

The following is a six-week series on "**The Church of Christ at Jerusalem**" by Eddy Gilpin

The Church of Christ at Jerusalem

Our Lord promised His apostles that He would give them the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 16:19). Those "keys" were employed on the day of Pentecost to "open the doors" of the church (Mt. 16:18; Acts 2:47). Thus began that day the church of Christ in Jerusalem and in the world. Acts 2, the hub of the Bible, brings to fruition much Bible prophecy concerning the work the Lord came to earth to accomplish. A study of the Lord's church at Jerusalem reveals some marvelous traits that His people today should emulate. In a study involving verses 37-47, at least six such characteristics can be seen. In this column over the next six weeks we should like to notice that the Jerusalem church of Christ was a listening, learning, lively, loving, loyal and likeable group of people.

First, the Jerusalem church was composed of a **listening** people. Acts 2:37 states: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter and the other apostles had been proclaiming the gospel of Christ (vss. 14-36). Although this sermon was quite pointed and withheld nothing concerning their guilt, it piqued their interest to the point that they listened to what was being said. At this point, of course, these had not been obedient to the Lord's commands and were not yet members of His body. However, their willingness to listen to the truth and be convinced by it characterizes them with the "good ground" spoken of by Jesus (Mt. 13:3-8). These 3000 did not allow prejudiced thoughts, preconceptions and family ties to keep them from hearing and heeding the truth of God.

As a result of their "hearing" these things, their faith in Jesus was established (as per Romans 10:17). Their knowledge convinced them and their faith allowed them to obey what the Lord (through Peter and the others) commanded of them (vss. 38, 41). They were willing to listen. As a result, the Lord directed them through the words of inspiration given on that day. Today, if men will listen, God will guide them through these same words of inspiration.

The Church of Christ at Jerusalem- 2

Last week we began a study of the Lord's church at Jerusalem by mentioning some traits found in Acts 2:37-47 about these people. We noticed that they were a **listening** people, having "heard this" which Peter and the others proclaimed (Vs. 37). In addition to this, they were also a **learning** people.

Acts 2:41 states: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." They had listened intently to the words the apostles proclaimed. They thus learned of their need to obey the gospel and purify their souls (cf. I Pet. 1:22). Of the tremendous multitude present on that occasion, three thousand listened, learned and obeyed.

It is interesting to note that the reaction of these who "heard this." They "gladly received his word" and "were baptized" (Vs. 41). This was in complete harmony with what they had been told to do by these inspired men (Vs. 38). This command followed on the heels of their concerned question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Vs. 37). They were concerned with their souls and their sins. Peter's response was what they needed. Thus their repenting and being baptized were essential to their salvation, as it is to everyone this side of the cross.

Interestingly, together with the apostles they were referred to as a group as "all that believed" (Vs. 44). Who were these "believers" then? They were the ones who had obeyed the gospel- they had repented of their sins and had been baptized for the remission of their sins. Who are Christians today? Those who have (in like fashion as they) repented of their sins and have been baptized for the remission of sins, based on their faith in and confession of Christ.

Truly, these were a **listening** and **learning** people. To become what they were, we must do as they did. Are you willing to listen to God (through the word He has given) and learn of His will for your life? His commands have not changed since they were given to this august group on Pentecost—nor will they.

The Church of Christ at Jerusalem- 3

We are continuing our study of the Lord's church at Jerusalem by noting some traits found in Acts 2:37-47 about these people. We have seen that they were a **listening** people (having "heard this" which Peter and the others proclaimed- Vs. 37) and that they were a **learning** people (having "gladly received his word" and having been baptized for the remission of their sins- Vss. 38, 41). Notice also that they were a **lively** people.

Acts 2:42 states: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." They were a people "on the move." They busied themselves in serving the Lord. Specifically, this passage deals with worship. It was in a "steadfast" way that they "continued" in this regard. Four particular areas are mentioned in which they continued in this fashion.

