

The Apostles Doctrine Acts 2:42

We come to this passage of Scripture after seeing the formation of the church. We see that three thousand responded in repentant faith to the message of Peter - to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We see they came forward to be baptized. And we said that this is one of the things that true faith does. It separates from that which is false. It separates even from the world and all of its hopes. And you can see this. Here is this large number of individuals on the day of Pentecost that hear these sounds and signs, and hear the preaching, and three thousand souls respond. How do we know that they believe? We know they believe because they separate from the others and they identify with the 120 who were gathered. We are here and not there. We are not people of Judaism but people of Christ. You can see their faith in their separation from what is false and their identification with the body of Christ or the visible church.

So we know the church separates from the world and all other religious systems, but the question now is what does the church do? How does it function, and how does it operate? Does it choose how it functions? Should we have movies and dancing and various kinds of socials? Should we hold Super Bowl parties or whatever? What does the church do when it gathers together? And here we see right from the formation of the church what the church began to do.

It is incredible how the church today wants to mimic the world around with its teaching and also its entertainment. The idea is we get people by becoming more like them, or we attract people by finding out what they want in a church and we offer them that. Hopefully we can see the error in that line of thinking. If we become like the world around us in conduct and teaching, they can get those things from the world, and the church becomes irrelevant at best. No, when you look at these early believers their lives changed, and the church was the most important entity in their lives. They lived, dwelt, fellowshiped and existed in the visible church of Jesus Christ.

And let me ask you: how important is the church of Jesus Christ? How important is the local body of believers? One of the signs we are born again believers is that we want to associate, fellowship and be a part of God's visible body. And it is so different than the current climate that undervalues the meeting of God's people. I met a man at a conference one time who was from New York. He said he loved coming to conferences and he had a great love for God. I asked him about his church. He said that he stopped going to church. I asked why? He said because they are filled with judgmental hypocrites, and that he was better without them. And that is the sentiment of so many. The church holds me back. I have to be free to be myself. And there is a whole swath of individuals that claim they are Christian that exist outside the church and want nothing to do with the church. But listen to what Jesus says in John 13:35, **"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."** Listen also to 1 John 2:9-10, **"Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling."** One of the signs that we are in the faith is we love those who we did not love. We associate are one with a people we used to be distant from or even hate. And we keep loving even when it is tough or costly.

And we also continue with them in a certain way, and you can see that in this passage of Scripture. And I want to begin with what the early believers continued in, and that is the apostles' doctrine. When you hear that what do you think of? How important is the apostles' doctrine to you? And you think this would be an easy question but it is not so easy. And the reason is that doctrine always divides. Jesus even said if you trust in him and who he is this would divide the most precious relationships that exist in the here and now, between father, mother, or siblings or whoever. The teaching of Jesus, who he is and his salvation divides. It unites true believers from those who are false. Many of you have known that division and suffered that divide in your families.

But we realize the apostles doctrine is what is to unite us as believers. But because the truths of Christ are so life altering, and for many are so offensive to our sense of our own goodness, there is a real effort in the church to downplay any doctrine that would be controversial, and just emphasize truths that we all agree on. So let us do away with the doctrine of eternal election, or many disagree with the need of repentance for salvation, or that we trust in Jesus' Lordship, or that certain portions of Scripture might not be inspired or authoritative, or that baptism is that important, or that we disagree on the nature of the Lord's Table, and no one is saved or lost by practicing the Lord's Table so let's just not do it, or gender issues and leadership in the church as far as women pastors, just don't even address the issues - just too divisive! Anything that would divide believers is suddenly downplayed or overlooked. Here, in the first church, at the head of the list of the positive activities that the visible church engaged in was the apostles doctrine. I want us to see a number of observations that will hopefully be valuable and spurn us on to want to know and live and revel in the faith that was once delivered to the saints.

