

What is the Model Church for Believers Today? – Part 2

Acts 11:19-30

Introduction:

1. There is so much confusion that reigns in Christendom today because there is a peculiar longing to try to make the Pentecostal church of Acts 2-5 the model for churches today. They forget this was a church composed entirely of Jews.
2. Yet, preachers tell us we need to get back to Pentecost and replicate what the Jerusalem church did. Of course, people aren't consistent in their approach to this:
 - Some emphasize the speaking in tongues.
 - Some downplay tongues and choose to emphasize the water baptism.
 - Some are enamored with the great healing ministry.
 - Some will focus on the authority of Peter.
 - Most Baptists have certain things they emphasize, but leave out the tongues, signs, and wonders.
 - Of course, nobody advocates selling all that you have and giving it away. They ignore this or spiritualize it away.
3. But, we learned that the Jerusalem church was operating under kingdom principles in early Acts. It was unique in that Israel was given a glimpse or foretaste of their kingdom, if they would simply trust Christ.
 - But Israel, as a nation, rejected the King - no King, no kingdom.
 - Israel's kingdom program was postponed and the mystery of this dispensation of grace was ushered in and revealed to the apostle Paul. The kingdom program was replaced by the mystery program of grace that we live in today.
4. We saw that because of the change in program, the Pentecostal believers ended up in deep poverty and had to have Paul's Gentile churches bail them out.
5. It is a major doctrinal error to try to go back to Acts 2-5 and model the Gentile church today after the kingdom-based all-Jewish church of Pentecost.
6. So what would be the model church for us today? It would be the church at Antioch. This was an incredible church for many reasons:
 - It was the first Gentile church.
 - It was the apostle Paul's first ministry.
 - It was the first place that saints were given the name "Christians."
 - It is the first great center of Gentile evangelism.
7. What were the godly traits that made this church a model church for us today? Let's look at **Acts 11:19-30** and see.

First, this church was founded upon the preaching of Jesus Christ. vs. 19-21

1. **Acts 11:19-21** is a turning point in church history. Until this time, the good news of Christ had been preached to the Jews only (vs. 19), with the exception of Cornelius in Acts 10.
2. Now, believers began to preach to Grecians. The response was great (vs. 20-21).
 - The word "Grecian" simply means a person from Greece.
 - A Grecian sometimes meant a **Jew** who was a native of Greece and spoke Greek. **Acts 6:1**

- Was this group Grecian Jews or Grecian Gentiles? Most likely it was both, because when we cross-reference **Acts 15:1-2** we know that Gentiles were a part of this church.
3. Notice how this church was founded:
 - They preached the Word of God and the Lord Jesus. vs. 19-20
 - God's hand (power) was upon them as they preached. vs. 21a
 - Many lost people believed the gospel and turned to the Lord. vs. 21b
 4. This is precisely God's plan for a church. Exalt Jesus Christ and teach the Word of God. If a church does not have this as its foundation, it will not please God. It doesn't matter the number of people, the size of the buildings, or how wealthy it may be.
 5. The church at Antioch was one body composed of Jews and Gentiles, focused on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a model for the body of Christ today!

Second, this church possessed godly leadership. vs. 22-25

1. The church at Jerusalem heard about what was happening in Antioch. They knew that they would need leadership, so they dispatched Barnabas. vs. 22
2. Leadership is such a vital part of a local church. According to **Acts 20:28-31**, leaders have the responsibility to:
 - Feed the flock.
 - Oversee the flock.
 - Protect the flock.
3. When we look at verse 24 it is obvious that Barnabas was a very wise choice. Barnabas had spiritual character and integrity.
 - So often this is ignored today. Too often churches look for talent, looks, personality, preaching ability, etc. Churches need to be looking for righteousness, spirituality, and doctrinal soundness in the faith.
 - Not only is leadership needed in the church, but godly leadership is essential. This is why **1 Timothy 3:1-13** and **Titus 1:5-9** are in the Bible.
4. Barnabas taught and exhorted this church. Because he was a man of integrity, people listened. Notice what happened in verse 24. *“Much people (were) added unto the Lord.”*
5. With all these Gentiles coming to Christ, Barnabas knew he needed help. Barnabas had the spiritual wisdom to know that Paul was the right man for the job. vs. 25
6. So Barnabas went to Tarsus and found Paul and brought him to Antioch where Paul would begin his great ministry among the Gentiles. vs. 26
 - Paul wasn't sent here under the authority of the Jerusalem church. Barnabas, of his own accord, went and got Paul. Paul's ministry did not begin out of the Jerusalem church, nor was it under the authority of the Jerusalem church. Galatians 2
 - Paul's apostleship was distinct and separate from the twelve. Isn't it amazing that God went to great lengths to make sure of this?
 - He kept Paul away from Jerusalem (he spent only 15 days there in 17 years) after his salvation and made sure that it was Barnabas (not one of the twelve) that brought Paul to Antioch.

