELIEVERS WERE ADDED, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, #2

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Verse 14, Acts 5:12-16)

PONDER THE ENVIRONMENT

The nature of all of the things taking place during the initial stage of the early church is most arresting. Everything had to do with the Lord and His great redemption. The response was to preaching and exhortation, not an invitation. The exposition was of Jesus and Scripture, not human circumstances. Judgment was because of lying to the Holy Spirit. The response to serious threats was an insightful prayer to God, and a determination to preach the Word with boldness.

There was no word delivered concerning contemporary issues that were unrelated to the salvation of God. During Christ’s ministry, there were “some that told Him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices” (Lk 13:1). Jesus replied, “Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lk 13:2-3). Jesus Himself added, “Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lk 13:4-5). Then He abruptly concluded the conversation by delivering a parable that pointed to the retrogression and fruitlessness of Israel, as compared with contemporary social injustices and calamities.

So far as the record is concerned, there was no exhortation about the poor and the needy – only about neglected widows among the people of God. There was no appeal to any particular age group – like the youth, the single, the married, and seniors, etc. There was no social outreach in the community. There was no political crusade. There is no record of any attempt to stamp out poverty in Jerusalem. There was no “praise service.” No man or group of men was unduly exalted. There was no word about the family structure. There was no inquiry about possible personal problems among the people. There was no entertaining “Christian” event to attract the people – in fact, they were meeting in the Temple, not a local coliseum. There was no special “seeker-friendly” gathering called. No one announced a specialized ministry, asking for support. The solitary Person that was extolled was Jesus, and the only documented reference was the Word of God.

I am not sure how the professed “Christians” of our day would respond to circumstances like that. But it does not appear to me that they would blend well with what is taking place in many churches.

THIS IS THE CONTEXT

This is the kind of context in which it is now said, “And believers were the more added!” The thrust was never placed on outsiders, yet outsiders were brought in! The message pertained exclusively to the Lord Jesus, and yet individuals perceived enough relevance in the message to believe! No special interest groups! No contemporary social issues addressed! Yet, “believers were the more added!”

Why was this so? It was because they were in the heart of the will of God, and therefore His hand was made known among them! Men may theorize about what is effective, and there certainly is a lot of that these days. However, in the book of Acts, we have a record of the work of God actually being accomplished. It is not a study on how to do the work, but a report of the work itself being experienced! We are being introduced to an environment in which God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and holy angels are involved.

Keep in mind that this occurred in spite of, what could be viewed as, hindering influences: the threats of the Jewish council (Acts 4:17,21), and the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). What was actually taking place among the people, as compared with on a “stage,” confirmed that God was working among them.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 28 of 38

ADDED TO THE LORD

“And believers were the more ADDED TO THE LORD, multitudes both of men and women.”
(Verse 14, Acts 5:12-16)

Other versions read, “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord” (NKJV), “And all the more believers in the Lord . . . were constantly added to their number” (NASB), “were added to their number” (NIV), “Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord” (NRSV), “had faith, and were joined to the Lord” (BBE), “Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers” (CSB), “also the number of them that believed in the Lord, both of men and women, grew more and more” (GENEVA), “And the more were those added who feared the Lord” (MRD), “and the numbers . . . who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily” (NJB), “Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord” (NLT), “and more and more believers in the Lord joined them” (WEYMOUTH), “Nevertheless, still more believers . . . were being added to the Lord” (ISV), “but still a vast number of people . . . who believed in the Lord, continued to join them” (WILLIAMS), “More and more there were being added to the Lord those who believed [those who acknowledged Jesus as their Savior and devoted themselves to

Him joined and gathered with them]” (AMPLIFIED), and ”more than ever believing [ones] were being added to the Lord” (ALT),

For the first time we read the expression “ADDED TO THE LORD.” In the second chapter it is written that 3,000 souls were “added unto them” (2:41), and that the Lord “added to the church” (2:47). The fourth chapter affirms 5,000 “believed” (4:4). Here, however, we read of the same kind of response in different words: “ADDED TO THE LORD.”

Some of the versions drift at this point, distorting what was said. They render an interpretation of the text rather than a translation: “added to their number” (NASB), “came to believe in the Lord” (NJB), “brought to the Lord” (NLT), and “continued to join them” (WILLIAMS).

The word “added” is not a numerical one, but rather speaks of the process of uniting one to another. It comes from a Greek word (prosetiqento), which means, “to put to, to add, join to” (THAYER), and “to add something to an existing quantity” (LOUW-NIDA). The Object to which the addition is made is particularized – to/kurio|, “the Lord.” The idea is that believers “kept on being ADDED TO THE LORD.” That is the clear statement of the text.

The thought of being added to the Lord is also expressed in these words, “But he that is JOINED UNTO THE LORD is one spirit,” or “one spirit with Him” [NKJV] (1 Cor 6:17). Another way of saying this is that we have been “made to drink in one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Again, one might say it this way, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30).

Jesus spoke of this marvelous addition, or joining, when He prayed on the night of His betrayal: “That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be ONE IS US. . . I THEM, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one . . .” (John 17:21-23).

Being added to the Lord Himself does not make Him any larger, or bring to Him any inherent advantages. It does, however, put us in a position where we can receive “OF HIS FULNESS” (John 1:16). Christ is IN US (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; Col 1:27), and we are IN HIM (1 Cor 1:30; 16:24; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 5:20). Because of this circumstance, the aim is for Christ to be “formed” IN US, so that His life is lived out in us (Gal 4:19). Paul put it this way, “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:10-11). You see, then, what a marvelous thing is accomplished when a person is “added to the Lord.”

This particular facet of redemption is also delineated in the exposition of men being put into “the body of Christ,” which is His church. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into that body (1 Cor 12:12-13). The relationship of this body to Jesus Himself is reflected in the words, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30).

