

The Early Church

A Study in Acts - 13 weeks

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The Early Church

This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

Imagine hearing Jesus say, "I am looking for a Church!" Could it be, the Church Jesus is looking for - would be found at the church we attend?

Jesus' desire has always been to be about the Heavenly Father's business. Do you find yourself from time to time asking God questions such as; "What do you want me to do now?" - "What do you want us as a body to do now?" - or "What is your heart today Lord?" If so, this is His reply to the person who is asking these questions: "I am looking for a Church".

The heart of Jesus is to find "that Church" - that is to be the Bride of Christ. "That Church" which Jesus Christ Himself founded. She seems to be lost today! If the Lord Jesus were to return today - where could He find His Bride?

When we have a missing person - it is our custom to circulate a description, and perhaps some information as to where they were last seen. Take a few minutes and consider the description of that Church – the one God is looking for - and where she was last seen.

She was last seen for sure in the First Century A.D., in the city of Jerusalem and the country- side surrounding the city. And now for the description:

Read Acts 2:42-47 and make notes:

When she was born, she devoted herself to the Apostle's teaching, - she devoted herself to fellowship, - she devoted herself to the breaking of bread, - and she devoted herself to prayer. Do you see that Church today?

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We hear many claiming to be that Church! But they appear to be impostors - for they ARE NOT devoted to the Apostle's teaching. Many of those claiming to be her don't even like to fellowship with her sisters - and certainly not devoted to fellowship. Many of these impostors have no desire to break bread with her sisters. And Oh, where is that Church devoted to prayer?

The Church the Lord is looking for - began with everyone being filled with awe - as many signs and wonders were done by the Apostles. Everyday, she continued to meet together in the Temple courts. She continued praising God and the Lord added to her number daily.

Many who are claiming to be her today don't even want to meet together one or two days a week – we can be sure that is not her! Now for more of her description:

Read Acts 4:32-33 and make notes:

Oh, I believe you would like her - if only you could meet her. You see, all of her members were of one heart and mind. She shared everything with all her parts. There was great power as she continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Many who claim to be her today do not have power - and many of them are so very slow to testify - if they admit to the resurrection of Jesus at all. That tells us, these are impostors. Now for a description of how she began to grow and develop:

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Read Acts 6:5-8 and make notes:

The one we are looking for, grew and added some helpers to the staff – deacons. Some men were chosen in addition to the Apostles to help with the physical aspects of the ministry. Please make a note of the names: Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. These men were not Apostles, but they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

When she was younger, it seemed primarily the Apostles did all the ministry, and miracles - then as she grew older and matured a little - there were some who were not Apostles who allowed the Holy Spirit to work through them. Many of those claiming to be her today, - say only the Apostles did miracles - this tells us the ones say this are not her! Now for more information on this church Jesus is looking for:

Read Acts 8:4-7 and make notes:

Philip goes down to Samaria and preaches and works miracles and signs and wonders. Remember, he is not an apostle – and the Holy Spirit is working through him, in a Gentile congregation. Some of those who claim to be her, - say only the Apostles and those few who they laid their hands on performed miracles. This is enough to let us know that none of these are her.

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Read Acts 9:1-17 and make notes:

Saul who was out to destroy the Bride of Christ was struck blind. Ananias placed his hands on Saul and Saul was miraculously healed – and then he was with the Holy Spirit. Ananias was not an Apostle and he was not one of those whom the Apostles laid hands on. Some of these who claim to be her, say only the Apostles or those few whom they laid hands on were able to prophesy – We know that none of these are her.

Read Acts 11:19-29 and make notes:

We find a man named Barnabas who was filled with the Holy Spirit - he was not an Apostle and he was not one of those seven Deacons they laid hands on. We also find a Prophet named Agabus who came to Antioch to help the ministry of Barnabas. Agabus was not an Apostle and he was not one of those seven Deacons.

In Acts 13:1, we find a few others named as being prophets who are not Apostles or one of the seven - Simeon, Lucius, Manaen. In Acts 15:32, we find Judas and Silas named as Prophets - Not Apostles - Not Deacons! In Acts 16:1, we find a man that is half Jew and half Greek who becomes a believer then a minister. His name is Timothy.

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As we continue to look at the Book of Acts, we find others who are not Apostles or deacons - and they became filled with the Holy Spirit - and they began to minister one to another. There were those like Barnabas who became a believer - then was perhaps the first to sell some property and give the money to the ministry. He later became one of the teachers and elders with "that Church" - God is looking for.

Then there were others who became believers, like Aquila and Priscilla - who were tent makers - they became filled with the Holy Spirit and began to take in ministers and to show them the way more adequately - so that these ministers could minister more effectively. You see, the Church the Lord is looking for - finally grew and matured to a point where not only the Apostles ministered but every member ministered to some degree.

She was a Church where each member was given a measure of faith - each member received some spiritual gift - each member prayed for one another - each member encouraged one another - each member strengthened one another - each member rejoiced with one another. The Church the Lord is looking for had come to a place - if one member fell, then the other members surrounded that member and restored them.

Many of these claiming to be her today destroy those members who fall. Many of these claiming to be her today cut off those who are weak. This lets us know that none of these are her. It has been some time now since she has been seen - it is likely she has grown some since then - it is possible she has changed some - but looking at the growth pattern in her early years - we can get a pretty good picture of "WHAT SHE WOULD LOOK LIKE TODAY" !

Have you seen the Church the Lord is looking for?

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We DO BELIEVE she is still alive – somewhere. And Oh yes, there have been many reported sightings of her through the years - in almost every generation since that first century A.D. - there have been reports of her. Even right here in this country there have been many reported sightings. People get so excited when they are told she was here.

Then they begin to search for her - and sure enough - there are many groups of people - who claim to be her - But when we look at them, we often see impostors:

We see a group that is not devoted to prayer - they only pray when there is trouble.

We see others who are not devoted to meeting together - they only come to meetings when all hell breaks loose in their little family unit.

We see some who are not devoted to fellowship - they will only come if they are somehow being recognized.

We see some who are filled with people - but no one is ministering to their neighbor or brother or sister - they seem content to come in and set on their "Blessed Assurance" - and let the "professional minister" do all the ministering.

We see some who are devoted to building their earthly kingdom - instead of the kingdom of God.

We see some who are devoted to building their house before serving God.

We see some who are devoted to building their career before serving God.

We see many who want others to minister to them - but never go out of their way to minister to others who are hurting.

We see those who strain to turn loose of the smallest of their finances - they would never consider selling their valuable property to put needed finances into the local church.

We see so many who are complaining - but never strengthening or building up..

"That Church" does seem to be lost today - But we can rest assured that she is not dead! With so many claiming to be her - and yet having none of the characteristics we know she must have - it makes us think she may be dead - or else why can't we find her?

Jesus is coming back to get His Bride. She will be like the one He formed and began in that first century A.D. She isn't going to look like the ones we see who claim to be her.

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Even if she is dead - then our Lord Jesus who is the Resurrection - will raise her from the dead - clean her up - make her spotless and pure - and will take her unto Himself for ever and ever.

Can we find those who will surrender - those who are willing to be raised from the dead practices of religion those who are willing to give up all the mask and pretending - where is the one who will allow God to make them into the Bride that is fitting and proper for Jesus? Maybe she is here - maybe she has just forgotten who she is - maybe she has forgotten how she is supposed to act!

Has "the Church" really become blind that she has no vision today? Has "the Church" really become lame that she can no longer go forth? Has "the Church" really become impotent that she can no longer reproduce? Has "the Church" really become so senile that she doesn't remember her upbringing the way it really was? I don't think so!

She is alive, and she IS the kind of church she started out as - only bigger and stronger - if not then she is dead! The call is for each living cell to return to their place in the Body of Christ - and perform their little part - so the Bride of Christ can make Herself ready!

Some need to come and re-join the Body of Christ. Some need to come and do some earnest interceding for others. And Just maybe we need a few more today, who will go forth with the "spirit of Elijah":

Read Luke 1:17 and make notes:

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If so, maybe we will be able to find “that Church” who is:

Devoted to the Apostle's Teaching

Devoted to Fellowship

Devoted to Breaking Bread Together

Devoted to Prayer

and Continuing to Praise God!

This will result in Wonders – Miraculous Signs - and it will result in The Lord (not us) adding to our number daily!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

As we look at the Early Church - there are several things God wants us to become aware of. Things, even if we have known them before - we need to be refreshed - because of what God has in mind for us.

Let's review a list of some of the miracles Jesus performed before He died on the cross for us. Try to imagine yourself being there – living in those days and seeing some of these things happen. Place a “check-mark” next to the ones you think might have excited you the most.

Miracles:

Turned Water into wine

Healed the Nobleman's son

Large catch of fishes

Freed of the Demoniac in the Synagogue

Healed Peter's Mother-in-law

Healed a leper

Healed a Paralytic

Healed a Cripple at Bethesda

Healed a withered hand

Healed Centurion's servant

Raised the widow's dead son to life

Calmed a storm

Freed of the Demoniac at Gadara

Healed a woman in Samaria

Raised Jarius' daughter from the dead

(cont'd)

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Healed two blind men

Cast out a dumb spirit

Fed 5000 with only enough for one

Walked on water

Healed the daughter of a Syrophenician woman

Healed a deaf man who also had a speech impediment

Fed 4000 with only enough for two

Healed another blind man

Delivered an epileptic boy

Money in a fish' mouth

Healed a man born blind

Cast out a blind and dumb spirit

Healed another woman

Healed a man with dropsy

Raised Lazarus from the dead

Cleansed ten lepers

Healed Bartimeus

Caused a Fig tree to wither immediately

Another large catch of fish

This is a pretty impressive list of miracles!

And the Book of John clearly tells us every miracle Jesus performed was not recorded. But, if you were alive back then and had only seen these 34 miracles - how could you not believe? How could you not want to follow Jesus ?

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It just stands to reason - Jesus had performed enough miracles - Jesus had performed sufficiently impressive miracles - that anyone and everyone would believe and follow and obey Him.

Read Acts 1:1-3 and make notes:

Let's look briefly at what some of these "convincing proofs" were - that Jesus gave during the 40 days after His resurrection and before His ascension - remember - Jesus had already performed these 34 miracles on the list we read on the previous page:

Read Matthew 27:50-51 and make notes:

Jesus is on the cross. The curtain being torn in this manner - took a miracle and it should have been enough to have attracted the attention of someone! Now for more "convincing proofs":

Read Matthew 27:52-53 and make notes:

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When people, who have been dead for a long time, start coming out of the tombs - ALIVE - and they come into the Holy city Jerusalem to visit with "MANY" people- this sure enough ought to convince a few! Would you want to argue with someone who had come back to life after several years of being dead? Let's look at another “convincing proof”:

Read Matthew 27:54 and make notes:

Well, there is a few more believers! He surely must be the Son of God! But now He is dead. It is over! The guards saw Him die. His mother saw Him die. His Disciples saw Him die. All the others gathered there saw Him die.

Praise God, it isn't over yet. Three days later!

Read the following text and make notes:

Mark 16:9

John 20:19

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Mark 16: 14

John 20:24

John 20:26

Mark 16:12

Luke 24:13

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Look at the account Paul recorded of Jesus appearing after His resurrection:

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 and make notes:

WOW! Jesus performed, who knows how many, miracles while He was alive and moving among the people. Jesus performed impressive miracles among the people. When Jesus died, He gave forth further proof that He was the Son of God, by releasing many of the Godly people who had already died in days gone by. He even allowed them to come into Jerusalem to give irrefutable proof of who He is.

Then after He arose from the dead Himself - He appeared on several occasions to one, or two, or even groups of His followers - With all these repeated appearances of Jesus, there should no longer be any question as to whether it is real (convincing proofs).

Back to the account in Acts:

Read Acts 1:4-8 and make notes:

Now, right after He said this, Jesus ascended into heaven before their eyes:

Read Acts 1:8-15 and make notes:

WAIT A MINUTE! - Only 120? - Where are all the others?

In Matthew 14:21, we are told Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 men “besides women and children”. Many Bible scholars believe the total number of people fed that day could have easily been 15,000 if the number of women and children are to be added to the 5,000 men.

So, at least one time Jesus was ministering to crowds running 15,000 people. And now it is down to 120? That is only 8/10 of 1% of the size of the group of followers that He once had. (0.008% is noticeably less than 1%)

After all those miracles - how could they turn away? What about that 15,000? They were all fed miraculously. They saw with their own eyes - Jesus turned enough food for only one person into enough for all of them and there was a great amount left over. They saw this - how could they turn away?

What about the 500 "brothers" that Jesus appeared to after His resurrection? "Brothers" tells us these were believers - part of "the family" - These guys actually saw the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes - and heard Him speak to them with His own voice - How could they turn away? But, where are they just a very short time later? (a few days latter?)

These few verses testify that only 120 were still committed - just 50 days after Jesus died on the cross. These few verses get so little pulpit (or teaching) time. These few verses have something to say to the Church today!

Have you ever personally seen a local church grow and flourish – and literally spill over because of the Spiritual revival going on within it? Then in a few short years, there is such a small number of people attending - many of their programs are stopped because they don't have enough people to operate them - it seems hardly anyone comes any more to their services.

Go back 100 years in history and find the most active churches and those that had the greatest attendance in America. How are they doing today?

Many of them have just a small number in attendance of what they once were. There are many local churches that have known great crowds in attendance - and now have fallen off to a small number. We don't even have to go back 100 years to see examples.

There are those who have noticed this pattern and have declared this is just the normal course of events - much like a flower that sprouts, blooms, and then withers. They tell us we should enjoy the move while it's there but when the crowds die back, we should move on because that means the Spirit has moved on also.

Those who are making this declaration are inconsistent. The conclusion they have drawn does not follow the analogy they have used.

The analogy of the flower is a great start in understanding this phenomenon. The flower grows through several stages - and when all the conditions are right, as for as soil, moisture, nutrients, temperature; and the flower is at the right age – it blooms.

When the bloom has stayed it's allotted time and begins to wither - do we uproot the plant and throw it upon the compost pile? It appears that some do. Some people purchase pretty little flowers that are already blooming, or they are budding, and they will take them home and enjoy the bloom. When the bloom is gone they will throw it out and will at some later time get another.

Some people do this with local congregations, concerning the bloom of the Spirit. This is not God's intention, desire, or plan.

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To follow the flower analogy, when the bloom withers and drops off - this is the time to begin cultivating, pruning, and caring for the plant in anticipation of it blooming again, - and then later on blooming again, then later on - still again.

These few verses we have read in the early part of the Book of Acts - are written here to encourage us - so that we will not “throw out the flower when the blooms drop off.”

It doesn't matter that the followers of Jesus grew and grew and grew in number - until at times He could hardly move about because of the great number! It doesn't matter that Jesus did so great and so many miracles! It also doesn't matter that they dwindled away until there were less than 1% of them left. It only mattered that the ones who were there - were “committed” and were in unity with one another.

The very idea of saying, “it doesn't matter that all those people fell out and stopped following Jesus” - can truly upset some Believers. Think about this for a minute or two.

The Holy Spirit was upon Jesus in power and might. The Holy Spirit was able to minister through Jesus whether there was one person before him or there were 15,000 people before him.

When it came to Jesus doing the works of the Heavenly Father, it didn't matter whether there was one or a great multitude. When it came to Jesus doing the ministry work, it didn't matter whether He was in the Temple or was in the wilderness.

Alone, or in the multitude, - Jesus was faithful to the ministry of God, the Father. Inside nice facilities, inside simple homes, or in the fields, Jesus was faithful to His calling. It didn't matter.