- Paul's apostleship and teaching would not be by man, but by direct revelation of Jesus Christ. **Galatians 1:1, 11-12**
7. Wouldn't you have loved to have been at Antioch as the apostle Paul shared with them his testimony and began to share with them what Christ had revealed to him?

Third, this church emphasized spiritual growth through God's Word. vs. 26

1. Once people are saved they must begin to grow. **1 Peter 2:2**
2. What happens if new believers are not rooted and grounded in the truth of God's Word? Like children, they are easily deceived and led astray by false doctrine. **Ephesians 4:14; Romans 16:17-18; Galatians 1:6-7, 2:4**
3. In verse 26 we learn that Barnabas and Paul gave themselves to instructing the people concerning the things of God. They taught much people for a year.
 - Churches in America need desperately to return to this emphasis of Bible teaching.
 - Today, churches are doing everything **but** teaching the Bible. They are top shelf at entertainment, drama, music, stories, audio/video effects, etc., but not real big on Bible teaching.
 - Even in most Baptist churches, the messages may have slick alliteration with lots of jokes, anecdotes, and stories, but as they used to say on Wendy's commercials, "Where's the Beef?" The messages lack substance and doctrinal soundness.
4. God's plan is for people in a local church to be taught God's Word so that they, in turn, can teach others. **2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 5:12**
5. What happens when the Bible is being taught, rightly divided? People understand God's Word and begin to live out God's Word. All the people of Antioch started calling these people "Christians."
 - The word "Christian" is composed of two parts. We understand the first part - it refers to Jesus Christ. The "ians" part means "a follower." Hence, a Christian is one who has placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ and made a decision to follow Him.
 - This phrase is only used three times in the Bible, and it was coined by the unbelieving Gentiles. They meant it as name of contempt, but it was actually a compliment.
6. What does this tell us? Paul and Barnabas' Bible teaching was having an impact on lives. They were living out their faith and the sound doctrine they were being taught.
 - So many people today who attend church live like undercover CIA Christians during the week. Their words and actions give no hint that they are followers of Christ.
7. The church at Antioch was such a model church. God's Word was being taught and lives were being changed and transformed into Christ's likeness. They were obviously impacting their community in a great way.

Fourth, this church manifested the gracious and giving heart of Christ.

1. During the book of Acts, the gift of prophet was still operative and necessary. God's Word in the New Testament was just beginning to be given and written down.
2. Some prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem with a warning. They declared that a great worldwide famine was approaching.
 - History confirms that this famine occurred just as Agabus predicted.
3. As we talked about in our previous lesson, a famine would affect the Jerusalem church more than anybody because they had sold everything they owned in anticipation that the kingdom was right around the corner.
4. The believers at Antioch knew this and immediately kicked into action. vs. 29
 - There was no hesitation. They stood ready and willing to give. This is the Spirit of Christ.
5. Notice a few things about their giving:
 - **Everyone was involved in giving.** It wasn't just a few wealthy people. Everybody could help to some extent.
 - **Everyone gave according to their ability.** God doesn't expect us all to give the same amount. We give according to our ability.
 - **Everyone was determined to give.** I love this. They were serious about it. It was something they wanted to do.
 - **Everyone followed through on their commitment and gave.** vs. 30 - They weren't all talk.
6. What was the key to this church's giving heart? Verse 23 tells us that when Barnabas came to this church he saw the grace of God.
7. This was a church that was thankful and appreciative of God's amazing grace and they demonstrated it. Therefore giving was a very natural and instinctive thing to do.
8. What a model church! When believers truly understand the grace of God and truly appreciate it, giving is not an issue. Giving is as natural as water flowing downstream.
9. The water of God's grace flows out of you and you can't help but give. The gracious and giving heart of Christ flows through you.

In Conclusion:

1. Those that want to run back to Pentecost to try to find the model church make a grave mistake. No church has ever replicated the Pentecostal church in early acts.
 - No church has ever had its leaders be able to communicate with numerous nationalities and languages without having learned their languages.
 - No church has ever had its members sell everything they own, give it away, and yet have God miraculously provide.
 - No church has ever had its leaders go into the streets of their city and heal people with their shadows.
 - No church is having people struck dead on the spot for lying to the preacher.
 - Churches today aren't meeting in the temple every day of the week.
 - Believers today don't have to repent of crucifying Christ and get water baptized in order to receive the Holy Spirit.

2. Instead of the cry being "Back to Pentecost" it should be "Back to Antioch."
 - It was a church composed of Jews and Gentiles, brought together in one body that manifested the grace of Jesus Christ as they learned and grew in God's Word.