Our text, then, is a most accurate statement, and is a fitting subject for cogitation, or study and meditation. This particular view, as many others, accents WHAT GOD DOES when a person believes and is baptized. It is GOD Himself who puts us into Christ: “GOD has united you with Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30, NLT). He washes, sanctifies, and justifies us (1 Cor 6:11). HE has

dealt to every man in Christ “a measure of faith,” that translates into a gift (Rom 12:1-6). HE has placed the saved in the body of Christ where it has pleased Him (1 Cor 12:18). God has sent forth the Spirit into our hearts (Gal 4:6). The saved are GOD’s “workmanship” (Eph 2:10). GOD has “given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11).

GOD is the One who adds the saved “to the Lord,” making them one with Christ. May He receive more glory for this marvelous addition!

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 29 of 38

MULTITUDES BOTH OF MEN AND WOMEN

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Verse 14, Acts 5:12-16)

Other versions read, “more and more men and women” (NIV), “great numbers of both men and women” (NRSV), “crowds of both men and women” (CSB), “the numbers of men and women who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily” (NJB), “a vast number of both men and women” (ISV), and “both men and women in really large numbers” (PHILLIPS).

This is the first time women are mentioned in the increase of believers. They were included with the pre-Pentecost disciples (Acts 1:14). As time progressed, women were considered an integral part of the body of Christ. When Saul of Tarsus launched a persecution against the church, he dragged off both “men and women” (Acts 8:3; 9:2), which indicates they were not in a non-functioning role. When the whole city of Samaria believed the powerful preaching of Philip the evangelist, “they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). The first converts in Macedonia were some women (Acts 16:13). When Paul preached in Athens a number of the “chief women,” or “leading women” (NASB), believed and joined Paul and Silas (Acts 17:4). In Thessalonica a number of “honorable women which were Greeks” believed, and in his record of their conversion, Luke lists them before the men who also believed (Acts 17:12).

The increase of believers, and the growth of the body of Christ, included the women. They are nowhere declared to be second class citizens of the heavenly Kingdom, although they are clearly declared to be in subjection to their own husbands – and only their husbands.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he mentions several women who were prominent in the work of the Lord. They include Phebe (Rom 16:1), Priscilla who is listed before her husband Aquila (16:3), Mary (16:6), Junia, who was imprisoned with her husband (16:7), Tryphena and Tryphosa who “labored much in the Lord” (16:12), Julia, the sister of Nereus (16:15). Paul also mentioned some women to the Philippians who labored with him “in the Gospel” (Phil 4:3). Philip also had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9). These, and other, women had been “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14), “added to the church (Acts 2:47), were members of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12,18), were “members” of Christ’s “body , of His flesh and of His

bone” (Eph 5:30), and were the “daughters” of God Himself (2 Cor 6:18).

Therefore, as the church begins to grow and people are added to the Lord, the glorious extent of salvation is being made known by the addition of both men and women.

Throughout the history of God’s people, men and women have been involved in the work of the Lord and devotion to Him. For example, when the gathering of supplies for the building of the tabernacle took place, “both men and women, as many as were willing,” brought gifts (Ex 35:22). When Moses gathered the people together for the hearing of the covenant, the Lord commanded him to “gather the people together, men, women, and children” (Deut 31:12). When a great time of repentance occurred during the ministry of Ezra, “there assembled unto him a very great congregation of men and women and children” (Ezra 10:1). When he delivered the Law to the people, it was before “men and women and all that could hear with understanding” (Neh 8:2). When accounting for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and leading them into Canaan, God Himself said, “For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I SENT before thee Moses, Aaron, AND MIRIAM” (Micah 6:4). Deborah was a married woman, her husband being Lapidoth.” Yet God made her a judge of Israel instead of her husband, and stood with her for forty years in that capacity (Judges 4:4; 5:31). She was the oracle of communication between God and the people.

In all of these instances, God acted in perfect accord with His nature, which cannot change.

Now, in our text, the cleansing wave of the Gospel sweeps over both “men and women.” It was not merely brought to the men, who, in turn, delivered it to the women and the children. Both men and women received the Gospel and were “added to the Lord.” They were both added to the church, and placed in the body of Christ, which has no idle or meaningless members.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 30 of 38

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN BEING “ADDED TO THE LORD?”

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Verse 14, Acts 5:12-16)

Other expressions that equate to be “added to the Lord” include the following.

1. “Joined UNTO THE LORD” (1 Cor 6:17).
2. “Baptized INTO CHRIST” (Gal 3:27).
3. “But of Him [God] are ye IN CHRIST JESUS, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).
4. “But now hath God set the members every one of them IN THE BODY, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18).
5. “For we are members of His body, OF HIS FLESH, AND OF HIS BONE” (Eph 5:30).
6. “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST; if so be that

we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17).

7. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are IN CHRIST JESUS, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).

8. “Therefore if any man be IN CHRIST, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17).

9. “Always bearing about in the body THE DYING OF THE LORD JESUS, that THE LIFE OF JESUS might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that THE LIFE ALSO OF JESUS might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:10-11).

10. “For both He that sanctifieth [Jesus] and they who are sanctified [the saved] ARE ALL OF ONE [God the Father]: for which cause He [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them [the saved] BRETHREN” (Heb 2:11).

11. “If we suffer, we shall also REIGN WITH HIM. . . ” (2 Tim 2:12).

Those who are added to the Lord obtain all of the advantages inherent to being in Him. This includes washing, sanctification, and justification (1 Cor 6:11). It includes access to God (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12), the right to obtain grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16), and being taught by the grace of God (Tit 2:11-12). Those who are “in Christ” have been placed in the heavenly places, and have access to “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3; 2:6). They are “complete” in Christ (Col 2:10), and have been “created unto good works” (Eph 2:10). They are a part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), and therefore have a necessary function within the body itself (1 Cor 12:18). They have access to “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are hidden in Him (Col 2:3). They are among those of whom it is written, “Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:21). All of the promises of God are “Yes” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). All believers are “made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21). All of those things, and more, were made available to the multitudes of men and women who were “added to the Lord.”

