

Acts 2:41-47 A Pattern for the Church

Today is our annual meeting, so I think it's entirely appropriate to speak on the topic of the local church.

Acts 2:41-47 gives us a pattern for the church. What should a church be doing? How should it operate? What are its priorities?

This passage shows us how the early church functioned, and it gives us a pattern or goal to follow today.

Quote: [This passage] present[s] an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew if it is to have that unity of spirit and purpose essential for an effective witness.¹

We should be striving to follow the pattern set by the early church. We should have the same unity, purpose, and witness that we see evident in the church when it began.

Of course, all of this hinges on a proper understanding of the word "church." There is a lot of confusion and misunderstanding regarding that word. So what does it mean?

- The Greek noun translated "church" in the NT is *ekklesia*, meaning "a called-out assembly or congregation."
- Of the 114 times *ekklesia* is used in the New Testament, the overwhelming majority (about 100) refer to a local church. E.g., the church at Galatia, Corinth, Rome, etc. By far, the NT emphasis is on the local church.
- The NT church is a particular kind of assembly. A local church is . . .
 - ✓ A group of baptized believers in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41)
 - ✓ Sharing a common faith or body of truth (Acts 2:42, Jude 3)
 - ✓ Observing the ordinances of baptism (Matt 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42)
 - ✓ Carrying out the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)

¹ Polhill, *Acts*

- ✓ Organized with the offices of pastor and deacon (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1-13)
- ✓ Meeting regularly (Heb 10:25, Acts 20:7) for worship, instruction, fellowship, evangelism, and service.

Paul calls the church “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). The church is the center of God’s program for today. Anyone who claims to be a Christian, but is not engaged in a local NT church, is seriously out of order. Every Christian ought to be a part of a local church.

Now that we know what a church is, let’s consider the pattern of/for the church, and let’s think about how well our church is following this pattern.

I. The church baptizes its converts. .40-41

- A. Acts 2:41f is a record of what happened when the apostles preached the Gospel—cf. vss. 14f—a message by Peter and the other apostles. That’s what the church is called to do—preach the Gospel.
- B. .37, 41 Notice the order here: first you hear and receive the Gospel, then you are baptized. So conversion comes first, then baptism after that.
- C. One of the things that sets Baptists apart from other groups is that we baptize only converts, those who profess faith in Christ. We don’t baptize babies or anyone else who does not have a personal testimony of salvation.
- D. Further, while we believe that baptism is very important, we don’t believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. We don’t believe in baptismal regeneration. We believe in salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Baptism doesn’t play a role in salvation; it happens after salvation.

Trans: A church that follows the NT pattern baptizes believers after they make a personal profession of faith in Christ. If you have been saved but not baptized, baptism should be your next step—it is the initial step of obedience after salvation.

II. The church receives baptized believers into membership. .41, 47

Another thing we believe based on the teaching of the Bible is the idea of regenerate church membership. That implies two things.

A. First, we recognize the idea of church membership. A local church knows who is part of the body. It employs some form of membership.

1. .41, 47 On the Day of Pentecost, about 3000 souls were added to the church. The newly baptized believers were recognized as members of the church in Jerusalem; they were added to those who had already been saved and baptized.

2. The clear biblical pattern is that believers affiliate with a local church after they are baptized. Normally, you join the church that baptizes you.

B. Secondly, members of the local church must be regenerated, that is, born again, saved. You must make a profession of personal faith in Christ before you can become a member.

We insist that only those who personally profess to be saved can be members of the church. That's regenerate church membership.

Trans.: The clear NT pattern is that the local church receives into membership those who have been saved and baptized.

III. The church teaches the apostles' doctrine. .42a

A. "Doctrine" is simply "teaching." The NT church is based on the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.

B. Where do we find a record of the apostles' doctrine/teaching? In the NT. The NT is our sufficient guide for faith and practice. If something is not recorded in the NT, we simply don't do it. E.g., baby baptism.

C. .42 Note the words "they continued steadfastly." They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles; they were single-minded in their devotion to this teaching. They didn't corrupt or compromise this doctrine. That's what we should be striving to do as well.

Trans: Everything the local church does should be somehow linked to the teaching of the NT. The Bible, and in particular, the NT, is our highest and final authority for faith and practice.