Now, the Church. If God looked at the Church the way we often do, He would never have poured forth the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. If Jesus looked at us the way we often times do, He would have probably told the Heavenly Father, "Don't bother sending the Holy Spirit, they're all about gone, there's less than 1% of them left."

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Praise be to the Father, and thanks be to Jesus! Jesus didn't look at numbers when He was ministering in His flesh body - and He didn't look at numbers when He ministered in His Glorified body.

When the believers, even the small remnant that was left, finally came together in unity and oneness of heart and mind - and with an attitude of "let me be used" - God poured out His Holy Spirit upon them and they were never the same again.

There are a number of people who say, "The Bible says, don't despise small beginnings"! The Bible doesn't say this! But the concept is a trustworthy saying.

All through the Old Testament, we see - God often used the small number of people to conquer the greater number. God often used the smallest person from the smallest tribe to accomplish some of His greatest task. God often used the smallest of value to bring about the greatest of value.

This characteristic of God did not change in the New Testament. There were a great number of Trained, Educated, Practicing priest in Jesus' day. The Glory of God was manifested among the poor, sickly, the outcast, the unclean, the adulterous, the humble. When it came time to empower the Church - it was just fine with God that there was such a small number left - because they were sincere.

Too often today in the local Churches - we seem to have lost sight of the principle Jesus taught concerning the number that will enter into Heaven with Him:

Read Matthew 7:13-14 and make notes:

At one time when the Disciples complained to Jesus because they were unable to heal a small boy and it seemed so easy for Him - they asked why they could not do it. In Matthew 17:20, we read that Jesus told the disciples that they would have been able to do this, "if you have faith as small as a mustard seed."

It appears they didn't even have the faith of a mustard seed at that time. Jesus said that if they had at least that much, it would have been enough. At another time when the Disciples found themselves to be a little short in the faith department (Luke 17:5-6) they asked Jesus to "increase our faith." Jesus was fairly quick to respond, "You don't need great amounts of faith - I work just fine through the small faith."

There was a time when Jesus was watching people place their offerings before the altar in the Temple. Some, who were very rich, had come and placed significant offerings before the altar. Mark 12:42-43) tells us a widow put in two "very small copper coins worth only a fraction of a penny." Take note of what Jesus said about her offering. Jesus wasn't then and isn't today moved by the large - He works just fine through the small.

Look at Luke 19:16-17. In the parable of the servants who had each been given some money to invest. Jesus congratulated the servant who had been faithful with the "very small matter" and rewarded him by putting him in charge of ten cities!

Do you think this is a "word for the Church today?" God rewards those who are faithful in the "very small matters" ?

These Scriptures and the text in the Book of Acts have a message for us today. We must not allow the distorted view of Satan, or of this world, to get us discouraged because we are not filling up all the chairs at this time.

Instead, let us allow these Scriptures to reassure us that even though we may appear to be a small remnant of what once appeared to be- If we are willing - God has already proven His willingness - to pour forth His Holy Spirit upon His congregation in Power and in Might.

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Do we want to see God move in this congregation in a mighty way? Do we want to see the Glory of God manifested here in our area? Are we willing to get our eyes off of what the flesh can and does see - and begin focusing our Spiritual eyes upon what God can and is doing?

What happened that day among the small group of believers has been repeated over and over throughout the centuries. So what - if the majority fall away and continue to chase after first one thing then another - SO WHAT!

Where people gather in Jesus name -
sincere in heart -
committed to follow Him -
no matter how few in number -
no matter how humble of circumstances -
God will pour forth His Holy Spirit upon them - and they will move in the Power of His
Might!

How about me and you?

If we can not move in the Power of the Holy Spirit - when there is a small number of us - then we could not do so if there were a large number of us. If we can not move in the Gift of the Holy Spirit, that God has given us in a small group - even in a group of one - then we can not move in our Gift of the Holy Spirit in the large crowd! If we are waiting for the "big crowd" for our chance to "minister"- then we might as well go home and park it. For God rewards those who are faithful in the very small matters.

How about you and me?

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Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Have you ever had to make a decision – then found out later that it was NOT a good decision? After the Disciples were privileged to see Jesus ascend into heaven, they returned to Jerusalem.

Read Acts 1:12 and Acts 1:15 and make notes:

Peter told of Judas having betrayed Jesus. Peter can obviously hear from God. He referenced the “Scripture” as having to be fulfilled. Do you think Peter was “hearing from God” at this time?

Read Acts 1:21-26 and make notes:

Peter addressed those assembled and pointed out the need to replace Judas who had killed himself. He suggested the replacement should be someone – who had been with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry – from Jesus' baptism through to His ascension.

Two men were nominated – Joseph Barsabbas (called Justus) and Matthias. Peter then leads the group in the first recorded group prayer meeting in the Early Church.

Early Church - 03 - Casting Lots

At first, it appears they followed the lead of the Old Testament practice – and they cast lots to see who it was to be. Originally, the lots were small pieces of stone with either numbers or words upon them. Later, other things such as wood and clay were also used for the lots – in addition to stone.

Read Proverbs 16:33 and make notes:

It was believed by the people of the Old Testament era - that God controlled how everything in this world turned out. So when they would cast lots, they reasoned that it was a way of allowing God to make a choice for them.

The casting of lots usually consisted of placing the small objects into a jar or small pot and then shaking the vessel until one of the objects fell out. In many situations during the years of the Old Testament events, - the Israelites would use the Urim and the Thummim to determine what God wanted them to do.

It is believed by many scholars - the Urim and the Thummim were two small pieces of stone that were kept in the pocket of the Ephod worn by the High Priest. These two special pieces of stone represented "yes" and "no".

When they needed a decision as to whether to go out to war or not to go to war; - they would have the High Priest place the Urim and the Thummim into a jar and shake it until one would fall out. They accepted this as God's answer and would usually act accordingly.

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They used this method to determine which tribe it would be – from which they would select their first king. Then the family was selected by lot - and finally the person within that family. They used this method to determine who had sinned and had cost Israel defeat at Ai.

Remember what was stated above? At first glance it appears this is what the Early Church tried to do. There is a noticeable – and significant – difference here in the New Testament!

In all of the Israelite Old Testament history, - they would cast lots to narrow down the field from the total of the people. Then gradually come down to the one.

Here, in the New Testament, we find the Disciples not using the age old practice among the Jews, but using a system that was used by the Romans -Gentiles. It was the Roman practice to nominate two people from among a group and then to cast lots.

If you believe God would direct the results of the casting of lots - then the Israelite method would allow God to make the choice more clearly than the Roman method. The Israelite method certainly took longer.

In the Roman method, man made the decision as to how to narrow down the field. Then God was allowed the opportunity to choose between what man made available to God.

In the Early Church situation - these men to whom Jesus was entrusting the very foundation of Church started out making their very first decision in the flesh.

The group put forward their choice of two men. Human selection was involved right from the start. Matthias was chosen from the cast lots.

It is also noteworthy that this whole process took place BEFORE the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There is no recorded incident of casting lots after the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. That is after Pentecost.

Early Church - 03 - Casting Lots

We never hear of Matthias after this either. There are some traditions concerning Matthias, but nothing in the New Testament of where he went or what he did.

It was only natural that these Jewish men, the disciples, would desire to refill this vacancy created by Judas' suicide. It was only natural. They were still thinking in the Old Testament, Pre-Church, way of thinking - which is partially "in the flesh".

If they had just "waited in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit had come upon them." If they could have put aside the "natural" reactions, desires, tendencies, and "natural" wisdom of man for just a little while - ten days!

God was about to show them a better way. The DIRECT inspiration and leading of the Holy Spirit. We can't help but wonder – if they had only waited – would God have allowed them to share in the conversion of Saul – and his becoming the Divinely ordained Apostle? If they had only waited upon the Lord!

Maybe it was because they went ahead in the wisdom of man and made their own choice – but whatever the reason - God left the eleven Chosen Apostles completely out of the process of Saul being converted, healed, anointed, and commissioned to be God's Apostle to the Gentiles.

If we look in Galatians 1:13 and through the end of chapter, - we find Paul didn't even go to the Apostles right away after his conversion. Instead, he went from Damascus into Arabia and preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ there, and then returned to Damascus. Only after 3 years of ministering in the Power of the Holy Spirit - did Paul go up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter specifically.

The Church is some 2000 years old now - and so many of us are still making our choices in the power and wisdom of the flesh - more so than by the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Early Church - 03 - Casting Lots

Have you ever been in a local congregation when they were in the process of finding a new Pastor? First there is usually a committee to establish the required qualifications. Then after the minimum acceptable qualifications are chiseled in stone - they have a committee to begin the selection process.

In the average church today, God is not usually afforded as much of an opportunity as was given by the eleven Apostles that day. At least they cast lots after they nominated two. Today's church not only nominates with the wisdom of the crowd - they also vote with the wisdom of the crowd! Perhaps because there is more fear over what the “wrong person” might do than there is a desire to find the person chosen by the Holy Spirit – a great deal of prayer does take place.

And it is pretty much the same when it comes to selecting other ministers within most local churches today. Have you ever had the opportunity to listen to the conversation that takes place when “the committee” is involved in making a choice for some teacher, or leader within the local church?

They might talk about how much that person gives in the offering - they might discuss how often that person attends the services - they might discuss personal appearance - and hardly ever do you hear anyone say what they believe God has said - or is saying - regarding that person.

And consider the people who go out from the congregation? Aren't most of the decisions and choices that are made based primarily upon what "we think" as the crowd?

Too many local congregations, are being led more by the wisdom of man than by the Divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Think for a few minutes – can you think of a local church who denied themselves the Divinely ordained person that God had prepared and sent to them? It happens regarding pastors, evangelist, prophets, elders, deacons, and just about every other ministry position within a local church. If you can think of one you have been able to witness – did you also notice that local church struggled along eating “dry bread and water” - spiritually speaking?

Early Church - 03 - Casting Lots

Church - listen up - Man's ways are not God's ways! Most of the time - Man's choices simply are not God's choice!

The Church of 120 started out by making their first decision mostly in the wisdom of man. But at least they stopped doing that when the Power of the Holy Spirit began to work in their lives. Why have we reverted back to making the decisions in the wisdom of man?

Many believers today have been Baptized in the Holy Spirit. We have available to us the Wisdom of the Holy Spirit - to help us in every decision that we make. We have available to us, the Power of the Holy Spirit - to make the right decision in every area of our life. God has been saying to His people all along - don't make the decisions of your everyday life in your own power or wisdom - listen to and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit .

Certainly in those things concerning the Church, Don't make decisions in your own wisdom and power - Listen to and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. God's choices for us just might not always come in the package we would choose. We should be more concerned with what is God's choice than "do I like the package."

How many congregations will "elect" someone to fill a certain number of positions - because they have always had those positions and somebody's got to fill each one?

That is Pre-Holy Spirit thinking - and it is defective. Just like the eleven Apostles - before the Holy Spirit was poured forth upon them.

God's way is that He will provide the "Minister" - He will select, train, prepare, and send. If God doesn't send the person whom He has selected and prepared - or if God does not raise up one from our group and anoint them - then we simply don't need to "elect" someone just so the vacancy will be filled. It is better to have a vacancy - than it is to have someone in position that is there due only to the wisdom of man.

Please be aware of this - God did not even allow the 120 to witness the preparation of Paul to be the next Apostle - let alone be a part of the process.

Early Church - 03 - Casting Lots

Church, are we listening at this point? If we choose to make our decisions with our own strength and wisdom - if we decide what we need in the way of "positions and offices" - then we may just find ourselves being left out of what God is doing in the preparing of Ministers for the Kingdom - we may find ourselves being denied the glorious privilege of even witnessing God's selection and preparation of the same.

This is also true on a personal level. Individuals do the same thing that congregations do. We give God two or three doors – and then declare our commitment to go through the one God opens!

We establish the minimum qualifications that we will listen to. There are those individuals that will not allow someone to teach them if they don't have more education or more years experience than they do.

Oddly enough, some people even establish a maximum qualification that they will listen to. There are those individuals that will not allow someone to teach them if they do have more than a certain amount of education or training.

And what about the ways in which local churches go about a “building project”? No need to elaborate on that!

This word is to the local Church and it is also to the individual. It is very important that we stop making our choices based upon our wisdom, reason, qualifications. God's people should make our decisions by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

What about us - as individuals?

What about those decisions we have been making? Just whose wisdom have yew been calling upon - whose wisdom have we been using in making those decisions - about our job - about our family - about our purchases - about all of our "so-called" private life?

Have we been looking to God's Wisdom - or Man's Wisdom? And whose wisdom will we seek to follow in the future?

Early Church - 03 - Casting Lots

List here some of the decisions you made using man's wisdom and some where you used God's wisdom. Reflect for a few minutes on the outcome of each.

There is so much that God wants to do among His people today - and we are cutting Him off because we insist on deciding for ourselves what we need - and this forces God to work outside of us and without us.

Please do not forget - even though the Eleven Disciples that had been selected by Jesus to become Apostles were blessed and Anointed - because they did not allow God to direct - and made a decision based on fleshly wisdom - they were denied the blessing to be a part of God's selecting the next Apostle. They didn't even get to watch or observe - let alone participate!

If we are honest, most of us will admit to having been guilty of making decisions with our wisdom. Let's allow ourselves to be encouraged by the Church of 120. They stopped making that mistake after the Holy Spirit was poured forth upon them. We too can stop this practice and begin to make our decisions - all of them - in the Inspiration and Power of the Holy Spirit of the Living God.

Early Church - 03 - Casting Lots

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the account of the early Church in the book of Acts – we find:

One - God wants us to be faithful in the very small matters and to stay together;
and Two - God wants us to seek His direction in everything before we begin.

Read Acts 2:1-4 and make notes:

In Leviticus 23:15-16 and in Deuteronomy 16:9-12, we find that Pentecost is to be celebrated "the day after the seventh Sabbath", which would be the 50th day, after Passover. On the first Sunday after Passover, the 1st sheaf of barley that was harvested was presented as an offering. This day in which the 1st barley sheaf is offered was known as the "day of the first fruits." (Leviticus 23:17-22, Numbers 28:26-31, Exodus 23:16)

This period of seven weeks, from the "day of the first fruits until the seventh Sabbath, - was also known as the Feast of Weeks for it was period of seven weeks of barley and wheat harvesting. (Exodus 34:22 and Deuteronomy 16:10)

In later years, and long before Jesus was born, many of the Jews came to recognize this also as the anniversary of the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai. In Exodus 19:1, we are told they arrived in the "wilderness of Sinai" on the 3rd new moon - or about 44 days after the first Passover. They figured the Law was given within 5-7 days after the arrival. This worked out that the Law would have been given on or about the day, they celebrated Pentecost.

So by the time of Jesus, the Jews were celebrating the "Feast of Weeks", - praising God for the harvest; and on the "Day of Pentecost", - would give God a day of solemn worship and acknowledgment - not only for the harvest but also remembering this as the anniversary of God giving them the Law.

Early Church - 04 - Babel Rescinded

This had become a significant Holy Day among the Jews. Many of the Jews held the view that the Law was the greatest thing God had given them. Pentecost was a very important day for them.

Consider “Wind” for a moment:

In Ezekiel 37:9-14 – Ezekiel prophesied to the wind and declared - it was the "breath of God" that breathed new life into those old dead bones. In Luke 3:16-17 - John the Baptist had prophesied the Messiah would Baptize with "wind and fire".

The Hebrew word "ruah" and the Greek word "pneuma" are used for wind and for spirit - depending upon the context in which they are used. There is some significance in the fact that the Old Testament language and the New Testament language - had a word that was used for both "wind" and for "spirit". What was meant by that word depended entirely upon the context in which it was used – I think this is important.