Faith brought them to the arena of spiritual blessing and plentitude far beyond the perception of any man. It is simply not right for those claiming identity with Christ to be spiritually uninformed and deficient. It is wrong not to “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15), or to be perpetually lacking in virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (2 Pet 1:5-8). It is simply wrong to remain a “novice” for an extended period of time, to say nothing of the eternal jeopardy that accompanies such staleness (Heb 6:1-6).

Professing Christians who are not running the race set before them (Heb 12:1-2), going on to perfection (Heb 6:1-2), drawing near to the Lord and resisting the devil (James 4:7), and working out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-13), are living contradictions of what God has declared the saved to be. Such people are found in staggering numbers within the professed Christian community.

Jesus is confirmed to be the real Christ through the Scriptures that speak of Him (John 5:39; Lk 24:27,45). The same Scriptures identify those who are really in Christ Jesus – those who have been “added to the Lord.”

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 31 of 38

INSOMUCH THAT THEY BROUGHT FORTH THE SICK INTO THE STREETS

“Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.” (Verse 15, Acts 5:12-16)

In this text, we are witnessing the outbreak of spiritual life, and it was all brought on by the powerful preaching of the Gospel. It is the belief of the Gospel, not the witnessing of miracles, that results in men and women being “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14). Now, the word of what is happening in Solomon’s porch spreads throughout the city, and eventually even into surrounding areas. That indicates that this was an extended period of blessing – one that was befitting of an enthroned Savior and “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11). God was being glorified in these responses.

INSOMUCH

“Insomuch . . .” Other versions read, “so that” (NKJV), “to such an extent that” (NASB), “As a result” (NIV), “And they even” (BBE), “Thus” (NAB), “so as” (YLT), and “in consequence” (MONTGOMERY).

The word “insomuch” is translated from a Greek word (*hoce-the*), which is a consecutive conjunction, expressing consequence. The lexical meaning of the word is, “so that” (THAYER), “therefore for this reason . . . so that, with the result that” (FRIBERG), and “the result or effect of the action in the principle clause” (LIDDELL-SCOTT).

The fifteenth verse is a continuation of the first part of verse twelve – “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.” After stating that many signs and wonders were being done through the hands of the apostles, there is a parenthetical statement. It enlarges on what was taking place at that time, showing the blessed harmony between what the apostles were saying and what they were doing: (“and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women”) – (Acts 5:12b-14).

Therefore, the word “insomuch” provides an explanation for the extent of the signs and wonders that were being done by the apostles. This was a most unusual display of Divine power. In a way, it is reminiscent of one of the occasions during which Jesus wrought many miracles. It is written of that juncture, “and the power of the Lord was present to heal them” (Lk 5:17). On another occasion it is said of Jesus, “for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all” (Lk 6:19).

In this text, Jesus, as the Administrator of the Kingdom, is working from heaven through the

men He had ordained to represent Him. He is not working in a static or unchanging manner, but with holy variableness. He knows when to send forth a special measure of power, and when to seemingly withhold it, as when James was beheaded some time later (Acts 12:2). As always, these works were done in strict accord with the will of God, and in keeping with His eternal purpose.

As with all spiritual gifts, the power to work signs and wonders was not resident in the apostles themselves. It was delegated to them in a Divinely determined and timely manner. No person endowed with such power can employ it at will. For example, Epaphroditus almost died in the very presence of Paul, through whom many miracles were wrought (Phil 1;25-27; Acts 15:12; 19:11-12).

This power is given to the faithful in order to do God's will alone. Once this is seen, it will assist in diffusing the inclination of men to want to emulate the working of miracles. Those who have such a desire have a marked tendency to overstate the works that are supposedly done, and to make valiant efforts to assign to God things that do not bear Divine distinction. I find this is a common weakness in certain Christian circles. It would be downright embarrassing if many of the professed miracles of our time were recorded in the book of Acts. I was once at a meeting in Chicago during which a man was said to have been healed of insomnia. Unlike the miracles recorded in Scripture, the testimony lacked verification.

However, no such thing will be found in the signs and wonders that were wrought through the hands of the apostles. The effectiveness of their work is confirmed by the flood of people who brought forth the sick when they heard of what was happening. These people did not come out of curiosity, but in a full persuasion that genuine miracles were taking place – because that is precisely what was happening.

Keep in mind that this has all happened suddenly and totally without any human planning. It is something that was initiated from heaven, and all the powers of darkness could not diminish the greatness of what was taking place. It is as though Satan's arms and legs withered, and he became impotent. Even though he filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit, and embezzle funds that had been pledged to God, the devil was not able to stem the tide of renewal that was breaking forth in Jerusalem.

In this text we are given confirming evidence of the exaltation of Jesus, the superiority of His rule, and the power of the Gospel. It speaks of a certain purity of heart and whole-hearted commitment to the Lord that was present. In my judgment, this was an environment in which the Lord could work more freely. Consider the following descriptions of the surroundings.

1. The unvarnished truth of the Gospel was being preached.
2. An unquestioned faith and commitment was found in those who were speaking.
3. The believers were of one heart and soul, and were thus of one accord.
4. A certain priority was present regarding the Lord Jesus Christ, His accomplishments, and His ministry.
5. Sin had been purged from presence of believers.

In such surroundings, the Spirit would not be quenched, grieved, or resisted. Any expression of unbelief would come from those who were clearly against the preaching of the Gospel, and were not numbered with the believers. In addition to these cursory observations, the reports of the workings of the Lord would go abroad, for God “hath made His wonderful works to be remembered” (Psa 111:4).

