

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

NOTES 9

ACTS 2:37-47

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

Paul finally finishes the body of the first inductive sermon recorded in the history of the church. He has shown from Scripture that the Lord Jesus really is the Messiah promised to Israel, and the Jews listening to him are pierced in their hearts and ask, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

Peter’s response is profound but simple: Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

Peter did not tell them to “believe” and be baptized, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:31. The question that arises is, why did Peter tell them to repent instead of to believe? How are repentance and belief—saving faith—related?

Jesus Himself preached repentance. Mark 1:14-15 says that after John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee “proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”

Again in Luke 13:1-5, there were Jews who were telling Jesus about some Galileans who had been killed by Pilate. Jesus asked them if they thought those Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered that way and ended by admonishing, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

After Jesus’ resurrection, he met two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and “he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’” (Luke 24:45-48).

Not long after Pentecost, Peter and John were again in Solomon’s portico on the temple mount. They had just healed a man, and Peter began his second gospel sermon recorded in Scripture. He said in Acts 3:19, “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.”

Acts 5 records the story of the apostles being jailed for preaching, but an angel released them from prison, and they returned to the temple about daybreak and began preaching again. The captain of the temple guard brought them to the Council before the high priest, and Peter and the apostles told the Council, “We must obey God rather than men.” Then Peter recounted that God raised up Jesus, whom they had put to death by crucifixion. He drove the point home: “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”

Peter clearly articulated that the priests were responsible for having Jesus crucified, but God raised Him up. Then Peter calls them to repentance for forgiveness of their sins

Later in the book of Acts, Paul is preaching to Gentiles in Athens. These people do not have a history with God’s law or His special revelation to humanity. They are pagans, and Paul introduces them to God the creator, the sustainer of life, the omnipresent one who is never far from any of them. In verse 30 Paul says, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

Paul was saying that God had not judged his audience because they worshiped idols in their ignorance. But now their time of ignorance was over, and God was appealing to them to repent of their godlessness because God has fixed a day when He will judge the world through Jesus—the one He raised from the dead as proof that He will judge the world.

In Acts 20 Paul gives a farewell talk to the Ephesians. He reminded them that he had consistently been “testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 21).

And to the Corinthians Paul wrote, “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10).

Repentance is not distinct from belief in the Lord Jesus. The gospel that saves us is the news that Jesus died, was buried, and was raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:1-4), yet this gospel does not effect salvation and changed lives in those who do not believe they need a Savior. The blood of Jesus is for the remission of sins. It is the amazing reality that we do not have to bear our own guilt that makes the gospel so incredible.

People who do not recognize their own depravity do not understand their need of a Savior. When people are not aware that they are unable to seek, respond, or live for God, no matter how hard they try, they will not find relief in the cross.

Many of us were raised to believe that if we prayed hard enough, we could avoid sin. That belief was heresy. We are born depraved, objects of wrath (Eph 2:3) by nature, citizens of the domain of darkness (Col 1:13). No matter how sincerely I prayed or how compulsively I prayed, I could not avoid sin, and I felt absolutely desperate when I found myself divorced after praying and praying throughout that marriage. God had to show me I could not avoid sin by praying because I was depraved. Nothing I did could fix my penchant for sin,

When I realized I could not avoid sin in any way, I finally began to realize what a miracle it is that God forgives me because Jesus took my sin.

When Jesus, Peter, Paul and other apostles preached the gospel and called people to repent, this call is not separate from belief. Repentance is a component of belief; it is the admission that I have reason for needing a Savior. Believing that Jesus died for sin without believing I personally am beyond all hope of serving Him without His blood covering me does not equal saving faith,

A person can believe Jesus died to save mankind without internalizing that fact as a personal transaction. He didn’t die impersonally for the unnamed hordes of people who have lived. On the contrary, He died for each of us individually. He knew from the foundation of the world that we would be born, and He knew the shape of our individual brokenness. He knew we could not pray hard enough to avoid sin; He knew we had to be saved and forgiven by an external Substitute.