Consider “Fire” for a moment:

Fire denotes divine presence.

Exodus. 3:2-5, the burning bush

Exodus 13:21, the pillar of fire that guided Israel by night

Exodus 24:17, the consuming fire on Mt. Sinai

Exodus 40:38, the fire that hovered over the tabernacle

These "tongues of fire" technically are not the "other tongues" or languages they would shortly begin to speak with. They are part of the divine representation of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon each individual.

Read Acts 2:5-12 and make notes:

Early Church - 04 - Babel Rescinded

Many of the visitors were astonished to hear the loud praises of God in their own language and dialect - Parthia, Media, Elam, and Mesopotamia lay east of the Euphrates.

Judea is believed to refer to the land that was controlled by the Judean Kings of David and Solomon. This land reached from the Egyptian border all the way to the Euphrates. Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia are those nations that represent Asia and Asia Minor. Egypt, Libya, and Cyrene are the nations indicating Africa. Rome is in the only recognized nation of Europe at that time. Cretans were those on the known inhabitable Island in the Great Sea, or the island of Crete. Arabs were those children of Abraham that were not of the Tribe of Jacob, or Israel.

Jews from every known nation of that day were "in town". Even the Arabs, which says all of Abraham's offspring, both Jew and Arab, - had representatives there to hear and see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

So what do you think all this have to say to us today? The message to a local church or a message to an individual?

For the Jews, this day of Pentecost had great significance from several view points, - one of the greatest of these was it's being a reminder of the "giving of the Law." For the Christian, this day of Pentecost now holds great significance - because it is the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new relationship with man.

One of the significant aspects of the Holy Spirit coming on the Day of Pentecost - is that it gives a continuity between the Law relationship and the Holy Spirit relationship. The former relationship was Law, or Torah centered and Torah directed. The present relationship is Jesus Christ centered and Holy Spirit directed.

God gave three meaningful signs to herald the coming of the Holy Spirit:
Wind, Fire, and Inspired Speaking.

Early Church - 04 - Babel Rescinded

Under the Old Covenant, the divine Presence rested upon Israel as a corporate people and specifically upon the designated High Priest. Under the New Covenant, the divine Presence separated and came to rest upon each believer individually.

We must not overlook the significance of the Inspired Speaking that took place here. All during the Old Testament times - prophetic utterances were associated with the Spirit's coming upon a particular person for a special purpose or work.

Judaism of Jesus' day had come to believe that along with the end of the writing prophets - God was also no longer speaking directly to man. They had come to believe the only means of communication from God to man was through the Torah or Scriptures. The Jewish community of that day was fully convinced God was only speaking through the written Word.

Those who were looking for the coming of the Messiah - believed the coming of the Messiah would bring an outpouring of God's Spirit - and prophecy would again come forth.

There is such great significance to the Holy Spirit coming on the Day of Pentecost - and in the way God heralded the coming of the Holy Spirit.

It would be wrong to say - Jesus became the Son of God when the Holy Spirit was seen coming down to Him after He was baptized. He was already the Son of God. This just signified that He now had the anointing to do what He was sent to do.

It would be equally wrong to say the Church was born on the Day of Pentecost. The Church had already been born.

What happened that Day signified the Church now had the anointing to do the ministry - the Church was born to do. And the anointing was not seen to rest upon the "group" or the "leader of the group" - but was seen to separate and rest upon each individual of the Church.

Early Church - 04 - Babel Rescinded

The relationship of the Spirit of God to the members of the body of Christ became very personal and intimate on that Day of Pentecost. What it was that actually drew the crowd - has been argued among Bible scholars for a long time.

It would be hard for us to say exactly what it was that grabbed the attention of the people in Jerusalem that day. It could have been the "sound of the wind", - or it could have been the noisy sound of the Disciples speaking in "other languages."

It isn't as important just what originally got their attention, - but it is important - what happened with the messages in "tongues."

Galileans had a very distinctive accent as Peter had found out when Jesus had been arrested. Galileans had difficulty in pronouncing gutturals - and were known for habitually dropping or swallowing syllables when they spoke. They were looked down upon by most Jews and especially those of proper standing in Jerusalem. They were seen as unlearned people who just murdered the language.

When the crowd gathers, - they hear Galileans speaking in their language - of all the nations present in Jerusalem - for this High and Holy time of Celebration. These men, who would normally be difficult to understand because of the lax attitude toward the language - were now preaching and proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah in all the known languages. Everyone heard as one !

This signified the reversing - or the doing away with - the judgment at Babel.

In Genesis 11 - The people were in one mind and in one accord in an effort to accomplish a fleshly goal - and in fact were being disobedient to God - so "The Lord confused the language of the whole world... the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth."

Now at the coming of the Holy Spirit in our New Covenant relationship, - God is "un-confusing" the language of the whole world. So there would be "oneness of heart" and unity of Spirit and purpose.

Early Church - 04 - Babel Rescinded

To the un-believer and even to the believer who has not been baptized with the Holy Spirit - it can seem meaningless when those around us begin to speak in tongues. But for those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, - there is such a sense of unity and oneness when we are together praising God in tongues as led by the Holy Spirit.

Even though the flesh ears may not understand a single word or at least very few - the spirit person within us recognizes a unity that just may be beyond the ability of the flesh man to ever comprehend.

It is tremendous that God went so far as to use all three things - the people of that day would view as a sign of the presence of His Spirit. The Wind, Fire, and Inspired Speaking.

The greatest significance that day - was the "un-confusing" of the languages of the earth.

This signifies God no longer wants the people of the earth divided. God desires for us to be of one heart, one mind, and one spirit - and that it be His of course. This is especially true of the peoples of the "Church."

Have you noticed how difficult it is for people of different local churches to talk? The people of one denomination or local church claim that they don't understand those of another church. The people from one church use words and terminology that means nothing to those of another church.

It is human nature that we fear what we do not understand. We tend to stay away from that which we fear. If we are going to be like the Church Jesus founded, then we must bring this attitude to an end.

We will surely hear people "brag" about their "evidence" - that they have received a certain "anointing" or "gift" from God. It doesn't matter which one of the many "gifts" of the Holy Spirit we may be imitating - or even if we can imitate everyone of them. If we are part of this present day move and attitude to separate and divide the Body of Christ - Then we haven't received the Holy Spirit that came on that day of Pentecost!

Early Church - 04 - Babel Rescinded

When we are Baptized with the Holy Spirit, - we will no longer play even a small role in anything that has to do with pushing the various parts of the Body of Christ from one another. When we are Baptized with the Holy Spirit, - we will have a heart to see the "unity" of the Body of Christ emphasized and promoted.

There is some significant symbolism in what occurred on that Day of Pentecost. It is good to look at it and to understand it.

But the real message for us today - is found in the "un-confusing" of the languages - the coming together of the people in Jesus Christ under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The Babel has been rescinded. If the other Christian is speaking a different language in the fleshly sense - then we can trust the Holy Spirit to interpret it for us. If not interpret it, then perhaps He will give us discernment as to what is meant. If not discernment then perhaps He will give us a Word of Knowledge.

The point is this - If we have the Holy Spirit active in our life - then we do not have to fear anything that we do not understand. We do not have to fear the other language – we do not have to fear the other religion - not the other customs - not the other attitudes.

The Holy Spirit will bridge over everything so that we can be of one heart, mind, and purpose. This does not mean we are to embrace or participate in everything that comes along. It means we don't have to be divided because of differences. If there is something we are to stay away from - for the sake of keeping ourselves "pure", then He will direct us.

Write down some times – or instances – when you purposefully declined fellowship with another Christian because of a difference in Biblical understanding.

Early Church - 04 - Babel Rescinded

If we are indeed Baptized with the Holy Spirit:

Let us be the hands and feet for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let us be about the work of bringing those that are believers into one purpose and one heart.

Let us be about the work of building bridges over these great valleys that are between the denominational churches.

Let us be about the work of building bridges over these great valleys that are between churches of the same denomination.

Let us be about the work of building bridges over these great valleys that are between the local church and those who have been hurt and offended. Sure they are probably in a bad attitude - they probably are doing and saying things that are digging the valley deeper and wider.

Let us be about the work of the Holy Spirit of bringing those believers who are separated - back together for the purpose of worshiping and serving our Heavenly Father.

Let us be about the work of "un-confusing" that which has separated the people of God.

Let us work together for the Kingdom's sake.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

What do you think our response should be, - if someone brought in a report that a man who was crippled was sitting on the sidewalk over here at the local shopping center asking for money? Should our response to that man be different - if we knew for a fact that he was lost (or not saved) - from what it would be if we knew he was saved?

If a report came that there was a man in our county jail - that was certainly without Jesus and he was very lonely- he is just about to be released - has no place to live - has no job: Should our response be different to a man in similar circumstances but was a believer in Jesus?

What about the family who ask the Church to help them financially? Should our response be different for those who are lost from those who are saved?

Is Jesus in the lost person who is in Jail?

Is Jesus in the saved person who is in Jail?

Is Jesus in the homeless person who is lost?

Is Jesus in the homeless person who is saved?

Is Jesus in the hungry person who is lost?

Is Jesus in the hungry person who is saved?

With these questions in mind, we will now look to God's Word for directions.

After the events on the Day of Pentecost, there were "many signs and wonders" performed through the Apostles. In looking at one incident in particular - we will see a simple but powerful principle unfold for us.

Read Acts 3:1-10 and make notes:

Early Church - 05 - Helping The Needy

This cripple man was asking for money - or other valuables that could be sold to raise money. He was trying to sustain his life by "begging" for the handouts of others. This man had no hope of ever "getting on his feet", neither physically nor financially. He had been convinced - "begging" for his sustenance was all that he could do, perhaps he felt this was the best he could ever hope for.

In the Judaism of that day "almsgiving" or giving to the poor was considered a meritorious act. So this beggar was placed in a prominent public place so the Jews could earn "brownie points" by giving him some money when they passed by.

Had Peter and John been a part of the average local Church today, - they would have brought this man's difficult situation before the church. They would have probably started a campaign to collect food, clothing, household furnishings, and money to take and give to this poor man. On that day when the beggar fixed his eyes upon Peter and John, fully expecting to receive something from them, - he received something more valuable than money or earthly food.

Unfortunately today, when a poor beggar comes to the average church and looks to them for help - the most that they can expect is some physical food, perhaps some clothes, and maybe even some money. The average local church today feels really good when they can put some material things into the life of the needy people who come their way. Most have come to think we can not hope to get a chance to tell them of Jesus if we don't first supply all their physical needs.

There is an account of Thomas Aquinas going to visit with Pope Innocent II. When Thomas Aquinas arrived, the Pope was counting a fairly large sum of money that had come in from various parts of the world of that day. The Pope said, "You see Thomas, the Church can no longer say, 'Silver or gold have I none.'" Thomas replied, "True...but neither can she say 'Rise and walk.'"

Most of us today would probably agree - it is a sad person who is poor - and in need - and doesn't have a vision of it getting better for them. It is even more a sad picture when a Church can not say, "Rise and walk" and doesn't have a vision that it can get any better.

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We have Spiritually dead Churches giving out material things to people who are in desperate need of Salvation in Jesus, Healing, Forgiveness, Deliverance, and the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, Jesus tells us what is going to happen when He returns in Glory.

Read Matthew 25:33-40 and make notes:

When people asked “when did we do these things for you?” - Jesus replied, “when you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.” Who did Jesus identify as His brothers or who did He say were His brothers?

When Jesus was given the opportunity to respond – we find His answer to that question in Matthew 12:50 and in Luke 8:21 . (write the answer here)

After Jesus had risen from the dead He appeared to Mary and she tried to hold onto Him.

Read John 20:17-18 and make notes:

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Jesus told Mary Magdalene to go to “my brothers” and tell them. She went directly to “the disciples”. The Early Church did not appear to have any problem in understanding who the "brothers" of Jesus are.

When Jesus was alive in a physical body, ministering among the people, He continuously tried to help people understand there was something much more valuable than earthly "stuff".

Just look at what Jesus said - Read John 6:35 and make notes:

When Jesus said this, he had already startled the people by telling them - Moses had not given them real bread from heaven. Now he was saying - He is the only real satisfaction for the desires of man.

If one gets physical food and physical drink, - it may be very pleasurable, but it last only a short time. If one gets Jesus, sells out to Him, and allows Jesus to become the Lord of their life, - then nothing of this world ever really becomes a big issue after that.

Every thing on this earth, - Every need on this earth pales in comparison with the splendor, magnificence, and importance of Jesus Christ. How concerned can we be about having or not having enough earthly food and water - when we have Jesus - and a personal relationship with Him?

Do you remember what Jesus said He came to earth to do?

Read Luke 4:18-19 and make notes:

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Some have desired to interpret this to say "the only 'good news' for the poor - is that you are going to make them "un-poor." Jesus was plain here - for the prisoners, freedom; for the blind, sight; for the oppressed, release. If He had meant finances for the poor, then that is what He would have said!

What He said was that He had come to "preach the Good News to the poor." Salvation in Jesus Christ is the ONLY Good News there is – period. Salvation in Jesus Christ is the ONLY HOPE for the poor.

Did you ever stop to think - we cannot feed the hungry enough to stop them from getting hungry?

Did you ever stop to think we cannot release a captive person enough times to stop them from being a prisoner again?

Did you ever stop to think we cannot give a poor person enough money to stop them from being in need again?

Jesus knew that !

Later, when people were starting to have doubts about Jesus being the Messiah, - after all, he wasn't fitting the exact image they had of what their Messiah should be - even John the Baptist was starting to wonder:

Read Matthew 11:4-5 and make notes:

Jesus did just what He said He had been sent to do. Does the Scriptures say that Jesus starting feeding physical food to all the people of the world?

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The feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000 – may have come quickly to your mind when you read the preceding question. Guess what? Jesus preached the "Good News" to them first! Jesus taught them the things concerning God's Kingdom - before He offered them physical food. Check it out in Luke chapter 9.

Jesus didn't try to feed every hungry person in the county. He simply fed those who came to dine at the Kingdom's banqueting table. The first century Church was instructed to do likewise.

Look at the specific instructions Paul wrote to the Christian Believers at Rome:

Read Romans 12:10-13 and make notes:

"Sharing with God's people who are in need" - refers to giving that is done outside our home. "Practice hospitality" - refers to giving done under our own roof. The key phrase for "Sharing" and "Practicing Hospitality" - is "with God's people." Look also at what John wrote to the first century church:

Read 1 John 3:16-17 and make notes:

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Then we have a record the first century Church did do this.

Read Romans 15:25-26 and make notes:

There is a very specific and clear outline given for the local Church of today in this matter of helping those who are in need:

Read 1 Timothy 5:3 and make notes:

"Proper recognition" is about to be described or outlined for us in the passage that follows. For some, "proper recognition" means we are there for them day and night. For others, "proper recognition" means we do not give them material goods at all.

In the culture of that day, a man who was not sick to the point of being "bed ridden" - or who was not severely handicapped simply wasn't given food and clothing. If he didn't work, they would let him starve, and his family right along with him – and yes, the children too!

In today's culture, we have men and women who are not widows but do fall into the category of poor and needy. In that culture – they didn't even consider the men or women who could work – only widows and orphans. In the next several texts about providing for a “widow” - we can place the word “man” or woman”.

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Read 1 Timothy 5:4 and make notes:

The first rule of thumb, when the needy come to the Church for physical or financial help; - they need to be instructed to go to their family first. Even if they are in another state and are miles away, - money can be sent overnight if it is necessary.

The family has the primary responsibility to care for one another. If the needy person has such a bad relationship with their family that they can't ask them for help, this might just be incentive enough to start "eating some crow", "swallowing hard" and start working things out. I realize to some this may sound hard – but if the Church would adopt such a policy, they just might help restore many families to a "speaking terms" relationship.