Can all of this happen again? If the church will ever get to a holy state, with holy affection (Col 3:2), righteous zeal (Gal 4:18), fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), seeking the things that are above (Col 3:1-2), and resisting the devil (James 4:7), they will find out. Until those conditions are prevalent, men are shut up to speculation on this matter. After all, God has not changed. Jesus has not changed. The Holy Spirit has not changed. And, the Gospel still has its power (Rom 1:16). The downward change that has taken place has all been in men – their profession, their commitment, and their sobriety.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.” (Acts 5:12-16)

Lesson 32 of 38

THE NATURE OF THOSE TIMES

In the early days of the church, there was a more rapid spread of the Gospel, and a more extensive multiplication of disciples – in addition to the display of many wonderful works. It appears to me that this was directly related to the moral and spiritual purity that were found among the disciples, as well as the unadulterated Gospel that was being preached.

Some propose that these traits gradually reduced and finally disappeared because they were Divinely assigned only to the beginning of the New Covenant era. I am rather inclined to think that it is the introduction of pervasive false teaching and hypocrisy that caused this apparent reduction—i.e. the diminishment of devotion, the lacking of godly zeal, the sterility of assemblies, and the absence of extraordinary works accomplished at Divine discretion. In other words, it is suggested by some that kingdom normalcy possibly excludes the presence of the favors and works that accompanied the beginning of the church.

Early in the church, corrupt doctrine was introduced by profane teachers, and apostolic warning about it was consistent (Acts 15:1,5; 20:29-30; Rom 16:17-18; 1 Cor 11:18-19; 2 Cor 2:17; 11:3-4,13-15; Gal 1:6-8; 5:10; Eph 4:14; Phil 1:15-16; 3:2; Col 2:4,8,18-19; 1 Tim 1:3-7; 4:7; 6:3-5; 6:20-21; 2 Tim 2:14-18; 2 Tim 3:6-9; Tit 1:10-14; Heb 13:9; 1 John 2:18,26; 4:1-5; 2 John

1:7,10-11). Notwithstanding those clear and pointed warnings, heresies and divisions surfaced in the first century Church – while the apostles were living and teaching. Here are some examples.

1. The promotion of circumcision among Gentile churches by Jews who lacked insight (Acts 15:1).
2. Heresies, or divisions, in Corinth (1 Cor 11:18-19).
3. In Corinth some believed there was no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12).
4. In Corinth, some taught “another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4).
5. In Galatia, some left God to embrace “another gospel” (Gal 1:6).
6. In Colossae some attempted to introduce “philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8)
7. In Thessalonica, some had taught distorted doctrine about the coming of the Lord (2 Thess 2:3).
8. James wrote to professing believers that had been led to make friends with the world (James 4:1-4).
9. Jude wrote to believers who were so obtuse, allowing false prophets to creep in among them without them knowing it (Jude 1:4).
10. The glorified Jesus Himself told the church in Ephesus they had left their first love, even though they zealously tested false prophets (Rev 2:4).
11. The glorified Jesus Himself told the church in Pergamos He had something against them because some of their members held to the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitines (Rev 2:11-15).
12. The glorified Jesus Himself told the church in Thyatira He had something against them because they had allowed a false prophetess to seduce His servants into committing fornication, and eating things offered to idols (Rev 2:18-20).
13. The glorified Jesus Himself told the church in Sardis that they were not even alive toward God – they were “dead” (Rev 3:1-4)
14. The glorified Jesus Himself told the church in Laodicea they were “lukewarm,” and He was going to spew them out of His mouth. He said they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:15-18).

Error and falsehood cannot be introduced within the professing church without impacting upon the working of the Lord among men. There are several reasons for this condition.

1. Sin in all of its deceptive forms quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit.
2. Truth is held back by unrighteousness, particularly when it is found among confessing Christians (Rom 1:18).
3. When found among God’s people, sin drives a wedge between men and God, as confirmed in the case of Achan (Josh 7:10-26).

Thus, the spiritual purity of the environment of that initial time can, in part, account for the outstanding things that took place during it. It is easy to concoct terms like “the age of miracles,” etc. to account for the lack of spiritual power. It seems to me that it is more discerning to trace that absence back to a pervading form of godliness that denies the power thereof (2 Tim 3:1-5) – a condition that began before the apostles left the scene. In other words, in my perception, there are spiritual environments in which God is more disposed to do “wonderful works.”

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 33 of 38

THEY BROUGHT THE SICK

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.” (Verses 14-16, Acts 5:12-16)

“INSOMUCH”

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) INSOMUCH . . .” Other versions read, “so that” (NKJV), “to such an extent” (NASB), “as a result,” NIV and “And they even” (BBE). This is a continuation of the statement made in verse twelve: “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.” It is after this that the text contains the parenthetical statement, “(and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women).

The full thought commenced in verse twelve is therefore, “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed EVERY ONE.”

Further, this was a direct answer to the prayer the body of disciples had prayed: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30).

This is nowhere related to a special era or period of time. Instead, it is directly associated with preaching the Word of God with boldness, especially in the face of intimidating threats.

THEY BROUGHT FORTH THE SICK

“ . . . that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches . . .” Other versions read, “they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets” (NASB), “people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats” (NIV), “they even took into the streets people who were ill, and put them on beds” (BBE), “into the broad places to bring forth the ailing, and to lay them upon couches and mats” (YLT), “So

that they [even] kept carrying out the sick into the streets and placing them on couches and sleeping pads” (AMPLIFIED), “people would bring out their sick into the streets and lay them down on stretchers or bed” (PHILLIPS), “ [they were] bringing out the sick and laying [them] on cots and mats along the open streets” (ALT), and “sick people were brought out to the road and placed on cots and mats.”