1. First thing we see is there is a new desire. V. 42.

What do you think of this book? In particular, what you think about the New Testament and the mystery of the church of Jesus Christ and its make-up? It is amazing how many people see this as a dusty and irrelevant book that we would be better just forgetting and leaving it alone. But for believers in Christ, the gospels as precious, the epistles are so instructional about our faith and trust in Christ and what he has accomplished. The epistles explain in a fuller way what Jesus has done and our future hope. We are Bible people. If you are a believer in Christ, you have a desire to know the truths - more particular, know the God of our salvation.

And notice what Luke records here about these early and new believers, "**And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.**" The "they" here is the three thousand souls that responded to the message were added to the church. This is the activity that they engaged in. And notice they "devoted themselves," and this describes not just the apostles doctrine but all that is mentioned here in this verse. And devoted has the idea they were all in. They were consumed with knowing and then continuing in this teaching that they were learning. It is present active, so it is not the idea they learned enough or followed enough, but they wanted more and more, and they continued to live in light of what the apostles were teaching them.

Now often we look at this verse and we come to the conclusion that Christianity is just about knowing Christ. And it certainly is nothing less than that. But Christianity is

an experience. We are afraid often to say that because some of the excesses from individuals who only emphasize experience. But it does not matter how much the gospel is preached or how clearly it is taught you must be born again. You must be given new life in Christ in order to believe. And we often say that we are a changed person with new desires and a new nature. But here is the question: how are we different? Others many times claim that they are changed people because of different religions or different philosophies, and they actually do change. But how is Christianity different in this sense of the change that has come over us? How do you know the difference between the true believers and those who have had some other encounter?

And the difference is right here. It is our relationship with the apostles doctrine. It is with our relationship to the Word of God and our desire for this word. We see it right in verse 41, **“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”** Notice what they did. They received the word, and then they acted on the word of God by being baptized. You see it also a little further down in verse 46, **“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.”** Notice day by day, “attending the temple together.” The meaning here is they were meeting to learn the apostles truth of Jesus Christ.

Think of what God had done and how he had changed them. They had no appetite for Jesus before this but now have new life. They have trusted and now desire him. They are like what Peter describes in 1 Peter 2:2-3, **“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”** How do you know you are a new creation in Christ? You have a taste - an appetite that you never had before. You can see it in any given preaching service. There are those who sit under the teaching of the apostles doctrine and you can go forty minutes and it seems like a moment. Is he done already? And then there are others, where a forty minute sermon seems like hours and hours. It is the most useless and wasteful use of time. But they were like new infants. New infants have a desire for their mother's milk. It is instinctive. It is built into their lives and their very nature. And it is the same for those who are born again believers. They wanted to learn and grow.

Here is Christianity in its infancy, and here we see authentic Christianity. I cannot understand anyone claiming to be a follower of Christ who wants only the bare minimum of the apostles doctrine. They wanted more milk and instinctively they knew they needed this for their spiritual life and health. How about you? Are you somehow satisfied with you level of knowledge? You might have a little knowledge that allows you to go on to engage in certain conversations about God, but you couldn't be less interested in reading or studying your Bible, coming out to church there is never a sense of expectancy, or there is never a desire to listen to a sermon or read an article about Christ let alone a book. This is authentic Christianity.

2. The second thing we see about this message is it is so humbling. V.42.

Think about how humbling this whole message of the gospel was, especially when you consider the whole historical situation. The three thousand that separated from their fellow country men had to say they were wrong. They were wrong about

Jesus. Think of it: fifty days early they were crying out, “crucify him, crucify him.” They were wrong about who Jesus is. They believed or discarded Jesus as none other than a fraud. They took great delight in their own wisdom. And you can see among so many today. They poke fun at believers as lacking any brain or comprehension. They discard the Jesus of the Scripture - the Jesus of the apostles.

But suddenly through the ministry of the Spirit they are pricked in the deepest recesses of their souls. They come to see the holiness and the personhood of Christ. They come to see their sin and all its ugliness and what it deserves. I can remember the first time in my life realizing the holiness and glory of God, and realizing how just God would be if he at that moment terminated my life and banished me in hell forever. And it was deeply humbling. I was wrong. I was not good. I was not acceptable before God, but deserving of his wrath. And it was humbling, and it was humbling to realize my only hope was the work and sacrifice of another. I cannot save myself. And yet at the same time, it was so exciting and comforting that he had done it all.

