

THE FOREST HILL NEWS



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Sunday:

Bible Study..... 9:30 A.M.
Morning Worship..... 10:30 A.M.
Evening Worship..... 5:00 P.M.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 P.M.

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A Learning Church Mack Lyon

The book of Acts is very exciting reading! It is God's Word and His story of a learning church. In the very first sentence, God boldly affirms His Son's triumphant resurrection from the dead with "many infallible proofs." Our crucified Savior showed Himself alive to His chosen apostles and studied about the kingdom with them for 40 days. Acts is the only divinely inspired history we have of this explosive beginning and the dynamic growth of the church Jesus built and loved and gave Himself for (Eph. 5:25).

The book of Acts accurately and boldly tells of the fastest growing movement of any kind in all the history of the world. In only about 30 years, the message of salvation and the church had spread into "all the world, and [was] bringing forth fruit" (Col. 1:6 NKJV). It is an amazing story, so you can imagine how surprised and disappointed I was when my preacher acknowledged in the church bulletin that he had not read the book of Acts or preached a sermon from it in 25 years.

THE PROMISED CHURCH

From the study of Acts, the student learns that the gospel's universal acceptance is not in its conformity to all the world's cultures or religions but in its sharp distinctiveness. The reader sees in Acts that God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." Surely then, "to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

In His last recorded conversation with the eleven (Acts 1:4-8), Jesus commissioned them saying "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (v. 8). While they watched, He then ascended into heaven!

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, Matthias had been added to their number. The twelve were all with one accord in one place and, according to His promise, the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1-4). Devout Jews from every nation on earth were dwelling in Jerusalem. When they saw the amazing working of the Holy Spirit, they asked about it. Peter preached to them that they—with their own wicked hands—had crucified the Lord of glory. They believed him and in their desperation asked what they should do. Peter replied, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (vv. 38, 41). The "gates of Hades" had not prevailed against it. Jesus Christ had established His church just as He promised (Mat. 16:18).

LEARNING A NEW LIFE

These new disciples had so very, very much to learn. We will assume they were faithful Jews, informed worshipers according to the law, but they had renounced all that. They had now become followers of Jesus Christ. The probability is that some of them, having come from distant nations, may never have seen Jesus nor heard Him speak. Some of them may have heard fireside or bedtime stories of His miracles, His crucifixion and His resurrection. Possibly some had not even heard much about Him. However, Peter's sermon, confirmed by the miracles of the Holy Spirit, converted them. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psa. 19:7).

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A Learning Church (continued from page 1)

It must have been as though these new disciples had awakened that morning on another planet among intelligent creatures who spoke another language, ate different foods and lived an unusually strange lifestyle. It was a new life to them. But isn't that what the Lord's way is (Rom. 6:3-4)?

From whom were they to learn all about this new life, and what had they to learn about being a faithful follower if this Jesus? About their new life in Christ? About God's will for Christ's disciples? About the kingdom of Christ? About the polity of this new religious group? About worshipping God in this "Way" (Acts 9:2)? About the first day of the week (not the Sabbath) and respecting the memorial to Christ—and oh, so very much more? As a little time passed, they learned the hard way that being a member of this new group, which is later called "the church" (5:11), incited extreme forms of persecution by their families and former friends and associates.

These new disciples "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching] and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). This new church was indeed a learning church. It had to be. It has been described as a school begun in Jerusalem by the Holy Spirit and taught by the apostles with some 3,000 new students. They were hearing the gospel of the kingdom for the first time and seeing it authenticated as the Word of God by the "many wonders and signs" the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to do among them (2:43; Mark 16:20). They "continued steadfastly" or they kept urgently hungering for instruction and encouragement from the men who had taught them the way of salvation in Christ Jesus. Those apostles were obviously true messengers of God. They were, in fact, "witnesses" of the risen Christ (Acts 1:8).

THE PROMISED GUIDE AND TEACHER

In our Lord's longest recorded conversation with the apostles in John chapters 14, 15 and 16, He promised them the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. He said, "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (14:25-26).

According to John 16:12-13, Jesus repeated that promise—perhaps for the sake of emphasis. He would have no misunderstanding about this—ever. He said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

Two of the first and most important rules for understanding a passage of Scripture is to determine (1) who

is speaking, and (2) to whom he is speaking. Therefore, it is a misuse, even an abuse of these Scriptures (promises), to apply them to all or to any Christians nowadays. So why shouldn't these new disciples "continue steadfastly in the apostles' teaching"? The Lord was working with the apostles and "confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (Mark 16:10).

PROMISES FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

The Lord also charged the apostles, "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). He even prayed, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20). Therefore, wherever and whenever the words whose apostles taught and preached in the Jerusalem learning church are taught and preached again, the results will be the same. If not, why not? A church of the New Testament kind will be the result. The Thessalonian church was commended for being "imitators" of the learning churches of Judea and became examples to all who believed in Macedonia and Achaia (1 The.1:6-7; 2:14). Who, then, would be so presumptuous as to deny that what that learning church gleaned from the inspired apostles is our Lord's way for His people everywhere and in every generation?

Let us all learn from 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that [the word "that" makes this a statement of purpose] the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." There is no work in which the man of God is not fully prepared by the Word of God. Would any mere man or woman anywhere any time be so audacious or contemptuous as to say, "Biblical doctrine won't work in our time or culture?" Would he say he has a better way for the Lord's church than the Lord has revealed in the New Testament? Shame on him! May God forgive and humble him.

Let us not be deceived, then; it is not impossible to duplicate the church we read about in the New testament in our time and culture. Twenty-first century churches can be and should be learning churches learning from the same teachers. Jesus Christ did not die until wise and learned men and women could do one better (Eph. 5:25). The church that bows or conforms to the demands of the culture loses its cutting edge in its society. One of the desirable qualities of New testament Christianity is not its sameness with that culture's religions but its distinctiveness. The first disciples were exemplary. What an exciting story of the learning church is the Acts of the Apostles!

(from *Gospel Advocate*, December, 2008)

Wise Words of Our First President Barry Grider

Last week President Bush delivered his Farewell Address to the nation. Today President Obama delivers his Inaugural Address. It is our prayer that all those who hold the sacred office of the presidency will remember the words of our first president, George Washington, delivered in both his inaugural and farewell addresses.

In his First Inaugural Address, President George Washington, "We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven itself has ordained." He believed in an objective moral order of the universe for determining what was right and wrong. Furthermore, in his Farewell Address eight years later, Washington offered the collective wisdom of his life in public service as both soldier and statesman.

Of all dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable support...It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government... Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with its virtue?

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