The text does not say sick people came, although I do not doubt that many such people came in the press – people like lepers (Matt 8:2) and the woman with an issue of blood (Matt 9:20). Here, however, the emphasis is on the sick being “BROUGHT” to the apostles – even as they were often brought to Jesus (Matt 4:24; 8:16; 9:2; Lk 4:40). The fact that the sick were laid on “beds and couches” confirms they were invalids, or in an extremely weakened and hopeless condition. The people had done the same thing when Jesus ministered among them. As it is written, “And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew Him, and ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard He was” (Mk 6:54-55).

This was not an experiment, for it is doubtful that people would put themselves to such an inconvenience for something that was doubtful. The signs and wonders that were being done by the apostles were genuine, and the people knew it. There was no doubt about their reality. Even those who were openly opposing the apostles said of the particular work that caused their opposition to surface, “that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:16).

Many of the professed miracles of our day are viewed with scepticism. However, that was not the case in the book of Acts – and particularly in our text. Yet, the miracles were not the focus, but the preaching of the apostles through which many people were being “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14). When you have preaching, the Gospel, and people being added to the Lord, the introduction of miracles does not produce an admixture. There is not a syllable in Scripture that suggests there would ever come a time when miracles would no longer blend with Gospel preaching and people being “added to the Lord.” To form such a theological view is anything but wise.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 34 of 38

AT LEAST THE SHADOW OF PETER

“Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.” (Verse 15, Acts 5:12-16)

Other versions read, “so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them” (NASB), “might fall on some of them as he passed by” (NIV), “that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them” (RSV), “so that when Peter went by, some of them

might be in his shade” (BBE), “that when Peter came, his shadow at the least, might overshadow any of them, and they might be delivered from their infirmities” (DOUAY), “so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some sick people as he went by” (GWN), “for Peter's shadow to touch them when he came by” (IE), and “[in the hope] that as Peter passed by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them” (AMPLIFIED).

This suggests that we are reading of an extended period during which the apostles were going in and out of the Temple, walking through the streets. It also confirms the leadership of Peter among the apostles, as Paul affirms (Gal 1:18; 2:7-8). Additionally it gives us a commentary on what was involved in Jesus giving the keys of the Kingdom of heaven to Peter (Matt 16:19). That is why Peter is the only one of the twelve that is mentioned in Acts after Acts 12:2.

Luke provides no further explanation for this most remarkable incident. We are not told why the people concluded that even the shadow of Peter's body was sufficient to work a miracle of healing. Further, Luke does not suggest their perception was wrong. The very fact that he records it strongly suggests its possibility, and, to me, there is no doubt it is included in the statement that follows: “and they were healed every one” (Acts 5:16). Perhaps this had happened before – something like those who sought to touch Jesus that they might be healed (Lk 6:19). There was also the woman who reasoned, “If I may but touch His clothes, I shall be whole” (Mk 5:28). Later, a multitude of people “sought Him that they might touch only the hem of His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole” (Matt 14:36). In the book of Acts we read that “God wrought SPECIAL miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:11-12).

Such miracles were by no means a standard way of Divine working, but neither were they a strange way. This kind of miracle is classified as “special,” or “unusual” (NKJV). These were, then, wrought according to the will of God, as affirmed in Hebrews 2:4. There is no need to suppose that the reasoning of those who sought for even the shadow of Peter to pass over the sick was not rewarded with healing. After all, there is such a thing as Divine working that is “according to your faith” (Matt 9:29). I am going to assume that is the case here, for there is no clear reason to do otherwise.

It does not seem reasonable that this is a proper place to insert the record of futile deeds that were driven by misconceptions of what the apostles were doing. Further, the fact that this verse is an extension of the statement that “by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people” (v 12), seems to me to compel the conclusion that the people's quest was favorably seen by the Lord.

There is no need for us to impose modern-day skepticism on the text. Nothing about it suggests that the people had misjudged what was possible, or that this is nothing more than a record of their wishes. This comes under the general heading of “inasmuch” – i.e., it is an extension of apostolic miracles.

Admittedly, this does not reflect the manner in which twentieth Century Christians in America think. So far as I am concerned, that strongly suggests the proclamation of “another Jesus.” I do

not see how the real Jesus can be proclaimed, and people draw conclusions that He no longer does this or that. The true Jesus has been invested with “all power in heaven and earth” (Matt 28:18). He has been “highly” exalted, and has been given as name “that is above every name” (Phil 2:9). He “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Pet 3:22). He is appropriately described as “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15). Like the Father, “He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased” (Psalm 115:3). That is the only proper way to think about the Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing about those affirmations suggest He has or will change how He works. When it comes to the Lord Jesus Christ and how He works, you cannot think in terms of “times and seasons.”

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 35 of 38

A MULTITUDE CAME FROM SURROUNDING CITIES, #1

“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.” (Verse 16, Acts 5:12-16)

This verse also supports the conclusion that people were really healed when Peter’s shadow fell upon them. If this had not been the case, the report of failure would also have spread, and would not have contributed to such a remarkable multitude being brought into Jerusalem. Remember, this is still part of the “insomuch” statement that elaborated on the many signs and wonders being done “by the hands of the apostles.”

MULTITUDES CAME, BRINGING SICK FOLKS

“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits . . .”