Read 1 Timothy 5:5 and make notes:

We see the definition begin to become very explicit. The person who has no family left. The one who is "really in need" meaning - they are not able to be employed.

And don't miss this part, "continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help." Not just a needy person in our community - not just a needy person without any family - but one who also puts their hope in God.

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The average needy person today, who comes to the Church for help, never has any intention of putting any hope in God. There are a few who do, but it is a small minority. Most needy people today, have their entire hope in the "pity" they can stir up in the hearts of God's people. They have their entire hope in the generosity of the "Church people."

Read 1 Timothy 5:6 and make notes:

In the Greek text the phrase "lives for pleasure" is just one word, - the word "spatalao" - which means "self-indulgently". The needy person who is living only for themselves is spiritually dead.

Read 1 Timothy 5:7-8 and make notes:

The un-believer is basically in a state of ignorance - that of not knowing. The believer knows better. James 4:17, tells us that "Anyone who knows to do good and doesn't do it, sins".

Read 1 Timothy 5:9-10 and make notes:

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Having defined who a real "widow" or in our case who a real "needy person" is, the eligible are now restricted a little more. They must be over 60 yrs old AND have been faithful to their spouse. Their good deeds must be well known, which include the refreshing of the Saints.

When we think about it - these requirements or qualifications are not that different from the qualifications listed for an overseer of the local Church.

Read 1 Timothy 5:11-15 and make notes:

In verse eleven where it says, "do not put them on the list", - the Greek word is "paraitou" which means "to reject or refuse." Notice also, one of the dangers is, "they get into the habit of being idle!"

My Grandmother would often say, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." I know this isn't a verse in the Bible, but I have watched this play itself out over and over in the lives of people. It is not healthy - either spiritually or physically - for people to be idle for long periods of time. There is a need to rest from time to time. But continuously being idle will ruin a person's self-esteem, - it will kill their vision, - and lead them into all manner of wickedness and sin.

Younger people ought to marry, - they ought to work at managing their household and home well. This means at least one of them if not both need to work at some kind of gainful employment. The reason is spelled out for us - so that the enemy will not have any reason or occasion to slander. This doesn't need any explanation for most of us. If you do - please bring this up with the group during the discussion time.

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Maybe you have heard this “saying” before - but - If you have, it is important enough to hear again and again. "Don't leave any weapon lying around available to Satan. He can and will use any sin in your life against you."

Read 1 Timothy 5:16 and make notes:

Anyone who has a needy person in their family, needs to provide for them, and not "let the church be burdened with them." Some might think, "well what should we do for the lost people who are in need?" This is a good question and the answer is right here in God's Word.

Read Luke 11:39-41 and make notes:

The Pharisees were originally a group who sought to be separated from impure things - in an attempt to be pure in all parts of their life. The idea being that God would be present more powerfully in a person who was "more pure." They had come to a place where they had worked so hard at keeping themselves from those "things" that were impure - that they had forgotten or at least lost the very heart of why they began to keep themselves pure.

Early Church - 05 - Helping The Needy

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for putting so much effort into keeping the outside clean - that they were not "sharing with the poor what was on the inside." WE MUST GIVE WHAT IS ON THE INSIDE - or nothing about the outside matters at all!

It would not matter one little bit if we were to feed every hungry person in our county – if we failed to share with them the real valuable - we have which is inside of us - Jesus Christ. It would not matter at all if we could somehow get people to get along with one another and quit fussing and fighting - if we failed to share with them what's inside of us.

Who wants to be part of the local church who will one day hear God rebuke them because they gave of the outside possessions and failed to give of the "inside possessions." Who wants to hear God rebuke them personally for failing to give of the real treasure of what He has placed in our heart.

If we can not share the “Good News” of Jesus with those who are in need - then it is a total waste of time to feed them, clothe them, or to carry them. And we should be trying to do these things.

What God desires of us - is that we would share the "real treasure" of what is on the inside of us - with those who are in need. If they become true "followers" of Jesus Christ they will most likely not remain in need. But we are to help those believers who are in need until they no longer are in need.

Every local church needs to be careful that we are not a Bad Steward of The Good News - and that we share the Good News first and foremost. Every local church needs to be careful that we are not a Bad Steward of the physical Resources God has given us – and make sure we do not waste them.

This applies equally well to individuals, families, and churches:

We need to share the "Good News" with the lost who are in need - and we need to share the resources with the saved who are in need.

Early Church - 05 - Helping The Needy

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Any of these sayings sound familiar?

"When life hands you lemons, MAKE LEMONDADE!"

"If you find yourself at the end of your rope, tie a not in the end and hang on." "Just give it time, time heals all wounds."

"Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you." "You just need to let Jesus be the Lord of your life."

"Speak the truth to one another in love."

Read Acts 3:1 and make notes:

Peter and John were confronted by a cripple man who was asking for money. Peter told the man, "I don't have any money but I will share what is on the inside."

Read Acts 3:7 and 3:11 and make notes:

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

The man who had been cripple but was miraculously healed – did not want to leave Peter. Most of us can readily understand that sentiment. When the people saw man who had been crippled since his birth, - he was healed - and he was now over 40 years old, they came crowding around the man as well as crowding around Peter and John.

In the following verses you can get a good idea of one of the main reasons for physical healing. This miraculous healing, had drawn a crowd. The crowd was paying attention. They would at this moment hear most of whatever either of these men said. That was the main purpose of the miracle.

Read Acts 3:12 and make notes:

Peter started out by saying to the people, "Don't even think - this happened by any special power on our part." - "Don't think it is because we are more pious than the rest of you." - "Don't even think we made this man able to walk."

Unlike many people of today, Peter wasn't about to take God's credit. Peter wanted the people to understand God was at work among them.

It was probably just fine that the healed man stayed close to Peter and John. The people were certainly going to stare at this man who had been crippled for over 40 years and now could walk, run, leap, and jump. But Peter did not want the people to start lifting him up in any way.

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

Read Acts 3:16 and make notes:

It is through His Name, - the name that was just humbled at the hands of this people - through the Name that is now glorified by the Heavenly Father, - that this man has been healed. Peter wanted the people to know the power which had brought about this miracle was in the Name of Jesus. He pointed out to them this crippled man had simply availed himself of the Power in Jesus' Name - by his faith.

Peter sets in to explain to them - he knows they acted in ignorance when they followed the lead of the religious leaders and asked that Jesus be crucified. He explains - God made use of their ignorance to bring to fulfillment His prophecies concerning the Messiah and Savior of this lost people. Peter used the opportunity afforded by this miracle to preach an evangelistic message.

Read Acts 3:19 and make notes:

What Peter was saying to them was - all they had to do to be saved was to avail themselves of the power in the Name of Jesus - just like the crippled man had done for his healing. Peter and John understood the importance of "speaking the truth in love."

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

If we try to get folks today to "speak the truth" they will hem and haw around and make it quite clear that they really don't want to do that. If we finally press them enough they might eventually agree to speak the truth to us - but we don't even understand what "speaking the truth in love" really means. If we get someone to agree to speak the truth to us, they just might say something like, "You are ugly and you don't smell so good either. "

Ephesians 4:15 is where the phrase "speaking the truth in love" comes from. Speaking the truth in love is supposed to help us grow up into Jesus.

Read Ephesians 4:11– 4:15 and make notes:

How many of us today know what the truth is? Jesus Is The Truth!

So, if we are going to speak "the truth in love" - then we must speak Jesus in love. How do we speak Jesus to the people of today? We speak to them - what the Word of God says about everything.

Jesus was the Word before He became flesh. When we are speaking the Word of God - then we are speaking Jesus. When we are speaking Jesus to the people - then we are speaking Truth.

Peter wanted these people to "know the truth"! We don't have to go through our life trying to rationalize the things that we have done. We don't have to spend any time trying to get them buried deep enough inside - so that they don't eat at us all the time. If we will repent before God, times of refreshing will come.

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

Some will say, “this just isn't the appropriate thing to do in the church today.” Some will say, “this isn't being sensitive to the feeling of the people.” Those who say these things are people who have already been blinded by Satan.

Suppose you went to the doctor and were suffering physically with some disease that had set up camp inside your body. Suppose the doctor tells you there is a cure for this disease but it requires you get the medicine in the form of a shot - and unfortunately for many people the shot has been very painful. Would you keep the disease and think - the doctor isn't sensitive to your feelings? - or would you endure the temporary pain in order to permanently get rid of the sickness and suffering of the disease? And it is just the same with our spiritual bodies that are sick from our sins and transgressions.

Let's look at some proof in the New Testament that it works that way. Remember, Peter was addressing the people who had just a few weeks earlier, taken part in the murder of Jesus the Christ.

Peter and John had gone to the Temple for the 3:00 p.m. time of prayer. On their way into the temple, God healed the cripple man. The time of prayer could have been 1/2 hour to 1 full hour. It could have been 4:00 p.m. or later when they began to address the crowd outside. This time of preaching or sharing of God's Word could have easily taken another 1/2 hour to 1 hour. This would have brought the time to at least 5:00 p.m.

Read Acts 4:1-4 and make notes:

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

There had already been about 3,000 who became believers on the Day of Pentecost. Now, after hearing the Truth, on this day after seeing the Power of God in the healing, another 2,000 became believers. Some Bible Scholars believe it literally means to have counted only the number of men that believed. They suggest there probably were as many women who believed if not more. If so, then the number of believers grew rapidly to a very large number.

Sure, it probably did prick their hearts with pain, right down to the core, to hear that this Jesus whom they helped to crucify was the Son of God. But Peter didn't just leave them with the "half-truth" - he gave them the WHOLE Truth. "You are guilty of sin, but if you repent, and confess your sin, then God will forgive you and cleanse you."

Peter was preaching to this people what would later be written down in 1 John 1:9.

Read Acts 4:5-7 and make notes:

Isn't it interesting - this one miracle of healing that took place - gave Peter and John two separate opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ? It immediately caught the attention of the people that were out and about. Then it caught the attention of the religious leaders who often kept themselves away from the congregation. Peter took the opportunity to share the same Good News with the religious leaders that he did with the people.

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

Read Acts 4:8-15 and make notes:

The religious leaders were stuck - they couldn't come right out and say that this man didn't get healed. They couldn't beat Peter and John at this moment - it would seem to the people that they were beating them for healing a poor cripple man. So they did all that a person can do when they realize they are powerless against you - they will threaten you!

Read Acts 4:18-20 and make notes:

This preaching and sharing that Peter and John were doing was of particular offense to the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees believed in Angels, demons, and the resurrection, but the Sadducees certainly did not believe in either of these.

The Sadducees had taken offence with Jesus because He had, on more than one occasion, spoken of "rising from the dead." Jesus had shot the Sadducees down in front of the people from whom they demanded respect and attention.

Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead. Jesus did this in the witness of a large number of Jews. Jesus claimed He was "The Resurrection."

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

The Sadducees had felt sure they had done away with this trouble maker when they convinced the Roman government to crucify Him. Then how frustrated and angry they became when the body of Jesus disappeared from the tomb. Their own soldiers who had been sent there to guard it said they saw an Angel - come and move the stone and did the forbidden thing of breaking the seal that had been placed upon it. They paid the soldiers money to lie and say that Jesus' followers came and stole the body.

If the people, many of whom had already heard reports that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, - were to hear that Jesus Himself had come back from the dead - this would not only have the people believing in something that was against the Doctrine of the Sadducees, - but it would tear away a little of their respect from among the people.

Remember, all of this was taking place just weeks - after they thought that they had put this "Jesus thing" to rest. When released Peter and John, went back to the group of believers and shared with them all that had happened with the religious leaders - and how they had been told not to share anything in the Name of Jesus anymore.

Their attitude did not become that of fear. Their attitude did not become that of "lets get those old so-in-so's that think they know it all." Just look at how they responded:

Read Acts 4:29-30 and make notes:

Oh how wonderful it would be if the ministers of today would pray like this! How wonderful it would be if the people of the local Churches would pray like this for their leaders and for themselves as well.

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

If the prayer of the people could be not only for God to stretch forth His hand to do miracles and perform signs, - but that "We, His servants, would be enabled to speak His Word with boldness."

Read Acts 4:31-33 and make notes:

These people were not praying and asking God for the Power to do Miracles just so that everybody could be "awed" and impressed. They were not interested in becoming some kind of show or circus. They were interested in sharing the Good News. They wanted to do so with Boldness.

There are a great many people today who seem to have the wrong idea about healing and miracles. It has been said that today's churches are too much like a multi-level marketing organization. Each person is more interested in getting someone else signed up than they are in using the product themselves. After a short time of this attitude at work in the Church, there are a lot of people signed up, but nobody is using the product.

A lot of people are claiming to be a part of the Church, but it is hard to find someone who is "living the Life" of a real Christian. What typically happens today, when God performs a miracle of healing, - is the whole crowd gets worked into a frenzy trying to make it happen again, and again, and again, etc.

Now, please think about this for just a moment. Do you think this man was the only cripple person in Jerusalem that day? Do you think there was no one else in that city that day that was sick or afflicted in some way?

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

Certainly there were others who were sick and crippled who were there. This miracle had already accomplished its purpose. It would have been very wrong for Peter and John to spend all their time trying to make it happen over and over and over. If this miracle happened in the average local Church in America today, the people would never hear the call to repentance – only the call to come and be healed!

In the average Church today, the minister would never tell the people what they had done was wrong. He would never tell them they need to repent and confess that what they had done was sinful before God.

Today, we are too concerned with "hurting someone's feelings" to preach the Word of God. "Oh, I can't come right out and say that these actions and activities are sin - because there might be some people here that have done these things and it would hurt them so much to hear me say that." - "Well now, brother, these people are good people, they didn't mean to be doing anything that was really wrong. They had good intentions, they were trying to do what they thought was right."

All of this "molly coddling" of the Word of God is sucking the life right out of it!

What is coming forth from the ministers today is as lifeless as sand. Because ministers are tip-toeing around the Word of God in order to prevent hurting anyone's feelings - most of the people in the congregations have begun doing the same thing.

We go out of our local churches and beat around the bush until the roots have been destroyed - but we never tell the people what the Words of Life really say. We have become "so concerned" that we don't offend anyone - that we are not taking them any Word of God - that can bring deliverance to them, or healing, or salvation, or help of any kind.

We have made the Gospel of Jesus Christ of absolutely no use among the hurting people of today. The message to us as a local congregation is - we should pray for God to perform miracles, signs, and wonders in order to get the attention of the people of this area, - so that they could be told "the Truth, the whole Truth, and absolutely nothing but the Truth."

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

We need to be praying and asking God - to help us speak forth His Word with BOLDNESS. We will never help anyone by "beating around the bush" - We will never help anyone by telling them only "half of the truth" so as not to offend them.

If there were ever a time when the people of this area needed to hear the "Full Word of God" it is today!

If there were ever a time when the people of this area needed to hear a call to repentance it is today!

It is God's will and desire to bring a "Great Revival" – but will He find a people willing to receive it?

It will not "just happen" - It will happen when we, as a people, humble ourselves before Him and repent for our sins - and ask for an In-filling of His Holy Spirit - so that we can speak forth with boldness.

How can we expect a revival to come:

When the people sitting on the pews as well as those in leadership -
are guilty of taking things that do not belong to them? -

When the people are guilty of lying and purposefully deceiving one another? -

When the people are guilty of sexual sins? -

When the people are guilty of not being the kind of husband or wife that God
says we must be? -

When the people are guilty of speaking forth profanities and speaking of obscenities?