Now, why do I emphasize all of that, and what does that have to do with these early believers continuing in the apostles doctrine? And it is this: If I had been wrong, if you had been wrong about the way of salvation, then what else was I wrong about? And it is incredible how so many of my views and beliefs have been reshaped by the apostles doctrine. But there was even more. I was ignorant about God. I was ignorant about who he is. I didn't know nearly as much as I thought I knew. And I needed to know more. What is this word people are using “justification”? How does that give me security? What is Jesus doing in my life in the here and now? What is sanctification? What had God to do with my suffering? What is heaven like and my great hope of being with Christ? I didn't know there was a resurrection to come. I knew Jesus rose but I thought absent from the body and present with the Lord was the final state.

And here is what happens when one becomes a believer in Christ. They are convicted by their ignorance of the one true God. They are convicted about their wrong assumptions of Jesus and they truly want to learn of him. That is why believers have a constant desire to learn the truths of Scripture. True believers want to understand more fully their salvation and what has happen to me. There is a sense where it felt so natural to come and trust in Christ. But why do I have these new passions? Let me ask you: do your have that hunger and thirst to know Christ? Because it is not just when we come to Christ but all the way through our lives. After all these years of pastoring and preaching and studying and reading, I still feel ignorant, not as ignorant as I once was but there is still so much to learn and revel in about the God of our salvation in this document that God has given us. The Scriptures humble us to know more of Christ.

3. The apostles doctrine also changes our orientation.

Think of who these people were. They were ordinary people. They were not the influential and the powerful, or the mover and shakers of society. But they realized the spiritual peril they were in and how the darkness shrouded their minds and how close they were to eternal torment, and how glorious and wondrous the grace of God is in Jesus Christ. But did they know enough to explain these truths? What if individuals asked them about their faith or the change in their lives, could they explain it. Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15, “**but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope**

that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." We want to be able to explain the gospel with all the ramifications of believing and not believing. New born babes in Christ desire to become mature so that they can help others.

And that is what happens to those who are in Christ. There is a wonderful self-forgetfulness. Before Christ, life was all about us and how we were faring and how others treated us. After Christ comes, it all about Christ and his glory and seeking others to trust and magnify him. And for us even to be a spiritual benefit to those who are in Christ, we must know the apostles doctrine. In them we can give hope and direction to one another as we minister to one another. Again, this new life causes us to love those who are of the household of faith.

And as we close this morning, looking at this first aspect of what characterized the early church it must be apparent that this is something that is very specific and very well defined called the apostles doctrine that the church of Jesus Christ is built upon. I can think of one church just recently that used to be very evangelical this past year celebrated gay pride month. And certainly the world teaches that anyone who would dare to call what the Bible calls sin - sin, is an extremist. And here is the way that many churches accept the philosophy of the world and reject the apostles doctrine. We are told that Christianity is not a creed but a way of life. It is loving your neighbour as we love God. And all of this sounds very noble but they define love and God's love the way they want, and that is a creed. That is doctrine. They even go further: what we have to do is accept the gospels and the Jesus of the gospels, and reject the apostles who twisted so much of what Jesus taught.

But here is what they forget: it was Jesus who chose these men to lay the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ. Listen to what Jesus even promised the disciples in John 16:12-13, **"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."** Jesus has many things to teach them but right now they do not have the capacity to receive it, but when the Spirit comes he will guide you into all truth. Jesus indicates the apostles will receive direct revelation from the Spirit. And this what we have - a fuller explanation of all that the gospels mean and what Jesus has accomplished, and his purpose and even design for the New Testament church. It is the apostles doctrine but ultimately it is God's truth.

If the first century Christians had as central to their faith in Christ, the Word of God - they devoted themselves continually to the apostles doctrine, how about us? Is there a commitment to know this Word and the Saviour of this Word? Christ's church are to be people of the book. Are we people of the book?