When Peter called the Jews at Pentecost to repent, he was calling them to vulnerable honesty. It wasn’t enough for them to simply accept the mental concept of Jesus’ death and resurrection as an historic even, like the call of Abraham or the flood. Unless a person casts

his own eternal future into His care, they would not benefit from His blood.

In other words, the call to repent is inseparable from belief. Unless we believe that Jesus died as our personal substitute, we cannot risk repenting. Facing our own deep depravity without knowing there is hope would destroy us. Knowing Jesus is our Sacrifice and Substitute gives us the courage and the trust to own our sin and surrender it to Jesus. Our belief gives us the ability to repent—and if we do not repent, our belief is only cognitive.

The spiritual reality of Jesus' death and resurrection is something we can understand only by the Holy Spirit's conviction. When we experience that conviction, we cannot risk ignoring it. We must let go of our control and surrender to Him, owning and offering Him our sin and receiving His blood and His forgiveness. It is a mystery too great to plumb; it is the reality without which we would perish eternally.

YOU AND THOSE FAR OFF...

In verse 39 Peter says, "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

The "promise" to which Peter refers is identified in the previous verse; forgiveness and the "gift of the Holy Spirit." The question of who "you" and the "far off" are was also addressed by Paul in Ephesians 2:13-18. In verse 13 he says, "you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." In verses 17-18 he further says, "And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

In Acts 2, Peter is addressing Jews. He explains that the promise of the miracle of forgiveness and new birth was for them and their children as well as for those "far off".

In Ephesians 2, Paul initially addresses the Ephesians, saying, "you who once were far off have been brought near..." The Ephesians were gentiles. The gentiles were historically "far off" from God because they had not been chosen and given the special revelation of God's word: His law and the Psalms and the prophets.

Both Peter and Paul used the same language to describe the original contrasting states of Jews and gentiles; Jews were those who "were near" to God, enjoying His calling, and their chosen status as well as having His word and revelation defining their nation. The gentiles were those "far off," as Paul said, "at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12).

Now, however, both Jews and gentiles are recipients of God's promises which previously had been addressed to Israel. Jesus' shed blood and His resurrection opened a new, living way to the Father (Heb. 10:20), and because of Him, both Jews and gentiles have equal access to God through Jesus.

About 3,000 Jewish souls were added to the tiny new church that day. Acts 1:15 tells us to what they were added: "In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus."

The group waiting for the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension numbered 120 people. On the Day of Pentecost, that number increased by about 3,000. The first members of the church were Jews, and the apostles became the leaders of the very earliest church because they had received the commission from the Lord Jesus to be His witnesses. They had been with Him during His ministry, death, and after the resurrection, and they were eye-witnesses of all that had taken place. They had the experience and the authority to declare the truth about Jesus.

THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

First, the apostles' teaching came from Jesus Himself and from the Holy Spirit's making Jesus' words and the Old Testament come alive with meaning. Jesus' last words to His apostles were His famous commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

The job of Jesus' followers is to witness to the world of His life, death, and resurrection and His forgiveness of sin. This is the gospel once for all delivered to the saints.

This same gospel is what Peter preached in his Pentecost sermon as recorded in Acts 2:23-24. He preached it again in Acts 3: 14-15 in his second sermon after healing a lame beggar in the portico of Solomon on the temple mount. He said, "But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. "Again in this sermon Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah by referring to Him as the Holy and Righteous One—a description which could not apply to any mere human. He declares Jesus died—and he points out that his audience was involved in His death. Peter ends with the declaration that God raised Him from the dead.

Again in Acts 4:10 Peter iterates this simple gospel message as he addresses the rulers and elders of Jerusalem: "let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well."

Paul also had the very same gospel message. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 he states the classic definition of the gospel: "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."

Paul also wrote to the Corinthians that he would preach nothing among the except Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23), that he was determined "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). From the day the church was founded, there has been only one gospel message—the message Jude calls "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 9).

This message of Jesus Christ who was crucified, buried, and raised to life on the third day is the message that holds the truth for eternal life for the entire world. This is the only gospel message that is valid. Anything added to or deleted from this historic reality makes the message a false gospel.

Jesus is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the gospel and of our salvation. No part of salvation depends upon us. He is all we need.