It won't happen until we come to God and confess the sins in our lives and repent - pure and simple! The people in the Churches of America have been "soft-shoed" for so long that it is hard to find someone who really knows what God expects of His people in the way of a "lifestyle."

Who will be a part of the Church that will take the "Whole Truth" to the people of this area? - Who will pray for the Word to be spoken Boldly from our congregation? - Who will you pray whether it is miracles, healings, or teachings, that come from this congregation, that it is all for the purpose of Glorifying God?

Early Church - 06 - Speaking Truth

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Before reading the text for this lesson – read again the closing statements and summary of the previous chapter:

Read Acts 4:32-35 and make notes:

Doesn't this sound like a wonderful church to be a part of? Chapter 5 begins with the account of Ananias and Sapphira. This husband and wife sold a piece of property - and decided to hold some of the money back and only pretended to give it all to the Apostles.

Most Christians are familiar with this account. However, we need to “touch base” with it in it's closing statements to prevent anyone being left stranded and missing the message of this lesson.

Read Acts 5:11-14 and make notes:

More than a few people have difficulty with with these two verses 13 & 14. Verse 13 says "no one else dared join them" and then verse 14 turns right around and says "more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."

These verses are not part of the text that contains the message for us today, - but God doesn't want them to be the stumbling block so many have allowed them to become. So let's attempt to put them to rest - so we can focus on God's message in this lesson.

Early Church - 07 - Full Message

This is the transition from the account of Ananias and Sapphira to the second appearance before the Sanhedrin by the Apostles. The first key to understanding this apparent conflict is to recognize what happened with Ananias and Sapphira. The second key is verse 11 which says, "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."

When the people saw what happened to those who were not honest, they all became afraid - unless they may die also. They feared - if they sold some property and brought the proceeds to lay at the Apostle's feet, - they might be struck down dead because of some sin or unclean thing that was still in their life. This is the part about "no one else dared join them." And who could blame them. How many people are we going to find in the local churches today that could honestly say - there is "no sin in my life"?

Verse 13 explains the result upon the people from Ananias and Sapphira being struck down because they were not totally honest. This was a frontal assault by Satan to stop the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Church.

Verses 12 and 14 make the bridge over this deep gorge Satan created to halt the movement of the Bride of Christ. Verse 12 exclaims, "The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together."

Even though Ananias and Sapphira being struck down brought about a paralyzing fear, - verse 14 proclaims, "Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number." The deep gorge of fear created by Satan to halt the movement of the Church was bridged by the "preaching of the Gospel" and the "working of signs and miracles." Now on to the text which has the message for this lesson:

Read Acts 5:17-18 and make notes:

Early Church - 07 - Full Message

The Sanhedrin had given these Apostles an official warning not to teach or preach any more in the name of Jesus. The first time it only involved two of the Apostles, but this time it was all of them. These men not only had the "guts" to go against the instructions of the Sanhedrin, - but they were doing miracles before and among the people, - and they were getting perhaps a bigger following than the Jewish teachers or at least a more enthusiastic following. The earliest opposition to the Christian Church was from the official Religious Leaders and the Official Organization of the accepted Religious order.

Read Acts 5:19-21 and make notes:

The Sanhedrin knew that they had previously forbidden these men to teach any further in the name of Jesus. They knew that they had placed these men under arrest and had them locked up in the public jail.

But when they sent for them the next morning, the arrested men were gone and yet the doors were locked and the guards still on duty. You know the Sanhedrin must have wondered if perhaps some of the temple guards had become sympathetic to the Christians; - or perhaps maybe even some of the members of the Sanhedrin itself – and in their sympathy, came and quietly and secretly turned them loose.

When the members of the Sanhedrin found out the "escaped prisoners" had not fled - but were in the temple courts teaching, - they sent the guards to bring them before the Sanhedrin.

Read Acts 5:27-28 and make notes:

Early Church - 07 - Full Message

They start out by reminding the Apostles they had been given orders not to teach in this name. Then they actually began to defend themselves. They said it seems you "are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." What a terrible thing in their culture, to be made guilty of the shedding of an innocent man's blood.

Please remember the Angel of the Lord had instructed the Apostles to "go and tell the full message of life in Jesus."

Read Acts 5:29-33 and make notes:

The contempt of court charge would have been sufficient to call for the death penalty. But to make things worse, these men seem to be making it clear - they would continue to speak about these things.

The Sanhedrin did not have civil authority to put someone to death. But as we have already seen with their handling of Jesus, - they can trump up charges in order to get the Roman government to take the life of one they consider dangerous.

Read Acts 5:34-35 and make notes:

Then Gamaliel reminded them of some men who had gathered a band of followers that failed to last. He reminded them how that shortly after the leader was killed, the followers ceased to follow the way that had been set forth by the leader.

Read Acts 5:38-42 and make notes:

Gamaliel was highly respected among the religious leaders as well as among the people of that day. He played a major part in directing the leaders and the people to maintain the purity and holiness of life to God. Gamaliel was a "doctor of the Law." This means he had all the formal training and education on this subject that was available. If he were alive today, he would be a Ph.D.

Some of the early church's historical writings indicate Gamaliel was - perhaps the greatest teacher of that day regarding the law or Torah - and how it could be applied to one's everyday life.

Shortly after his death it was written in one of the early church historical writings, "Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time." Another wrote, "When Rabban Gamaliel the elder died, the glory of the Torah ceased, and purity and separateness died." It was the respect which they had for Gamaliel that held the Sanhedrin back from their worse intentions. And that was to kill the Apostles.

Because of the plea of Gamaliel, the Apostles were only flogged and warned that the ban against teaching in the name of Jesus was still in effect. Verse 42 has the summary statement regarding the Apostles. "They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ."

Consider the instructions given to the Apostles by God found in verse 20 - "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." God wants us as individual Christians, as well as a local body, to be going and telling the people the "full message of the life" in Jesus.

Do you think the majority of “religious teachers” today proclaim the “full message of the new life” in Christ Jesus? Or, do the majority today proclaim on “pieces parts” of the message of life?

Consider the words of the “respected” and wise professor of the Law – Gamaliel – found in verses 38 and 39: "Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

If our purpose is of human origin - If our purpose is for fleshly gain - If our purpose is to bring attention to ourselves - Then our activities will surely fail! If our purpose is from God and to God, then no one will be able to stop us.

We need not fear what man says against us.

We need not fear what laws might be passed against us.

We need not fear what threats are made against us.

We must be committed to "telling the full message of life in Jesus". And be assured that as long as our purpose is to accomplish the task for the Lord's sake, - then no one or no group of men will be able to stop us.

God expects the Believers of today to be loyal to Him. The Believers of today must be obedient to God. What the religious leaders of that day really needed to do - was to "confess their sins and repent before God" so that they could be forgiven. But it seems that the truth itself didn't matter at all to them. The inward guilt of their sins kept them in a frame of mind that prevented them from seeing things as they truly were.

The very ones who should have been leading the people to a closer life and walk with God - were the ones who were killing and trying hard to stop the message from God. Any Church today, or any leadership today, that fails to confess their sins and repent before God - will find themselves unable to see the truth - and in their blinded ignorance, - they will find themselves on the opposition side - to what God is saying today and is trying to accomplish among His people.

Early Church - 07 - Full Message

It is dangerous for Christians to ignore this lesson. There are today, a great number of professing Christians - a great number of local churches - and a great number of Church leaders - that are in opposition to what God is saying and what God is doing today. Throughout the history of mankind, there isn't one episode of anyone or anything being successful that has opposed God.

If we are to be a Disciple or Servant of God today, then we must be obedient in "telling the full message of life in Jesus" every where and at all times.

God is able to deliver us from any threat or persecution.

God can stir the persecuted heart to count it as a privilege to be shamed or persecuted.

God can stir the persecuted heart to have a sense of joy and rejoicing.

God can stir the persecuted heart to a sense of courage and a sense of mission.

Will we allow God to stir our heart? - Will we be obedient to "tell the full message of life in Jesus"? We can rest assured that if our purpose is to glorify God, then no one will be able to stop us. We can rest assured that if our purpose is to help bring deliverance for the people in helping them find Jesus, then no one will be able to stop us.

Will we commit to obey God and "tell the full message of life in Jesus"? - Will we be bold and not allow anyone or anything to discourage us?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

This lesson will look at a familiar text to many Christians. One that you may have heard taught on many times. Don't throw out any of the fine messages you have heard from this text, but approach the text with an open heart. Begin by taking a moment in prayer – ask God to give you fresh understanding and insight then read the lesson.

Read Acts 6:1-7 and make notes:

Some definitions may help:

“*disciples*” - translated from the Greek word “*mathetes*” meaning learners, pupils

“*Grecian*” - those Jews born in foreign lands that spoke Greek

“*Hebraic*” - those Jews born in Palestine that spoke Hebrew

“*distribution*” - translated from the Greek word “*diakonia*” meaning service;
the ministrations of those who render to others who need help

“*word*” - Greek word “*logos*” meaning spoken word; doctrine or teaching; -
don't forget that the "Word" is also Jesus Christ

“*full*” - Greek word “*pleres*” meaning full; covered in every part; thoroughly permeated
with

“turn this responsibility over” - Greek word “*kathistemi*” meaning to set one over a
thing;

to appoint one to administer an office

“*ministry*” (in V4) - Greek word “*diakonia*” - same as "distribution" in verse 1

“*Stephen*” - Stephanos = crowned

“*Phillip*” - Phillippos = lover of horses

“*Procorus*” - Prochoros = leader of the chorus

“*Nicanor*” - Nikanwr = conqueror

“*Timon*” - Timwn = honorable

“*Parmenas*” - Parmenas = abiding

“*Nicolas*” - Nikolaos = victor of the people

Early Church - 08 - When Problems Arise

The Church at Jerusalem had come to be made up of both Jews from the Hebrew sector and dialect as well as Jews from foreign lands that spoke Greek. Most likely the only major difference between them was the language they spoke. But, as is usual with peoples of different languages, there were probably some small social differences as well.

In the natural Jewish community, there were some tensions between the "pure Jews" who were born and raised in the Jewish lands - and these "less than pure Jews" who had been born in captivity of foreign lands. It too is only natural that some of these prejudices would come into the Church as people are converted.

While the Jews that were born of parents who had been taken off into captivity were still practicing the Jewish religion, they didn't speak the Jewish language.

They were of the same faith, but didn't speak the same language, - they were seen as inferior. This is the soil in which Satan begins to sow his seeds of trouble - in an effort to stop the ministry of the Church and to stop the preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting - that the dispute or disagreement that arose within the Early Church was not one of theological or doctrinal issue. The disagreement that arose was one of a very practical everyday thing. It was over the distribution of food to the poor widows.

It might be expected that there would be a greater number of poor widows among those who had come back from foreign lands. Many Jews who were born in lands of captivity and raised there would return to Jerusalem in their later years after they had earned their freedom.

They returned to Jerusalem in order to be buried near the Holy City. Having been born and raised in another land, they would not have family or property in or about Jerusalem. When their ability to work ceased, then they were at the mercy of those who would give to their needs.

Early Church - 08 - When Problems Arise

It is comforting to see that when this dispute arose, - the Apostles did not want to take on the primary responsibility of the physical ministry - at the cost of giving up the spiritual ministry. Neither did they want to ignore it for a while to see if it would just go away. They didn't set in trying to lay blame upon someone or some group for the problem or dispute. A dispute arose, they faced the problem at once, got a solution from God, and put it into action.

When a problem arose – the Apostles allowed the community of believers to select seven men in whom they could place their trust. Seven men in whom the community of believers had confidence - but who had to meet the qualifications of being "filled with the Spirit and wisdom."

The believers selected all seven men from the Greek speaking Jewish believers. It was the community of believers who selected the seven men and presented them to the Apostles. It was the Apostles who set them into their position of service.

The Greek noun *diakonos*, from which we get the word deacon, is NOT used in this passage - however, the Greek word *diakonia*, which is the work of a *diakonos*, IS used here. Remember - "*diakonia*" = distribution of the food, and ministry of the Word. Deacon was a place of service or ministry long before man made it an office within the organization. These seven men were not elected to oversee the financial or business affairs of the Church. They were appointed or ordained to do the ministry within the community of believers.

When the Apostles did not allow a physical need within the Church to distract them from the ministry of the Word - and did not ignore the physical need; but appointed Ministers of Helps to see to the physical need - verse 7 reports that "the Word of God advanced" and the "number of disciples increased" and even a number "of priest became believers."

It's hard to imagine a ministry anywhere that would not desire for the deacons and/or elders of that Church to be "filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom." No doubt there are many Churches that wish their Ministers were given to or dedicated to "prayer and the ministry of the Word."

Early Church - 08 - When Problems Arise

Every minister today, and every Church today should look at this text - and then pattern their work, ministry, and efforts after the Early Church - in that the Spiritual Leadership needs to be dedicated and focused upon prayer and ministering the Word of God.

Read Acts 6:8-10 and make notes:

Read Acts 8:5-7 and make notes:

Do you think, only Stephen and Philip performed signs, wonders, or miracles before they became "ministers of helps"? Verse 5 tells us that Stephen was "full of the Spirit" when they selected him. The text infers that all of the seven men were "full of the Spirit" when they were selected. It would be reasonable to believe all these men probably performed signs and wonders before, since they were "filled with the Spirit."

However; when you read the Scriptures prior chapter 6 in Acts, - it is quite clear in stating - the miracles and signs were performed by the Apostles. It makes this statement several times, "many signs and wonders were performed by the Apostles." (or at the hands of the apostles)

This is a significant turn in the ministry of the Early Church. From this point forward, we will see many people besides the Apostles, - being used to perform signs, wonders, and miracles.

Early Church - 08 - When Problems Arise

We see after the killing of Stephen and the beginning of the persecution of the Church, that Philip went to Samaria. Being chased from Jerusalem and away from his place of Ministry of Helps, it was a bold act on his part to go to Samaria. There had been a strong division between the Jews and the Samaritans for a great many years.

The Samaritans, who practiced the Jewish religion, were mostly half-breeds as far as the Jews were concerned. The Samaritans were refused permission to come into the temple in Jerusalem many years before - so the Samaritans built their own temple where they could worship Jehovah. This angered the Jews and deepened the gulf between them.

Philip went as a Jew among the Samaritans and preached Jesus to them. His preaching was accompanied by signs, wonders, miracles, healings, and casting out of demons.

The Early Church stressed prayer and the ministry of the Word. When physical needs arose, they didn't allow these to distract from the primary purpose of the Church. Even when it became necessary to divide internal duties, these were seen as various aspects of the one ministry. The Early Church was prepared and willing to adjust its procedures and organizational structure. It was willing to develop new post of responsibility in response to the needs.

Many times throughout Church history there have been those who have strived to take the Church back to the explicit practices of the Early Church. These people usually believe - that they are restoring the Church to a more Biblical pattern by reproducing the pristine forms of the early Church practices.

It would appear - that if we really want to be like the Early Church Believes, then we must constantly be engaged in the adapting of methods and structures to meet existing needs. This does not even imply that we are to adjust or modify the Word of God. The Word of God will remain unchanged forever! We had better continue to proclaim it, teach it, and preach it, just the way it is. The adapting and modifying is of the methods and organization. Write below some things we could learn from the Early Church based on the texts in this lesson?

Early Church - 08 - When Problems Arise

There are at least four words of direction that can be taken from the Early Church for a local body of believers:

- A: Don't get involved in the practice of assigning blame when things seem to be going wrong.
- B: Expend the energies of God's people in promoting prayer, proclaiming the Word, and correcting injustices.
- C: Don't be paternalistic in solving problems; which means trying to provide all the solutions and directions.
- D: Turn over the authority for working out solutions to others; maybe even to the ones who feel the effects of the problem the most.