Other versions read, “ALSO a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits” (NKJV), “And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits” (NASB), “Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits (NIV), “A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits” (NRSV), “And numbers of people came together from the towns round about Jerusalem, with those who were ill and those who were troubled with unclean spirits” (BBE), “and there were coming together also the people of the cities round about to Jerusalem, bearing ailing persons, and those harassed by unclean spirits” (YLT), “They were coming from all the towns around Jerusalem. They brought their sick and those who were bothered by evil spirits” (IE), “The inhabitants, too, of the towns in the neighborhood of Jerusalem came in crowds, bringing sick persons and some who were harassed by foul spirits” (WEYMOUTH), “The people of the towns near Jerusalem also continued to come in crowds,

bringing their sick and those who were harried by unclean spirits” (MONTGOMERY), “And the people gathered also from the towns and hamlets around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those troubled with foul spirits” (AMPLIFIED), and “In addition a large crowd collected from the cities around Jerusalem, bringing with them their sick and those who were suffering from evil spirits” (PHILLIPS).

I have taken the time to provide a variety of versions of this text, confirming its most remarkable nature. This was not the result of a deliberate outreach to bring people in. IT WAS THE RESPONSE TO THE LEGITIMATE WORKING OF THE LORD. In our time, religious marketing and advertisement is in full swing. Professed specialists instruct people in the professed art of “outreach.” None of that existed in any form in the early church. Such an effort was not required because a very real work of God was taking place – a work in which men were being transformed, and helplessness was being addressed with Divine power. I realize that, with many, this is a very sensitive issue, but it ought not to be so. When there is an absence of power and a lack of godly influence, specialists should NOT be called in. Rather, prayer should be made by righteous people, as in Acts 4:23-37.

Behold how rapidly the people were multiplied! There was no human plan, no contrived strategy, no special advertisement or appeal to the multitudes. The people came together upon the basis of a report of what was taking place – just as they did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:6), and when the lame man was healed at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3:11).

Later the “council” will charge the apostles with FILLING Jerusalem with their doctrine (5:28). Actually, there is no record of them going throughout the city preaching. At this point, we are expressly told that the preaching was going on in the Temple, in Solomon’s Porch, and from house to house. I do not doubt that wherever the apostles went they spoke the Word, but to this point they were generally gathered with believers, with outsiders, or “the rest,” being drawn to them because of their great works and poignant words.

What we are seeing here is Jesus building His church, just as He said He would (Matt 16:18). He was not doing it through the strategies and methodologies of men, but through the Gospel and mighty deeds. The apostles had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine largely by means of reports, and what they had declared being “noised abroad” (Acts 2:6). The uniqueness of their message, and the power that accompanied it, got the attention of the people.

It is most difficult for a person in the grip of spiritual Babylon to think in this manner about the spread of the truth and the gathering of people. Notwithstanding, this should not surprise us. Jesus said if He was “lifted up from the earth,” speaking of His death, He would “draw all men” to Himself (John 12:32). That is, when He had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and returned to heaven, He would compel men from within to come to Him. This would be done through the powerful Gospel, the light of the good works of His people, and the report of “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11; Psa 111:4).

Today there are areas of the world where the persecution of the saints of God is taking place. In places like China, the church has been driven underground, and has gone into hiding. I would never stand in criticism of these good brethren. Notwithstanding, there is no Scriptural example

of those in Christ Jesus taking this kind of action. It was found of old time among some of the prophets (1 Kgs 18:4), which took place under an inferior covenant, where the resources available to those in Christ Jesus were not experienced (Heb 8:6).

The time has come for the church to seek power from God – power to stand in the faith, power to witness, power to stand against the wiles of the devil, and power to overthrow the works of the devil. Preachers and teachers must be challenged to “feed the flock of God” (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), edify the saints (Eph 4:11-16), and culture an environment in which God will work for His own glory. The church is not intended to be a powerless and intimidated segment of a degenerate society.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 36 of 38

A MULTITUDE CAME FROM SURROUNDING CITIES, #2

“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.” (Verse 16, Acts 5:12-16)

Where these results are not present, men must caucus together and figure out a way to reach the people. For example, in my sixty-one years of ministry (as of 2015), I have heard the professing church speaking endlessly about reaching the world for Christ. By way of comparison, midway through the first century, Paul wrote, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Col 1:23). That is impressive language, to say the least.

In the past thirty-five years, we have been hearing a lot about the “10/40” window of the world, which represents the people groups largely unreached by the Gospel. The 10/40 Window is the rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia approximately between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude. The 10/40 Window is often called “The Resistant Belt” and includes the majority of the world's Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. The original 10/40 Window included only countries with at least 50% of their land mass within 10 and 40 degrees north latitude. The revised 10/40 Window includes several additional countries, such as Indonesia, that are close to 10 or 40 degrees north latitude and have high concentrations of unreached peoples. Approximately 4.83 billion individuals residing in an estimated 8,065 distinct people groups are in the revised 10/40 Window. 5,494 (62.5 %) of these people groups are considered unreached and have a population of 2.97 billion (61.5 %) – nearly half of the world’s total population. The 10/40 Window is home to some of the largest unreached people groups in the world such as the Shaikh, Yadava, Turks, Moroccan Arabs, Pashtun, Jat and Burmese.

There are literally hundreds of mission groups plotting ways to carry the Gospel to these areas – and the area remains basically the same. So far as I know, no significant number of people from

these areas are migrating to where the work of God is being reported. Through the Prophets God revealed a time when a significant number of people would come to where the Gospel was being preached (Isa 2:1-3; 11:11-12; 23:23-25; 27:13; Zech 8:20-23; Micah 4:2-3).

But that is the kind of thing that was happening in our text. Already, when the church was launched on the day of Pentecost, there were devout Jews there “from every nation under heaven” (2:5). The growth in the number of disciples is recorded in these words: “there were added unto them about three thousand souls . . . the Lord added daily to the church . . . many of them which heard believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand . . . and believers were the more added to the Lord, both men and women” (2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14). All of this without any human organization, strategy, or initiative! As it is written, “This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23).