PROPERTY IN COMMON

Acts 2:43 tells us the new Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit and the life of God with direct access to the Father for the first time Adam sinned, "kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. They "began selling their property and possessions" and were fellowshiping daily, eating their meals in each other's houses and praising God.

Some have read this passage and see in it a mandate for Christians to live communally, divesting themselves of property and holding all things in common. This conclusion however, is not supported by the whole book of Acts.

Acts 12 records the story of Peter being released from prison by an angel. When he emerged, stunned, he "went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were

gathered together and were praying” (Acts 12:12). This verse reveals that Mary had many believers gathered in her house to pray, but she was clearly the owner of the domicile.

Acts 17 records the anger of the Jews in Thessalonica when Paul preached in the synagogue. In a jealous frenzy, they picked up some ringleaders from the market place and formed a mob, storming the house of Jason, a local believer where, apparently, Paul had been staying. Again, Jason owned his house.

Acts 18:7 tells of Paul in Corinth who, when the local Jews resisted and blasphemed the gospel, left the synagogue and went to the house of Titius Justus, “worshiper of God” whose “house was next door to the synagogue.” Moreover, as he made his farewell speech at Ephesus, Paul said he taught them “in public and from house to house” (Acts 20:20).

Acts 21:8 identifies Philip the evangelist as having a house where Paul stayed in Caesarea, and verse 20 names Mnason of Cyprus who welcomed Paul into his home.

Paul ends his letter to the Romans with a long list of people to greet. In verses 3-5 he names Priscilla and Aquilla whom he calls “my fellow workers in Christ,” and he greets “the church in their house.” He greets them and their church in their house in 21 Corinthians 16:19 as well. Colossians 4:15 records Paul’s greeting to Nympha “and the church in her house,” and Philemon 2 names Apphia and Archippus “and the church in your house.”

Moreover, in his second epistle, John says in verse 10, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting.”

Finally, even the famous story of Ananias and Sapphira emphasizes that possessions are not necessarily to be held in common. After Ananias lied about the money he gave to the church, saying the amount given had been the entire amount of the sale price of their land, Peter asked him why he had lied to the Holy Spirit. “While [the land] remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 4:5).

The example of the earliest church is not an example of living commune-style but of realizing that what one has is for the benefit of the body. Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 not that the rich are to distribute their wealth and become equal with everyone else, but that they are not to be haughty, to trust their wealth, but to be generous, ready to share, rich in good works, thus storing up treasure in heaven.

2 Corinthians 8:9-15 carries Paul’s plea to the financially comfortable Corinthians to finish their promised collection for the poor in Jerusalem. He says the readiness to give is “acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” He states clearly that no one should give to the point they themselves are burdened, but that they in fairness share what they have with the members of the body who do not have.

Romans 12:10-13 contains this clear instruction: “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”

1 Timothy 6:6-10 says, “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”

In other words, we are to share what God gives us with the members of the body He brings to us. Notably, hospitality and contributing to the needs of the brothers are specific commands.

WHAT “BODY LIFE” LOOKS LIKE

Verses 42-46 of Acts 2 describe several characteristics of Christ-followers living in community. The first thing mentioned is their devotion to the apostles’ teaching—they immersed themselves in the gospel and in learning how to understand Scripture, which the apostles were both teaching as they explained the Old Testament and which, in some cases, they were writing as they corresponded with local congregations.

Furthermore, they devoted themselves to “the fellowship,” sharing meals and praying together. They experienced deep awe as they realized what it meant to be filled with the life of God and to be given His mind and discernment. Moreover, the apostles—God’s appointed leaders and teachers of this first generation church—were the vehicles of many signs and wonders God was doing as confirmation of their teaching and of Himself. “The gospel is true, “these miracles were saying to the people.

They lived together closely, and each considered what they had to be at the disposal of the others. They sold many of their possessions and used the money to provide for the brothers and sisters who were in need. They attended the temple together—the only public place of worship to God that existed then—and as Jews, that was their “home church”. They opened their homes to each other, serving meals to one another in their various homes, and they received their food with “glad and generous hearts” and praised God. They found favor in the sight of “all the people,” and God added new souls to their number every day.