When problems have arisen:

Have we fought change in structure or methods?

Have we sought to find someone to blame?

Have we desired to offer all the solutions?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the Gospels, there is an account of Jesus sending out the Twelve in groups of two. Jesus called the Twelve together and instructed them to go to no cities other than the "lost sheep of Israel."

Read Luke 9:1; Mark 6:7; Matthew 10:7-8 and make notes:

The results were obvious: Mark 6:12-13 - They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Later on Jesus sent out 72 in groups of two :

Read Luke 10:1; 10:9; 10:17-20 and make notes:

Early Church - 09 - Willing To Serve

After having been given this opportunity - and after having seen this with their own eyes, it is hard to imagine that they wouldn't try to keep it going. But we see in the Gospels just a short time later - when the Disciples had returned and were once again traveling along with Jesus - they were unable to heal.

Read Luke 9:38-40; Mark 9:28; Matthew 17:15-16 and make notes:

When the Disciples were sent out two by two and they were able to heal the sick and cast out demons - it was by the anointing from Jesus. They were ministering by the Power of the Holy Spirit, - but they were simply sharing in the anointing that came from Jesus upon them. They did not receive the Holy Spirit until after Jesus ascended to be with the Father in Heaven.

Since they had been ministering under the anointing, - they were no longer able to minister in that way when the anointing was lifted. Isn't it interesting - after the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the Disciples, only the Apostles performed signs and wonders:

Read Acts 2:43; 5:12 and make notes:

Early Church - 09 - Willing To Serve

Then things changed from the time of the events in Chapter 6 of Acts:
Read Acts 6:3-8 and make notes:

The people selected the seven men and presented them to the Apostles. We are told in Acts 6:7 that the “Word of God spread”; the number of disciples increased in Jerusalem, and a large number of priests became believers.

That alone would have made the action successful, but there is more! Then something noteworthy starting happening with “the Seven” who were chosen to make sure food was distributed to the widows:

Read Acts 6:8 and make notes:

Philip, one of “the Seven”, went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. Read Acts 8:5-7 and make notes:

Read Acts 8:26-40 and make notes:

Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch traveling along the road to Gaza. When Philip explained the Scriptures to the eunuch, the eunuch believed and it states they stopped the chariot and both of them went into the water – and Philip baptized the eunuch.

It doesn't tell us where on the road Philip was, - but at the very least, Philip would have been translated some 40 miles. Philip was "zapped" from one place to another long before the imagination of man invented Star Trek was "beaming" a person from one place to another.

What made the difference? Some would have us think beet it was what happened in Acts 6:6: "They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them." However, when we look at the text it clearly states - these men were already "filled with the Holy Spirit". And it is fair to say these men were covered over with the Holy Spirit", and "completely permeated with the Holy Spirit."

They didn't receive the Holy Spirit at this time - they already had the Holy Spirit. There are many people today who "have the Holy Spirit" and yet they ARE NOT performing signs and wonders!

There was some importance for the the Apostles to "lay their hands upon" the seven. This was a traditional custom of bestowing authority, or acknowledging a person among the people. However, it did not bestow the Holy Spirit. It was a visual aid to stimulate the seven - to begin to be obedient to the Holy Spirit - and to get active doing the work of the ministry.

What was different now? Before, all of the Disciples, except the Apostles, were busy just sitting around and observing what the Holy Spirit was doing through the Apostles. They had received the Holy Spirit and were doing nothing with the Holy Spirit that they had received.

AND NOW – They became busy ministering to those around them with the Holy Spirit. Once they began to minister to those around them, they found times the Holy Spirit was willing to perform signs and wonders through them as well.

What's holding back the work of the Holy Spirit today - is nothing more and nothing less than Disciples who have received the Holy Spirit – but are completely content to just sit around and watch the "ministers" PERFORM. When we begin to minister to those around us - we will see the Holy Spirit is just as willing to perform signs and wonders through us.

Why aren't more people ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit today? Some are simply lazy and don't want to do anything. But many are discouraged and dis-illusioned by what they see.

Hopefully this will help explain the large scale disillusionment we are experiencing in our society today: My wife is a witness to these two facts:

- It is nearly impossible for me to stay awake late into the night.
- When I go to sleep, it is nothing short of a miracle for anything to wake me up for at least two to three hours.

In the fall of 1992, I had watched the first half of several of the league play-offs for baseball - not able to stay awake to see all of any of the games. The Braves had not performed very well throughout the playoff. In a couple of the games during the time that I watched, - they even seemed to be playing with no more skill than little league players would have.

In the last game of the playoff - the one that would determine who would get to go to the World Series - I knew that I was going to sleep around the sixth inning - the Pirates were winning and the Braves weren't playing as well as they could - I said, "The Pirates deserve to win," and I went to sleep accepting it that way.

My wife, who never falls asleep without turning off the T.V. was going to watch a little longer. She went to sleep and left the T.V. on. The Holy Spirit woke me up a short time later - it was the ninth and last inning of the game - the bases were loaded with Braves and one of their known "Big Guns" was coming to bat - they only had one out.

When I saw who was coming to bat - and realized that the bases were already loaded - and there was only one out - it just stood to reason that the Braves could get the two runs needed to win this game.

I watched as the "Big Gun" came to bat and - STRUCK OUT! They still had one out to go - if only they will send one of the other "Big Guns" - they can still pull this thing off.

Practically all of my hopes disappeared when they announced a pinch hitter was coming up to bat and it was some name that I did not know. In this most important game of the season so far - in this last chance at bat for the Braves - when everything was at stake - they didn't send one of the tried and proven performers - they sent out this unknown.

My thoughts were - perhaps they had accepted the loss - and were allowing this man to have the chance to say - he played in the play-offs by coming to bat this one time. If you remember this game, then you are aware that this "unknown" hit the ball - the tying run came in - then the winning run slid into home plate and the Braves became the league champions. They not only come out of the hole - but became the champions at the very last time at bat of the very last contest of the season.

It would have been just as much of a win, if they had held the lead all the way through the playoffs. But they had not had the lead since the early part of the playoffs - they had been behind - it seems that their enemy was just a step ahead of them. But the Braves kept on going to bat - they kept right on trying - and they DID NOT put all of their hope in the proven performers.

Early Church - 09 - Willing To Serve

Even if it was at the very last minute - even if it was at the very last time at bat - it still doesn't change the fact that they became the league Champions – and went on to compete in the World Series.

Today - in the Spiritual contest that is being played out in our lives - when we look at the circumstances and situations in the natural - when we look at the activities of those who are supposed to be Christians - when we look at all those who seem to be ignoring the ministry of the Church - we may be tempted to say, "Well, the spiritual forces of darkness are simply working harder than the Christians" - "the Christians aren't even trying" - "the Devil and his team deserve to win".

It doesn't matter that we may appear to be behind right now!

It doesn't matter that we are coming down to the end of time!

It doesn't matter that many of the Church's "Big Guns" are striking out!

All that is needed - is for the people of God to submit themselves - and be willing to go out there and take a swing at whatever is thrown.

I don't know whether we will win in the very last inning - of the last game - or if we will be able to take the lead and hold onto it until the end - But I do know that WE WILL WIN!

The Braves did not have that going for them! They did not know that they would win - they were just hoping that they would. We KNOW, from God's Word, that we will win!

How can we possibly even consider giving up? How can we even consider losing hope?

There is a tremendous message for every sports team of every age in what happened with the Braves in the league playoffs - "Keep on playing to win right up until the last minute of the game - no matter what the score is and no matter how the game has been going."

Wouldn't it be tragic if our local sports team caught hold of the message and the Church missed this message?

Early Church - 09 - Willing To Serve

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The Church came under direct and purposeful persecution immediately following the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit. While the "new born" smell was still upon the Church - they dragged one of the young men of the church out of the city and stoned Stephen to death.

Read Acts 8:1-3 and make notes:

While the Disciples of Jesus were fleeing from the persecution in Jerusalem - they were spreading the Gospel - the remainder of chapter 8 gives the account of Philip and the mighty works of God that came forth through him.

Read Acts 9:1-2 and make notes:

Saul was not content in just driving these Believers in Christ from Jerusalem - he felt that he must pursue them to wherever they tried to flee - not just within the bounds of Israel, but to the other countries as well.

This is from Saul's own testimony that he gave before Agrippa in Acts 26:11. With such a zeal to cleanse the "anti-god" people from the land - Saul joined a rather distinguished group - such as Phineas in Numbers 25, Elijah in 1 Kings 18 & 19, and Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees.

Early Church - 10 - God Blindness

These men were all prepared to go to great extremes of violence toward those they believed to be enemies of God. And there were others who had engaged in severe violence to rid the land of the "blasphemers" in the past – often with the apparent approval of God Himself. Here is a man, who is dedicated to serve His God, even to the point of causing physical harm if that is what it takes.

Read Acts 9:3-6 and make notes:

Saul's testimony in Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 22:6 tells us a great light fell upon him around noon. This great "illumination" that fell upon Saul's fleshly eyes must undoubtedly have fallen upon the inner man of Saul as well - just look at the complete turn around in the life of Saul that followed.

This narrative of the conversion of Saul does not explicitly say that Saul saw Jesus Christ - but if we look in verse 17 and verse 27 we see the testimony of Ananias and of Barnabas that Saul did see Jesus.

In 1 Corin 9:1 & 15:8 Saul says he did see Jesus. Acts 9:7 tells us the men who were traveling with Saul “stood there speechless” and they “heard the sound but did not see anyone.” Surely they would have seen the "flash of light" - it doesn't say that here, but in Acts 22:9 it does say that all those with Saul saw the light and were afraid.

Acts 26:14 Saul says "we all fell to the ground." The difference was, the others were able to get up – Saul was not able to get up. It does say, they heard a "sound" and they didn't see anyone. It states in Acts 22:9, the others did not hear the voice of the one speaking to Saul. They heard a sound but did not hear a discernible voice. This is paralleled in John 12:29 when God spoke to Jesus, the people standing near by said that they heard "thunder" - but did not hear a discernible voice.

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So, this "life changing" experience for Saul - had little if any effect at all upon the others that were with him.

Read Acts 9:8-19 and make notes:

When we compare Acts chp 22 & chp 26, we see what Ananias said to Saul confirmed what Saul had heard during his Damascus road experience. This is an important principle Christians today need to take heed of: "if God gives us a word through another Brother or Sister, then that WORD will confirm what God has already said to us, it won't be something new and different."

Read Acts 9:20-22 and make notes:

Is Apostolic Succession The Way to receive apostolic power?

The Apostleship of Paul and the part that Ananias played in healing him and Saul's being filled with the Holy Spirit, - will forever be a major stumbling block to those who teach that the Apostolic ministry can only come through one line of transmission - and that being from the twelve Jesus established. If the risen Lord Jesus could commission Saul in such an "irregular" way without any intervention from the "twelve",- then why could He not do it again and again in even other "irregular" ways?

Write here some of your thoughts on this:

The Church's first thought when powerful enemies of the Church arise?

The most voracious enemy of the Church can be converted and become a vital part of the Bride of Christ. When we see certain individuals, with civil authority and the blessings of others in places of authority begin to purposefully strike out against the Church - stating their agenda is clearly for the purpose of destroying the Church:

- . 1. we should not shrink in fear and despair -
- . 2. we should pray all the more for them that they will see Jesus - and become obedient to Him - and maybe be just as zealous to serve Jesus as they had been to destroy His Bride.

Experience has shown that when we find someone who feels they must destroy anything to do with Christianity – this is usually an indicator that this person is under a certain amount of conviction - so the more they are spouting opposition the more encouraged we should become.

I have met a great number of people who simply don't believe in Jesus as a Savior and don't see any need for a Savior. They don't even know whether they really believe that there is a God and a Satan. These people don't respond with strong opposition and threats to destroy me and the Church I belong to. They usually have that silly little smile that says, "I am not going to play your childish little game with you, so you just run along and play Christian with someone else."

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But when I have tried to witness to someone who is under conviction - those to whom God has spoken - those who have felt the "tug of God" upon their heart - and just simply don't want to give up the path that they are walking - these have been the ones who have responded with vehemence and verbal assaults and sometimes even physical assaults.

The more they are opposed to the Christian message, pray more and be more encouraged. This goes for your family members, neighbors, work place associates, and POLITICIANS.

Sometimes, people can become so "blinded" by their passion and enthusiasm for the cultural or traditional – that they simply cannot "See God" or his ways. Sometimes God has to blind us for a short time, just so we are willing to look at things differently.

Jesus said we cannot put "new wine into old wine skins." - For if we do, then we wind up losing not only the old wine skin but the new wine as well.

It is our human nature to want to hold on to whatever pattern and practice we currently have. When God desires to give us something new, and we refuse to be transformed we determine that we are not going to change - then sometimes He will strike us blind for a time - until we are ready to walk a different way.

Please note in this account - God told Ananias that Saul was praying. Let's talk about Spiritual Blindness for a moment.

It has happened to me, and I have seen it happen to a number of other Christians who were serving God. One day you find yourself "knocked down" and you can't see where you are to go from here. You find yourself helpless, and you don't know what to do or where to go. It is at this point that we are now willing to change and walk a different way - if that is what God wants us to do.

For those of us who have found ourselves in this situation,- we usually become discouraged, and sometimes even depressed. I have known a couple of people who became physically blinded after they were adults. They fell into a depression that was extremely difficult for anyone to handle.

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We do this when we find ourselves spiritually blind - what we should do is "PRAY" and eagerly search for the New Direction God has for us. If we had not been so stubborn about "not changing" our direction or our method - then most likely God would not have had to allow us to lose our vision.

And while we are staggering under the load of not being able to see where we are to go from here - just maybe we will pray and ask God for help and for guidance. We become so confident and comfortable in our methods that we don't seek guidance from God on a daily basis - and just go on doing things the same old way over and over and over.

When the Holy Spirit desires for us to go a different route for a while - we don't see it or hear it because we are content to just do things the way we have been doing them all along.

When we find ourselves without the vision of where to go from here - when we can't make out just which road and which direction we are to take from here - this is the time to fall before God and pray.

Some of us have fought depression and discouragement - concerning the agenda of certain political candidates who are threatening our future to serve Christ and the future of our Nation to be a Godly nation. We need to spend some times repenting of our attitude of fear and despair
– and pray for these people to see Jesus – and to become obedient to Him.

Some of us may still be fighting the feelings of discouragement and disappointment of being "spiritually blinded" - we get so hurt when we can't see just where it is that we are supposed to be going. As long as we sit around in the mucky grubs - we will get worse - and not better. But if we will repent for our stubbornness to change and submit ourselves to God - we will have our spiritual sight restored - and we will see a whole new way to go.

Early Church - 10 - God Blindness

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Prejudice and Partiality are found just about everywhere among every people group. Prejudice has probably been around since the beginning of time. There just may have been some prejudice with Cain and Able, along with the jealousy.

America has often been called a "melting pot", because people have come to this country from almost every other country. These peoples have shared communities, shopped at the same stores - their children have gone to school together - there has been inter-marrying between these peoples of different nations.

If America was truly a "melting pot" then there would be very little prejudice here. But the reality is that Prejudice is every where in our world today - every nation, state, city, and neighborhood. Prejudice exist even within families - between parent and child, brother and sister. Feelings toward and feelings against other people are a tragic reality. There seem to be two major reasons for prejudice:

- 1 - Feelings of Superiority
- 2 - Guilt

People are different in color, beliefs, speech, looks, behavior, ability, energy, position, status, social standing, and / or possessions. Prejudice arises quickly when people feel their differences make them better than others.