Now the people pour into the city of Jerusalem from the surrounding towns. To give an idea of the number of towns surrounding Jerusalem, the following towns were within a five mile radius of the Holy City. (1) Ramah (Josh 18:25), (2) Shiloh (Josh 18:1), (3) Beth-Horon (1 Kgs 9:17), (4) Bethel (Josh 18:13), (5) Ai (Josh 10:1), (6) Michmash (1 Sam 13:2), (7) Gilgal (Josh 15:7), (8) Aijalon (Josh 21:24), (9) Ramah (Josh 18:25), (10) Jericho (Matt 20:29), (11) Anathoth, (Josh 21:18), (12) Zorah (Josh 19:41), (13) Zanoah (Josh 15:34), (14) Jarmuth (Josh 15:35), (15) Bethlehem (Matt 2:1), (16) Makkedah Gedor (Josh 15:41,58), (17) Adullam (Josh 15:35) (18) Keilah (Josh 15:44), (19) Mamre (Gen 14:13), (20) Machpelah (Gen 23:9), (21) Hebron (Josh 21:11), and (22) Engedi (Josh 15:62).

During Christ's ministry, people often came to Him out of many different cities (Matt 14:13; Mk 1:45; 6:33). Now, after He had ascended into heaven and assumed the reins of the Kingdom, the same thing is happening regarding the ministry of His apostles. Also, during Christ's ministry they brought the infirm and “laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment” (Mk 6:56). Here again, the sick were placed in the street.

The point to be seen here is simply that God can so work that people will flock to hear the Word and experience deliverance. THAT WORKING, HOWEVER, REQUIRES BOTH A PURE MESSAGE AND A HOLY PEOPLE. There is no human strategy that can manipulate God into a position where He draws people in the manner seen in this text. This drawing is a result of a heavenly determination, not a human scheme. The mighty work recorded in the book of Acts commenced with one hundred and twenty people – devoted and praying people (Acts 1:15). That is what can happen when God is in the work!

I must confess that I long to behold such marvelous workings among an obviously holy people with spiritual understanding. Already, as a sort of firstfruits drawing, we have seen this kind of drawing in our assembly. Within the United States, it is nothing in size compared to our text. However, on a global scale we are presently ministering to thousands of people. This has not been the result of promotion, or some human initiative. The only thing we have to offer is a revealed and unchanging message that is the appointed catalyst for Divine working and blessing. The impressive number of people we are reaching in Pakistan, India, Burkina-Faso, Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana via the Internet, has all been initiated by spiritual leaders coming to us. By

request, we presently publish a monthly magazine for 4,000 Pakistani ministers and teachers, and another magazine in Kenya for 100 key ministers.

If you deliver the message of the Gospel, and expound it faithfully, no mind is capable of imagining the extent to which God can use your labors.

EVERY ONE WAS HEALED

“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.” (Verse 16, Acts 5:12-16)

“ . . . and they were healed every one.” Other versions read, “and they were all healed” (NKJV), “and they were all being healed” (NASB), “and they were all cured” (NRSV), “and they were all made well” (BBE), “and each person was cured” (GWN), “and they were cured, one and all” (WEYMOUTH).

The Scriptures contain several references to EVERYONE being healed by Jesus. “ . . . and He healed them . . . and healed all that were sick . . . and He healed them all . . . He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them . . . “for there went out of Him virtue, and healed them all” (Matt 4:24; 8:16; 12:15; Luke 4:40; 6:19).

This was not always the case. Sometimes it is said that Jesus healed “many:” “And He healed many that were sick . . . for He had healed many” (Mk 1:34; 3:10). Once it is written that He healed them “that had need of healing” (Lk 9:11). Another time it is written that “as many as touched were made perfectly whole” (Matt 14:36; Mk 6:56). Once the Lord was at the pool of Bethesda where “a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered” were found. Passing over them all, Jesus singled out a solitary man and healed him, commanding the man to pick up his bed and walk (John 5:1-9).

In the wilderness, when Israel was plagued with poisonous snakes, Moses was commanded to make a serpent of brass and hoist it on a pole. Any person who was bitten, “when he beheld the serpent, he lived” (Num 21:9).

The point to be seen here is the extraordinary nature of the times. Jesus did not always heal everyone, which indicates that is not always the will of the Father – for Jesus always did the things that pleased His Father (John 8:29). This was a time when the extraordinary Gospel was being preached by spiritually uncommon men, in an environment of strong faith.

The Lord was working in such a manner as to confirm who He was, and the reality of His great salvation. This does not mean the Lord only worked in such a manner at the beginning of the New Covenant era – the day of salvation. It does mean that God works in such a way when His purpose is advanced by this manner of working.

The aim was not merely to heal sick people. If that was the aim, then they all would have been healed when Jesus walked among them. This is evident because, after Jesus had ascended into heaven, a whole host of sick people were brought in from outlining areas – areas in which Jesus

preached for more than three years. Mind you, this was the area around Jerusalem, where our Lord spent considerable time, especially during the latter part of His ministry. Yet a few weeks after His ascension back into heaven, a multitude of sick people still remained. It should not be difficult to see that there is a higher purpose being fulfilled by the exalted Christ than ensuring that everyone has good health.

Again, this was a fulfillment of the prayer of the church: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:30). Until that time, so far as the record of the apostles’ working is concerned, there had been a single healing – the man at the gate Beautiful (Acts 3:1-11). On Pentecost, the apostles were said to have done “many wonders and signs” (Acts 2:43). These probably included healings, although a point is never made of it. What should be seen here is the sudden quantum leap from very little healing to an abundance of it. Limiting ourselves to the written record, we have one man being healed. A short time later many sick people were brought in from the neighboring cities were all healed – “every one.”