IV. The church lives in fellowship.

This passages uses three very important words: .42b—“fellowship,” 46a—“with one accord,” .46end—“singleness of heart”

- A. The biblical word “fellowship” (*koinonia*) is based on the word “common.” To “have fellowship” with someone means that you share something in common with one another. Fellowship implies communion or communication based on something held in common or something shared. Essentially, fellowship occurs when partners share things in common.

The early church “continued steadfastly in ... fellowship.” One of the marks of a healthy NT church is that the members of that church live in partnership. That is, they see themselves as partners in a common work. They are participating with one another, sharing together based on common beliefs and goals. And they are able to continue steadfastly in that unity and harmony. They maintain that sense of partnership and cooperation in spite of problems that might hinder fellowship.

- B. .46a “with one accord” (ὁμοθυμαδὸν) – “of one mind,” .46end “singleness of heart”—both these words speak of unity and cooperation.

Quote: The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonise in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ’s church.²

We live the Christian life in union with other Christians of like faith and practice. Christianity emphasizes group unity and harmony. Our aim should be that we operate with one accord and with one mind.

² Online Bible Greek/English Lexicon.

- C. Note vss. 44-46. One of the most prominent uses of the word “fellowship” in the NT pertains to sharing material resources with other believers. In fact, the word “fellowship” is sometimes translated as “share.” That’s what the early church did—they shared with one another.
- D. As partners in Christ’s work on earth, we each need to share and invest with our partners in the pursuit of God’s goals for the church. Each partner must share the load.
- E. When you support the work of the church financially, that’s what you are doing—sharing in the labor. Our church supports missions; we are sharing in the work of reaching the world with the Gospel.

Trans: All Christians ought to be part of a local church where they can share their lives with others of like faith and practice. Partnership with others is one of the great blessings of the Christian faith.

- V. The church worships together. .42-47
 - A. .42 Worship includes listening to someone teach the Word of God—“the apostles’ doctrine.” We spend time learning the apostles’ doctrine.
 - 1. Doctrine—the teaching of Jesus and the apostles—is the foundation and center of our fellowship and worship. We unite around a common set of beliefs and practices.
 - 2. The church should insist that the teaching they get is strongly doctrinal in content and quality.
 - 3. A good church emphasizes both correct behavior and correct belief. Right behavior is based on right belief.

- B. Worship includes the ordinances
 - 1. Baptism (.41)
 - 2. .42, 46 The Lord's supper (Breaking bread??)
 - 3. These two ordinances are under the authority of the local church; they are local church ordinances.
- C. .42end Worship includes prayer. And notice that this is congregational prayer. The believers met together for prayer.
Individual, private prayer is good and necessary, but we should not neglect congregational/corporate prayer. **E.g.**, this afternoon.
- D. .47a Worship includes praising God. We often do this through music. A hymn is a song of praise to God. The church is to employ songs, hymns, and spiritual songs in its worship.

What about vs. 43—"many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." Are we following that pattern? We would be happy to follow that pattern *if* the apostles were still with us. The Bible teaches that the apostles had the ability to do miraculous signs and wonders. In fact, these miraculous abilities were the proof of one's claim to be an apostle. If we still had apostles in the church, they would still be doing the same kind of signs and wonders we see in the Bible. We have no genuine apostles today of the same quality as the original apostles. Thus, we do not take that part of this passage as setting a timeless pattern for us.

The rest of this passage presents a pattern to follow. We should be striving to be a church that

1. Baptizes those who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus alone to be saved;
2. Receives baptized converts into the membership of the church;
3. Teaches NT apostolic doctrine; we want to teach and affirm "sound doctrine";
4. Live in fellowship; we emphasize the importance of partnership among people of like faith and practice. We want to be of one accord, of one mind.
5. Worships through teaching the Word, providing the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, emphasizing corporate prayer, and praising God.

Every Christian ought to be a member of a church that follows that pattern.

No church follows this pattern perfectly, but we should certainly see this pattern as the goal/aim of our church. We should all aspire to fulfilling this pattern. We should all be involved in one way or another in the process of evangelism, baptism, teaching and learning, enjoying fellowship together, and worshipping the Lord in spirit and in truth.

If you are not a member of our church, but you want to participate in this great work, we invite you to join with us as we seek to fulfill God's pattern for his church.