Paul further describes the way a growing Christ-follower’s life will look. They will be marked by the “fruit of the Spirit”: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Importantly, these various characteristics are collectively called the singular “fruit” of the Spirit. Paul continues in Galatians 5:22-26 by saying those who belong to Christ “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” and will “walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

Romans 12 is a comprehensive description of what life in the body of Christ should be like. Each of us is to offer oneself to God as a living sacrifice. We are to consider ourselves to be members of Christ’s one body, and we are to be members to one another. We are to practice our spiritual gifts according to God’s grace which He has given us, and we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think but honor one another, knowing God has granted each person a measure of faith. No one is superior to any other. We are to be diligent, faithful, never repaying evil for evil, blessing those who curse us as we are diligent in serving the Lord and being devoted to prayer.

Ephesians 4:25-32 stresses that we are not to lie or slander one another. We are not to be angry or allow the sun to go down on our anger, thus giving the devil an opportunity to tempt and manipulate us at the point of our unresolved anger. We are not to steal, but we are to do honest work so we have something to share with everyone in need. We are not to allow “corrupting talk” to come out of our mouths but only talk that will build one another up, giving grace to those who hear. We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit and must put away “all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander” and malice. We are to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving to one another as Christ forgave us.

As Christ’s body, we are literally to treat one another as He treats us, taking our lead from Him as our Head.

MEDITATE

As you reflect on the miracle of Pentecost and what it set in motion—the church alive with the Holy Spirit—ask God to show you how He wants you to respond to Him. Ask Him to show you the role He wants you to play in His body. Ask Him to reveal what He wants you to surrender to Him, trusting Him to be your identity and fullness. Ask Him to show you how to live submissively in His presence and as a member of your fellow brothers and sisters.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

9

ACTS 2:37-47

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

STUDY

When Paul finishes his sermon, the listening Jews are pierced to the heart and want to know what to do.

- 1. Peter tells the assembled people to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. What is the relationship between “repentance,” “faith,”(which Peter does not name here) and baptism, and why did Peter emphasize repentance in this context instead of “believing”?**

Mark 1:15 _____

Luke 13:1-5 _____

John 3:16 _____

Acts 16:31 _____

Romans 10:8-9 _____

Ephesians 2:8-9 _____

Luke 24:45-48 _____

Acts 3:19 _____

Acts 5:31 _____

Acts 17:30 _____

2 Cor. 7:10 _____

Acts 20:21 _____

- 2. Who were those Peter identified as “you and...your children and all who are far off”?**

Ephesians 2:13, 17-18 _____

- 3. Verse 41 states that about 3,000 souls were added that day. To what were they added?**

Acts 1:15 _____

4. Verse 42 tells that the first converts devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and to prayers. What was the apostles' teaching?

Matthew 28:19-20 _____

Acts 2:23-24 _____

Acts 3:15 _____

Acts 4:10 _____

1 Cor. 15:1-4 _____

1 Cor. 1:23 _____

1 Cor. 2:2 _____

5. How are we to understand v. 45: "and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all as anyone might have need"? Does this mean Christians are to divest themselves of property and ownership?

Acts 12:12 _____

Acts 17:5 _____

Acts 18:7 _____

Acts 20:20 _____

Acts 21:8 _____

Acts 21:16 _____

Romans 16:3-5 _____

1 Cor. 16:19 _____

Col. 4:15 _____

Philemon 2 _____

2 John 10 _____

Acts 5:4 _____

1 Timothy 6:17-19 _____

2 Corinthians 8:9-15 _____

1 Timothy 6:6-10 _____

6. Describe the life of Christ-followers in community. What behaviors and fruits of the Spirit do you see among them?

Verses 42-47 _____

Galatians 5:22-23 _____

Ephesians 4:25-32 _____

Romans 12 _____

MEDITATE

What is the core of the gospel, and why does repentance play a central role in the good news? How is the Lord Jesus calling you to live as God’s child in His body? What is He asking you to surrender in order to live humbly and submissively in His presence and as a member of your fellow brothers and sisters?

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” 1 Peter 2:24-25, NIV