Mistreatment leads prejudice. If a person is mistreated by others, they are from that point forward prejudice against the type of person that mistreated them. This mistreatment can come in a variety of ways - ignoring, neglecting, joking, gossiping, opposing, cursing, and persecuting are just a few examples. This mistreatment brings about the attitude that this other person is guilty.

A Sinful attitude will also lead to prejudice. When we have a sinful attitude, even though we do not carry out the actual sin, we know that we are guilty within. We develop a strong prejudice against those persons that remind us of our guilty attitude. (examples - sinful attitude toward people of another race - toward homosexuals - toward those who are richer than we are)

Early Church - 11 - Breaking Prejudice

Read Acts 10:1-11 and make notes:

Cornelius sent some of his men to find Peter and to bring him back to Caesarea. Peter experienced a vision where God told him to "get up, kill and eat" - from a selection of animals; all of which the Jews considered unclean. Then the men from Cornelius arrive and Peter puts them up for the night and goes with them the next day.

Read Acts 10:24-26 and make notes:

This passage strikes a blow against prejudice. It shows us Jesus Christ desires to erase the prejudices and barriers between the various peoples of this world.

Perhaps some background will help. The Jews of that day, just like all other peoples on the earth, had developed their own laws and customs. Every Jewish child was born into this environment and was raised according to these laws and customs.

Early Church - 11 - Breaking Prejudice

Remember, it was stated earlier, one of the things that leads to prejudice was mistreatment, which brings about guilt? The Jewish people had been mistreated and persecuted more than any other people of the world. Through the centuries, the Jewish people had been conquered by one army after another. They had been deported to other nations by the millions. Even in the day when Jesus was among them in the flesh - they were an enslaved people by the Roman government.

Their religion, in particular their belief in God, was what they believed had held them together through all this. They had distinctive beliefs concerning:

A - The Sabbath - temple - inter-marriage -

B - worship and cleansing - diet, or foods that could be eaten.

The Jews were sure their beliefs kept them from alien beliefs - and from being swallowed up by other peoples and customs. Their religion was the thing that maintained their distinctiveness as a people and a nation. Because of this, they opposed anything or anyone that threatened or attempted to break the laws of their religion.

It appears that the Jews had misread or misinterpreted God's Word to them. God had surely called Abraham to come out from among his people to give birth to a new nation, the Jewish nation. But it was for the purpose that God would have a people that would be His witnesses and His missionaries to the rest of the World. God chose the Jewish nation out of grace - and not out of partiality - or because they were the only ones to accomplish some righteous feat.

God gave His Word to the Jews, and instructed them to proclaim it to the rest of the world and to tell the world about the True God. The Jews were to be an example to the others peoples on earth.

This is one of the major areas where the Jews failed. Instead of proclaiming God's Word and proclaiming God to the world - they separated themselves from the world. They claimed God's Word and His Law was theirs alone. The Jews became extremely prejudice -they built barriers between them and other nationalities.

Early Church - 11 - Breaking Prejudice

The Jewish prejudice of Jesus' day was so established that the other peoples of the earth were called "dogs" - they would not have any contact with a Gentile, and if forced to, they would go through a purification ceremony afterward. They would not help a Gentile woman giving birth, lest another Gentile "dog" should come into their world.

It was into such a world that the Church was born - a world of great prejudice - Jew against Gentile - Gentile against Jew - Gentile against Gentile. Northerner against Southerner - Southerner against Northerner. Skin color against skin color. Accent against accent.

How were these prejudices to be overcome? How were these walls and barriers to be torn down? That is where this passage comes into the picture.

God had never intended for Salvation to be kept from the rest of the world. It was never God's will that any should perish. The people to whom the Salvation of Grace through faith in Jesus was given were trying to hold it unto themselves alone.

God was about to swing upon the doors of Salvation to the whole world - so that every man could hear the Good News - so that Salvation would be available to every person. God begins to breakdown a major wall of prejudice - that wall that has been built between Jew and Gentile.

Cornelius was a soldier, a military officer. He was in charge of at least 100 soldiers from Italy. Cornelius was stationed in Caesarea, which was a Gentile city, - a place the Jews would not set foot unless absolutely necessary.

Cornelius represented the height of prejudice for the Jews - He was a Gentile, and he was also one of those who was currently oppressing the Jews - a Roman.

Cornelius was not worshipping one of the false Gods of the many Gentile nations - he was worshipping the One True God - the same God the Jews worshipped.

It is important to note, Cornelius had not become a Jew. He had not become circumcised. Perhaps he had some of the common prejudices of that day and would never even consider becoming a Jewish follower.

Early Church - 11 - Breaking Prejudice

It would have probably cost him his position in the Roman military. Cornelius received a vision from God:

He was in prayer - AND - He gave his attention to the messenger of God

Please note:

1 - His prayers and charity had come before God

2 - He was to send for a Jew named Peter and ask him what to do

Even though Cornelius had an enormous reverence for God and had been faithful in his service to God - He still lacked something. Cornelius was obedient and sent some of his men to find Peter and to escort him back.

Cornelius was a good and devout man - he worshiped the true God - he feared and revered God - he did good works and gave to the needy - he prayed continually - BUT Cornelius was NOT saved !

This is revealed in Acts 11:14 by saying that "he and his household will be saved." Alright, you might be thinking, that explains why he had so much prejudice, he was lost. No! That is not it. There is a Bible principle coming into play here:

Read Jeremiah 29:13 and see if you can identify the Bible principle:

Here was a man that was seeking God with all his heart, and God was going to see to it that he heard the Salvation message. That meant the wall of prejudice between Jew and Gentile had to come down. So, at the same time God was preparing Cornelius, the Gentile, to receive from a Jew - God was also preparing Peter, the Jew, to share with a Gentile.

Early Church - 11 - Breaking Prejudice

Peter was a strong individual and not easily swayed from what he believed. In his normal state of mind, he would never have welcomed these Gentile men it is very unlikely he would have traveled with these "unclean dogs" anywhere - and he simply would never have stayed in the home of a Gentile or even entered it to share .

So what changed Peter? Peter shared something in common with Cornelius - he prayed often - and he received his vision from God while he was praying, as did Cornelius. In spite of Peter being an Apostle, having walked with Jesus, he was still just a man - he still got hungry and thirsty -and he still had prejudices also.

Being saved, being spiritually mature, even being called to serve God doesn't make a person free of Prejudice. The Greek word translated "trance" is misunderstood today. It is more precisely "an ecstasy" came upon him.

He was so concentrated and so focused upon God - he got so excited that he lost all sense of this physical world about him. He was swallowed up in the thoughts of God. Peter had come into the presence of the Living God. Peter probably did not see himself as being one of prejudice.

He most likely saw himself as one who stood for what is right and pure. He probably thought he was standing against unrighteousness when he refused to have anything to do with that which is unclean.

In order for Peter to shake off the armor of Prejudice, it would be necessary for him to know - this was the desire of God in Heaven. Peter was shown a large sheet upon which there were all manner of unclean beast - he was instructed from God to "kill and eat".

Peter refused because these were common and unclean animals. What a tremendous spiritual battle must have been going on within Peter. He was determined not to eat or touch anything unclean - and here was His God instructing him to "kill and eat." You don't want to violate "Your Law" and you surely don't want to be "Disobedient to Your God." Peter was corrected by God, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Early Church - 11 - Breaking Prejudice

Peter had this experience 3 times before the vision ended. Can you imagine saying "NO" to God? (sure we can - most of us do that fairly often). Peter may well have been perplexed and not quite sure exactly what all this meant - but he was at least sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

It was the Holy Spirit that told him that men were down stairs looking for him - to go with them - not to hesitate. Peter obeyed the Holy Spirit and received the men, even though they were Gentiles.

It was unheard of for a Jew to allow a Gentile into a Jewish home, let alone actually invite them in. How do you suppose the Gentile visitors enjoyed the kosher food that night for supper?

Peter had already exclaimed he had NEVER eaten any unclean food. So we know - Peter was a devout Jew, observing all the many dietary laws. The "unclean" food issue was one of the major reasons, Jews would have nothing to do with Gentiles.

Isn't it interesting - the very thing in our life that we take such pride in regarding our walk with the Lord – sometimes is the very thing that winds up being thrown out onto the Spiritual garbage heap????

This text doesn't tell us just how much Peter understood from the vision at the time he received it - but it does tell us that by the time he arrived at Cornelius' home - Peter understood a great deal more than just food.

Read Acts 10:28 and make notes:

Early Church - 11 - Breaking Prejudice

Somewhere along the way - from the time that Peter saw the vision with the selection of "unclean" animals to choose from - and the time that he arrived at Cornelius' home - Peter understood - God was talking about a great deal more than just "food" - Peter said, "God has taught me!"

Read Acts 10:34-48 and make notes:

When finally given the opportunity, Peter gave the real "Good News". This is the way God intended for it to be!

Here are some suggested principles to take away from this text:

1 - It took God to tear down the wall of Prejudice.

It seems impossible for man to lay down his own prejudices - it takes a work of God performed in our hearts

2 - God humbled the people on both sides of the wall before tearing down the wall.

It seems the Pride we have concerning our service and faithfulness to God - actually strengthens our prejudices. We can not see the Prejudices fall until we become truly humble before God and man.

3 - We are not to go it alone.

Peter was venturing into "new territory" of obedience to God. Please note in Acts 11:12 that Peter did not go alone. He took orthodox Jewish brothers with him.

4 - It is not the idle who receive.

Cornelius was not idle while waiting for the arrival of Peter. He was busy getting people ready to hear what God was going to say to them.

Write down some other principles you think we can take with us from this text:

Today's Churches are frequently found to have a severe case of Spiritual Tunnel Vision. Many of these will acknowledge that they are somewhat narrow in their vision but believe that it is because they are "so focused" upon God.

If that were really the case, it would be wonderful - but the reality is that too many Churches today are suffering from Tunnel Vision and as a result they are not doing the Ministry that God commissioned them to do. One of the main causes of Tunnel Vision in today's Churches is Legalism in regard to Traditions.

The Vision of the Early Church was Narrow and very Traditional. How was God going to break the Church away from this traditional Judaic view of excluding the other peoples of the earth?

God saw the need to break the Jews away from - their thoughts of distinctions between themselves and other nations that leads to building walls and barriers between others and the cross. Peter is returning to Jerusalem after his ministry in Caesarea - the news of what Peter did traveled back to Jerusalem even faster than Peter did.

Read Acts 11:1-4 and make notes:

Peter told them of his experience upon the roof top while he was praying - and he told them of his trip to Caesarea and how that Cornelius had gathered a group together to hear what he had to say about Jesus.

Early Church - 12 - Tunnel Vision

Read Acts 11:15-17 and make notes:

The Apostles and the Brothers in Jerusalem, heard about Peter's preaching mission to the Gentiles in Caesarea. The news was bound to travel fast. It was unheard of for a Jew to fellowship with Gentiles, not to mention eat with them. What made it worse was that they heard that Peter actually baptized the Gentiles without requiring them to be circumcised them first.

It helps to remember that at this time practically every believer was a Jew. They had grown up committed to keeping the Law of Moses. When they accepted Jesus as the Messiah - and began to live as "Christians", they just viewed this as an extension of Judaism.

In their minds and according to the logic of their laws and traditions, if a person wanted to accept the Christ, then they had to become a Jew first. They had to be circumcised,- they had to commit themselves to the law of Moses, - and they had to observe all the ceremonies and rituals of Judaism.

Once a person had become a Jew and had done all these things,- then and only then could they receive Jesus as the Messiah, - and only then could they be baptized, and only then could they be accepted as part of the Church.

Just look at what Peter had done - He had allowed these Gentiles to receive the Word of God without having them circumcised. He had broken the Law of Moses by "going in with these uncircumcised and eating with them".

Early Church - 12 - Tunnel Vision

These Early Believers who were still loyal to the Judaic religion and traditions were just shocked. The Jerusalem Church was on the verge of being shaken to its "new born" foundations.

The basic beliefs of these early believers - the beliefs that Jesus had enlarged - were now being challenged. Peter had to give an answer for what he had done. Peter had to give some kind of explanation and it had better be good.

Verse 2 tells us that it was the "circumcision" segment of the Church that was criticizing Peter over his ministry activities. This could indicate that the Apostles and most of the Christian Brothers felt no particular contention or divisiveness. Perhaps the Apostles and the majority of the Christian Brothers trusted Peter to hear from God and to be obedient to God.

Perhaps they trusted Peter's walk with the Lord and felt that he most likely did have an adequate explanation for this unusual behavior. The Greek word translated "criticized"- diekrinonto - means to stand against or to take an opposite position, to take sides against, to create a division.

These people were creating strife, struggles, and discord among the believers. They readily opposed Peter - and the meaning of this word indicates that they did not just ask him about it but that they repeatedly accused him with it.

Tunnel Vision in Today's Churches:

Some people hang onto their religious forms, ceremony, rituals, rules, and regulations. They will place these things before the very lives and the salvation of persons souls.

Instead of their spirits rejoicing because more people were now saved and had come to a personal knowledge of Jesus - their spirits were full of contention and divisiveness because some of their religious practices had been violated.

Early Church - 12 - Tunnel Vision

Becoming too attached to rituals can blind us to God's purpose - to reach out to all people everywhere with the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ. We can become "so focused" upon performing the ritual correctly that we become "blinded" to the Mission.

We can spend so much of our effort in guarding against someone violating one of our "traditional whatevers" that we don't have time, strength, or manpower to carry out the Mission of the Church.

Every person on this Earth needs to be reached with the message of Salvation through Faith in Jesus - EVERY PERSON, no matter who they are, and no matter what kind of lifestyle they are living. The Church should not neglect telling anyone the Salvation message and the need for Salvation.

The Church that is being led of the Holy Spirit – Will Not Neglect the telling of everyone with whom they come in contact. And this will take place without limitations due to race, nationality, lifestyle, or any other distinction. The Church's mission is to reach everyone - the dirty as well as the clean - the perverted as well as the decent - the lower class as well as the upper class.

Jesus told His Disciples Matthew 24:14, "This Gospel of the Kingdom is to be preached in all the world..." He didn't say "just to the Jewish world."

Jesus told them on another occasion Matthew 28:19, "Go and teach all Nations..." He didn't say "just teach the Jewish Nations."

Luke 24:47 states clearly, "that repentance and the remission of sins should be preached in His name among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

In Acts 1:8, Jesus said, "You shall receive power after the Holy Ghost comes upon you... then be my witnesses to the utter most parts of the earth."

People with Tunnel Vision become focused upon the "tool" with which to do the work - and lose sight of the work to be done.

Tunnel Vision leads the Church to sin:

Some Churches commit what I am sure is a terrible crime in God's eyes. They try to monopolize the Gospel, keeping it only to themselves, and rarely if ever sharing it. They may begin by saying they will gladly share it with anyone who comes into their "little group" - but it isn't long before the "walls of prejudice" begin to spring up on every hand. They begin to build little walls of exclusiveness and begin to shut "certain kinds" of people out.

Legalist:

These are the ones that tried desperately to hold on to Judaic practices - we still have those with us today in the Christian Church. The Legalist in that day were truly impressed with Jesus and even professed Him - but they were never able to understand that Jesus wanted all people everywhere to be saved and to become one.

This battle was very real in the beginning days of the Church sadly, but it is still among us. Isn't it interesting, all through history, even in the early days of the Church, there have always been those who simply could not follow Christ alone. There have always been those who would lay the burden of the law, or some form of legalism, upon those who would follow Jesus. They were called those of the "circumcise in that day - but today we can just call them the "legalizers"

Correcting Tunnel Vision:

Sometimes in order to do the Lord's will in reaching and evangelizing, - we have to break with tradition and buck the tide of doing things the way they have always been done. When we do, we surely can expect to receive criticism from those who are the legalist and the traditionalist.