Throughout history there have been periods of spiritual dryness, when men and women of faith longed for the Lord to bare His holy arm, working in an apparent manner. Our text has confirmed that in a very short span of time there can be an outbreak of spiritual life and Divine workings – workings with an impact upon men.

This should establish to our hearts that nothing is too hard for the Lord, His arm is not shortened, and He can suddenly show Himself strong and convincingly. It seems to me that, if we are engaged in the will of the Lord, it is in order to pray for the Lord to work in such a manner. This is in keeping with David’s petition, “O Lord God. . . show Thyself!” (Psa 94:1). With, David, the plea was for recompense upon his enemies. For Moses it was for glory (Ex 33:18). Both sought a revelation of Divine power.

DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson 37 of 38

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DIVINE MANNERS REVEALED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

"And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." (Acts 5:12-16)

Lesson 38 of 38

CONCLUSION

The remarkable incidents that are chronicled in our text took place immediately after a great judgment – the death of Ananias and Sapphira. At the time of that judgment, the Spirit moved Luke to record a number of things.

1. "Great fear came upon all them that heard these things" (5:5).
2. "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (5:11).
3. "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (5:12).
4. "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them" (5:13a).
5. ". . . but the people magnified them" – the apostles in particular, and the believers in general (Acts 5:13b).
6. "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women)" (Acts 5:14).

Apart from the working of the Lord, where could such a mixture of human responses be found? As natural men perceive things, some of these responses are so contradictory they could never occur at the same time – i.e., fearing and magnifying; no man daring to join yet believers being added in great numbers, etc.

The working of the Lord does not fit into the natural order, but is rather imposed upon it! It stands separate and apart from nature, which has no powers to produce such things – things that

liberate the soul, glorify God, and clarify His eternal purpose. There simply is no power resident in the natural order that can produce such marvelous things.

Those who are prone to think in terms of, what is called, positive thought, and of its imagined power, could not navigate well in such a surrounding. No amount of positive thought, no matter how extensive, could have produced the things of which we are reading. The recollection of Ananias and Sapphira being struck dead would keep the people sober, forbidding the outbreak of carnal jubilation or fleshly joy. The signs and wonders wrought by the apostles would remind the people that God's power was the source of blessing as well as judgment, and that it was altogether transcendent to the natural order. Multitudes of believers being added to the Lord would accent the power of the Gospel, and neutralize any inordinate fear brought on by the appearance of supernatural works.

I get the impression that the blessing of the Lord was poured forth because of His good pleasure in the proclamation of the record He had given of His Son. He had exalted the Lord Jesus, and His messengers received the word with joy, quickly proclaiming it. He was also pleased with those who had embraced the Son, and were fleeing to Him for refuge, to lay hold on the hope that was being set before them (Heb 8:18). These were the kind of people that could be multiplied to the glory of God.

Under such conditions, there is no need to try and produce additions. The "truth of the Gospel," when proclaimed, will produce fruit, for it is undergirded by Divine power. As it is written, ". . . the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and BRINGETH FORTH FRUIT, as it doth also in you" (Col 1:5-6). Those who believe the Gospel know this to be true. Such have every right to expect the Lord to work where faith and truth are found.

Jesus once taught His disciples, "the seed is the word of God" (Lk 8:11). That, according to His own word, was a facet of "the mysteries of the kingdom of God" (Lk 8:10). The "word of God" has particular reference to the Good News – "the Gospel of the Kingdom" that Jesus heralded among men (Matt 4:23; Matt 9:35). After His resurrection, when Jesus spent forty days with His disciples, He spoke to them "of the things PERTAINING TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD" (Acts 1:3). When Philip preached in Samaria, he spoke of "things concerning THE KINGDOM OF GOD, and THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST" (Acts 8:12). When Paul preached in Ephesus, for three months he disputed and persuaded men "concerning THE KINGDOM OF GOD" (Acts 19:8). When he left that area he confessed he had gone among them "preaching THE KINGDOM OF GOD" (Acts 20:25). When he was in his own hired house in Rome, held as a prisoner, a day was appointed to him for the people to come into his lodging. It is written that "he expounded and testified THE KINGDOM OF GOD, persuading them CONCERNING JESUS (Acts 28:23). The last verse in the book of Acts tells us that Paul dwelt two years in that house, receiving all who came to him, "preaching" "THE KINGDOM OF GOD, and teaching those things which concern THE LORD JESUS CHRIST" (Acts 28:31).

Should the time come when the church returns to the emphasis that is clearly seen in this record of the activities of the people of God, it may very well be that the Lord will work as He did in the book of Acts. However, as long as the professing church is content to dabble in political,

domestic, and social issues, it will remain fundamentally powerless, for such words are in no sense “the seed of the Kingdom.” The Gospel is not A power, but is THE power of God!

It is not right for men to make a business out of religion, building financial empires, and institutions that bear their own names, and glorify their own persons and objectives. Attempting to sanctify such things as fund-raising, recovery programs, and expertise in organizational matters are nothing more than an exercise in vanity. There is a reason why a record of such efforts is not found in the Word of God. **THEY HAVE NO SPIRITUAL POWER.** The fact that such entities are characterized by spiritual impotence confirms this to be the case. It is ever true that Divine power can only be employed for holy purposes. It is not possible for a holy God to dispatch His power for unholy and unsanctified purposes. Heavenly gifts cannot be used in the fulfillment of purely earthly objectives. The Kingdom of God is one that is strictly governed by the exalted Christ (Isa 9:6-7), so that Divine resources are always matched with Divine purposes – not only for what the King has determined to be done, but also HOW it will be done, as well as WHO does it. Those prerogatives belong exclusively to the exalted Christ, to whom God has given “all power” (Matt 28:18) and judgment (John 5:22).

The book of Acts – in particular the text we have just covered – is a confirmation of this unvarying fact. These realities are being lived out in the text.

– Given O. Blakely