The True Disciple of Christ will remain faithful to what Christ ask them to do, just like Peter did. The True Disciple does what God tells them to do. The True Disciple does all that they can do to reach out and share Jesus Christ as Savior with the world around them.

Early Church - 12 - Tunnel Vision

God's vision for the Church has always been wider than what most people are willing to see - Peter was led to reach out to the "unclean ones" near by - and Peter was led to reach out to the contentious ones right around him. Peter didn't spend much time making excuses. He simply told them that God had directed him, and what happened when he obeyed.

Peter stressed the broader vision of the Church's mission - the door of Salvation being open to all men everywhere - Peter also stressed the intervention of God Himself - God moved, revealed, and directed.

This same word is to us as the Believers today, "We are to make no distinctions, and take every opportunity to share the Gospel of Salvation in Jesus. " Just look at John 3:16: "For God so loved the World, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Read Acts 11:16-18 and make notes:

Looking at verses 16-18, we see that Peter understood something rather significant: He remembered the Word of the Lord, and he realized that the Baptism of Jesus is more important than the Baptism of John. Being baptized with water is good and we should do so - but being baptized with the Holy Spirit is of greater importance.

Peter said that when he saw that God had already Baptized these Gentiles with the Holy Spirit - "who am I that I should object to what God is doing"? Peter had nothing to do with these Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit -that was all God's doing. Peter was trying to get them to understand that Jesus was the Messiah and the Savior of mankind. They believed, then God gave them the Holy Spirit; with no ceremony, no ritual, no tradition observed.

The Message of Jesus brings repentance:

Repentance is of God. If there were no Holy Spirit at work today, then there would be no repentance. Repentance leads to receiving life. Repentance allows us to receive Jesus. Jesus IS eternal life to all who believe.

God opened up this tunnel vision of the Church early in it's infancy - We **MUST NOT ALLOW** our vision to become narrow again. Taking the Message of Salvation in Jesus is the "Magna Carta" of the Church - telling people that they can have life and have it in abundance and have it for eternity, in Jesus, is our mission.

Not all Traditions are bad. Not all rituals are bad. Not all ceremonies are bad. There may be some that are bad sometimes but not bad always.

How do we identify the things that cause Tunnel Vision?

ANYTHING that stands in your way or slows you down, in sharing the Gospel of Salvation - is to be shunned, stepped over, broken, or pushed aside. **ANYTHING** that makes it possible to share Life in Jesus is okay, even if it does break someone's rules or traditions. If it leads us away from the Primary Mission of Sharing Jesus - then it needs to be removed from our path and practices.

A good example can be seen in our observance of Christmas. It should be a time set aside to remember the birth of our Savior. We need to remember just what it was that He was Born to do. That will help us prevent "tunnel vision" and keep our eyes wide open to the mission and opportunity. Can you think of other traditions that could actually help us prevent Tunnel Vision if they were kept in proper perspective?

Early Church - 12 - Tunnel Vision

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

There are so many different kinds of churches today. A great variety of types of worship services – a fairly wide range of teaching or preaching styles – and several different ways of governing the local church. What should the Church be like?

We are going to look at a pattern of what the Church should be. Antioch was the third greatest city of the Roman Empire. It followed only Rome and Alexandria in size. The city had over 1/2 million people. When Rome captured Syria, Antioch became the capital of Syria.

The city was dominated by Greek culture while it had a fairly large Syrian and Jewish population. Antioch was located approximately 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. As the third major commercial and cosmopolitan center of the Roman world, it was always quite active with the hustle and bustle of businessmen, salesmen, laborers, and visitors.

Antioch was known to be quite tolerant of religions, and forbid no religion. Antioch was the home of the great temple of Daphne, an immoral god. Antioch was a city that history said had gone mad over sports and pleasure. Antioch had become somewhat of a cesspool of pleasure. In that day, Antioch had become a byword for sensual pleasure - bustling day and night with whatever pleasure man desired.

This sounds like a great place to begin a church and a church work - doesn't it?

Read Acts 11:19-30 and make notes:

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

There is no question that this passage covers one of the most significant events in history. It is the founding of the first Great Gentile Church.

As we look at this church, we see a simple yet dynamic pattern for all churches and believers to copy. In this passage there are three different Greek words used for witnessing and/or sharing God's Word. They show the ministry of the church and just how believers are to go about sharing Christ

In verse 20, the word translated "speak" is the Greek word "*lalountes*" – which literally means "speaking as in simple sharing of conversation among people." The believers shared Christ in their everyday conversation. They were saved - they had received life - and they were rejoicing in their hope. Their salvation, the presence and power of Jesus in their lives - was on their minds - and they worked it into their conversation.

In verse 20, the word translated "telling" is the Greek word "*euaogelizimenoí*" – which literally means "to declare and proclaim the gospel, to preach glad tidings of Jesus Christ." The believers actually preached and proclaimed the Lord Jesus.

In verse 23, the word translated "encouraged" is the Greek word "*parekalei*" which literally means "admonish, advise, challenge, entreat, urge, warn, encourage." Notice what the word of exhortation or the word of encouragement was - "encouraged to remain true to the Lord Jesus with all of their hearts."

This word is very close to the Greek word for the Holy Spirit – "*paraclete*." The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to exhort and to encourage toward Jesus. His presence and power in the believer is for the purpose of urging believers to remain true to the Lord Jesus with all of our heart and to bear a testimony of His glorious salvation.

What is the Minister's Job in the Church?

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

Read 2 Timothy 4:2 and make notes:

Note that in this first Great Gentile church - the minister's ministry was that of exhortation or encouragement to the believers. Look at what Paul said to Timothy as instruction to a minister.

When the fine lesson is finished - when all of the interesting illustrations are tied in - when all of the humorous examples are shared - no matter how eloquently and professionally it has been presented - if the people have not been ENCOURAGED to live for Jesus- if the people have not been ENCOURAGED to try to be more like Jesus - then the Minister has FAILED!

How many churches today are being taught by men and women who ARE NOT led of the Holy Spirit? The people are being taught history - and that is beneficial. The people are being taught geography - and that is beneficial. The people are being taught lessons from the Bible - but are the people being encouraged, exhorted, admonished, and urged to be more like Jesus?

On the judgment day - the minister will be not be judged so much on how fast the church grew - or how many people actually tried to live the life that was preached. The minister will be judged on - did he exhort and encourage the people to be more like Jesus.

It is not the minister's job to make a person live the Christ-like life! It is simply the minister's job to encourage people to do so.

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

Acts 11:19-20 tell us of the founding of the church at Antioch. After the death of Stephen, the persecutors of the church gained a new zeal and the church was forced to flee from Jerusalem. It is interesting, not everyone of the church left Jerusalem - but most of the believers did.

The Apostles stayed in Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that as the believers were scattered - that they did not become discouraged about their belief in Jesus just because of the persecution. In fact as they were scattered - they shared their new found faith in Jesus. The church at Antioch was born by lay believers sharing Christ.

Read Isaiah 45:22 and make notes:

The gospel of Christ began with the Jews - but praise God it is a message of hope and deliverance and salvation for the whole world. God desires for all men to come to His Son, Jesus Christ, that they will be saved through Him.

Those first believers probably did not fully understand Jesus at the time when He said "go into the highways and as many as you find, bring them to the marriage" - but He was sharing that the first invitation would be to Jew, but that all would be invited in the end.

Read Romans 10:12 and make notes:

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

The statement in Romans 10:12 "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile", helps us understand that God never meant to have churches divided over color, or nationality, or style of government, or anything else.

Jesus had established a Great Church among the Jews. He had told his disciples to wait at Jerusalem until they were empowered from on high. But Jesus had also told them that they should go into all the earth - making disciples - teaching them all that He had taught.

It wasn't Jesus' plan that a church be established among the Jews and that was the end of it. It was His original plan, that after the Jews had become the Church, that they would take it to the Gentiles. They weren't doing that - they were staying in Jerusalem. If you wanted to get into what the church was experiencing - you had to go to Jerusalem.

A little persecution changed all of that and the church was taken to the gentiles as was the original plan. The Church was born through the hand of God.

God overruled the stubbornness of the Jewish church to stay at Jerusalem. God overruled the persecution. God overruled the fear and trauma of the persecuted believers. God overruled the pleasure madness of sins at Antioch.

Read Luke 1:79 and make notes:

God's sovereignty is seen in the birth of the church at Antioch among the gentiles. Luke 1:79 helps us understand why Jesus came.

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

Because of obedient and faithful lay believers - the Great Church of the Gentiles was born at Antioch. Remember, that Antioch was not a place that would seem to be open to the gospel. If we were looking for a place to minister and we came upon Antioch - most of us would say, "we better leave this one to the 'big guys'".

That was not God's plan and I thank Him so very much that it was not. If all the great works and all of the great churches had been started by the "big guys", the "heavyweights" in the Spiritual things - how many lay believers could ever be convinced that God would do anything through them?

We don't have to wait to become one of the "big guys" in the kingdom. If we are obedient and faithful, that is all that God requires and that is all He needs to accomplish great things.

Okay, the mother church at Jerusalem heard about this new church that has begun in Antioch. Remember how they responded when they heard about the evangelistic work that had taken place in Samaria? A similar response and attitude was taken when they were told that these Gentiles have begun a church. Refer to Acts 11:

v22 - they sent ministerial help - they sent encouragement v26 - they sent teachers
They sent a missionary disciple to help this new church – Barnabas. And just look at his qualifications:

v24 - he was a good man - full of the Holy Spirit - full of faith.

Barnabas was aware of the Spirit's presence and power. Barnabas had the faith to believe with this people the fruit of the Spirit would be manifested there. Barnabas was not just a "man of faith" and he was not just a "Spirit filled man" , he was a "good man". Barnabas was as good on the outside as he was on the inside.

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

Look at what happened when they received a Spirit Filled leader - a great number of people were brought to the Lord Jesus – v24. They had already experienced a great number turning to the Lord from the testimony of the believers that birthed the church there at Antioch. But now with the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit - they were seeing another great number of people come to the Lord.

When a church is led of the Holy Spirit - they will reach people. The believers will be witnessing faithfully. The church will show a genuine --- interest in others.

When the church grew to a notable size - they sought additional teaching staff. v25 Barnabas went and looked for – and found Paul – and brought him back there to teach and instruct this gentile church.

The church met consistently training. The purpose for the church meeting together was to be taught about the Lord and His Word. The believers hungered for the Word and wanted to be fed on it. They did not have to be begged or enticed or bribed to come. How does that compare with most churches today?

The church at Antioch developed quite a heritage for itself and for Christ. The believers at Antioch were the first to be called "Christians". This was a "nickname" given to the believers by the unbelievers. It was not meant to be complimentary but was originally used as a slur - "you are just like that one who claimed to be something and just look, he's dead now, and gone" - "you are trying to be like that one who claimed to be god, yet he couldn't even save himself from death on a cross" - "it wasn't like he had to hurry or anything - he had several hours to get himself off of the cross before he died" - "you are trying to be like that lunatic" - "unlearned, ignorant".

It wasn't meant to be complimentary, but think about it - "Christ like" - like Christ - not bad. The believers began to take the name "Christian" and to wear it proudly.

From the experience and response of the believers at Antioch - "Christian" became the name by which the whole world would identify the followers of Jesus Christ. It wasn't the believers that first called themselves "Christian" - it was the unbelievers - the world!

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

Now for the really important question: are we a Christian because we say we are ? Or - are we a Christian because the unbelievers around us., say that we are?

We may be a believer - but if we have to tell people around us that are "Christ like" (a Christian) – then we are probably not really all that Christ-like. We are becoming Christ-like when those around us say it is so. Again, we can be a Believer, but we are not a "Christian" unless the unbelievers accuse us of it!

Do the unbelievers around us see us trying to be like Jesus Christ?

There is one more thing to see in the example of this Great Gentile Church. Refer to Acts 11:27-30. In these verses, we see the church had launched a mission program. Some of the prophets had come and prophesied that a severe famine would be coming. We are told here that the famine came some 5 to 15 years later, during the reign of Claudius.

There was a prophecy that there would be a time of great need among the believers. The church responded by deciding they would help the believers in other areas with whatever they had. They shared money and supplies - everyone sent relief according to their ability.

This new church - this gentile church is seen launching a mission project. They even shared their ministers - look who they sent - Barnabas and Paul. They sent the best they could send, of all that they had - money, supplies, and ministers.

When a church is being led by the Holy Spirit - they will show a sincere interest in helping believers everywhere.

The first time the title "prophet" is used in the early church is in v27. The prophet of the new testament church has a ministry to edify, exhort, and comfort the church. This is along with the gift of telling what was coming (telling of future events).

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

The pattern of the New Testament Church:

A - the church is born

B - the church is followed up and taught

C - the church seeks additional teaching staff they meet consistently for teaching

D - they live uprightly before the unbelievers

E - they launch a mission effort

The main focus of this pattern of the Great Gentile Church at Antioch is on the believers being called "Christians"!

Who calls us a Christian?

We can come together regularly -

We can have some really great times together -

We can do some wonderful ministry to the needy in this area -

We can send missionaries out -

We can send supplies and finances to missionaries -

We can wear all the right symbols we can say the right words -

BUT do the "unbelievers" we know, - the ones that we work around, live around, do business around - do they accuse us of being or at least trying to be "like Christ"?

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

Make two list:

List 1 – the evidences that I look "Christ-like to the unbelievers around me

List 2 – things I need to change to be "Christ-like" to the unbelievers around me.

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

A Summary and/or Meditation from this study:

“I'm looking for a Church”

Each member was given a measure of faith each member received some spiritual gift
each member prayed for another

Each member strengthened another each member rejoiced with another

Today, we tend to think of the Early Church as “Bigger than Life” spiritual giants

The Church of 120

After all the miracles Jesus had performed

After all the people who had personally been blessed only 120 ?

Starting out Casting Lots to fill what they perceived as vacant positions too many local churches today are led by the wisdom of man rather than Divine Inspiration of the Holy Spirit

Babel Judgment rescinded

Let us be about building bridges and fellowship - instead of dividing walls

Helping the Needy

We are to be giving what is on the Inside – instead of what is on the outside

Speaking The Truth

We need to be praying and asking God to help us speak His Word in Boldness

The Full Message

Churches today tend to tell the part of the message that will attract or appease we are told to “Tell the Full Message”

When Problems Arise

When the Church stresses Prayer and Ministry of the Word -

Problems are dealt with when they arise – instead of damaging the church

Early Church - 13 - Gentile Church

Willing To Serve

Disciples sent out two-by-two - much ministry took place

God Sends Blindness

Sometimes God sends blindness so we are willing to look at things differently

The “irregular” method of God calling and anointing Paul for ministry

Let's us know that it isn't about a continuous succession of apostolic anointing

Breaking Prejudice

Prejudice and Partiality have been around a long time – common among people

It took God to tear down wall of Prejudice

God humbled people on both sides of the wall before tearing it down Jesus desires to erase All Prejudice and Partiality from the Church

Opening Tunnel Vision

Many Churches today suffer from Tunnel Vision Often missing God's New Direction

Tunnel Vision leads churches into sin

Tunnel Vision must be corrected in order for Evangelism to take place

A Great Gentile Church

Does the average Church today – resemble the First Great Gentile Church

We truly should be trying to be more like the Early Church –

Not in the kind of clothes -

Not in the kind of services – style – or liturgy.

All of that was only significant to the culture and tradition of the day and community.

We should be copying the dedication – the Spirit Led – aspects of the Early Church.