First, they were steadfast in "the apostles' doctrine." Jesus had earlier told these men, "whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 16:19). (What He told them literally was "whatever you bind on earth shall have already been bound in heaven...shall have already been loosed in heaven.") How could this be? Recall that Jesus had told these apostles that the Holy Spirit would "guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16:13) and "teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (Jn. 14:26). These men were thus speaking the words of Christ. When these new disciples at Jerusalem continued in "the apostles' doctrine," they were continuing in the doctrine of Christ (cf. I Cor. 2:12, 13; II Jn. 9).

Second, these Christians at Jerusalem "continued steadfastly" in "fellowship." To be certain, there was fellowship with each other. However, fellowship with God had been attained and was now being maintained through their praise of and allegiance to Him. First John 1:7 reveals "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." The "fellowship one with another" in this passage is fellowship between man and God- vertical fellowship.

Third, they "continued steadfastly in "the breaking of bread." Along with other references (communion, Lord's Supper), this refers to the memorial feast established by the Lord (Mt. 26:26-29) which all of His followers observe in remembrance of Him (I Cor. 11:24, 25) on "the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7).

Fourth, they were steadfast in praying. Prayer is a fundamental Bible doctrine. Every faithful follower of the Lord was a praying individual. Every faithful congregation of God's people was a praying people. It is not an amazing thing then to see that the church of Christ at Jerusalem was a praying group- and "steadfastly" so.

James reveals that "faith without works is dead," just as "the body without the spirit is dead" (Jas. 2:26). The Lord's church at Jerusalem was indeed alive and well, as their faith produced action. Thus, this **listening** and **learning** group was also a **lively** people.

The Church of Christ at Jerusalem- 4

Thus far in our study together we have seen that the Lord's church in Jerusalem was composed of a **listening**, **learning** and **lively** group of people. Continuing in this study of Acts 2:37-47 we find that they were also a **loving** group. Verses 44 and 45 reveal, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

Benevolence has always characterized the Lord's people. The old adage, "No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care" was realized by Christians long before it was ever put into such concise words. Considering what the remainder of the New Testament says about these matters of benevolence, caring and love, it is no wonder that the first congregation of God's people was characterized by these traits. The phrase "love one another" appears 13 times in the New Testament (i.e. Jn. 15:17; Rom. 13:8; I Thes. 4:9; I Jn. 4:7; etc.). Jesus portrayed love "one to another" as the badge of discipleship when He stated, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:35). Just as being a loving group characterized the Jerusalem church, it must also be a trait found with any faithful congregation of the Lord's people today.

Another item of note connected with this passage is the phrase "all that believed" (found in verse 44). The words "faith," "believe" and "belief" are often misused. Most often

when the Bible uses these terms it is in reference not to mere mental assent, but to trust conjoined with obedience. This is the case in this particular instance in Acts 2. Please notice who these were who were categorized as being "all that believed." They are found earlier in verse 41- "Then they that gladly received his word *were baptized....*" Those who had heard, received and applied (through obedience) the words of Peter were those who were described as being they "that believed." To be certain, the same is true today. One cannot be a "believer" who does not obey the words of the Lord (cf. Mk. 16:16; Heb. 5:8, 9; I Jn. 5:3; etc.).

The Church of Christ at Jerusalem- 5

The Lord's church in Jerusalem (Acts 2) was composed of a **listening, learning, lively** and **loving** group of individuals. They were also characterized by their **loyalty**.

Acts 2:46 states: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." The temple was the center of life in Jerusalem at this time. It was the center of their former lives in Judaism. It was likely around the temple area that they had first heard the gospel and obeyed its precepts. The sermon on Pentecost had been in this area. Those 3000 who had obeyed "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (vs. 42). That would have included the command found in the commission given to the apostles in Matthew 28:19, 20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The apostles had been taught to teach, baptize and teach. They taught those who had obeyed in order that they might go and teach others to obey. The genius of God's plan is seen in Acts 8:1 when the disciples were "all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria." Because they had been taught, "they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). These went their way sowing the seed of the kingdom (Lk. 8:11).

Further, the gospel's course had been revealed to the apostles by the Lord prior to His ascension. The gospel would begin at Jerusalem and progress through "all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This beginning point is clearly noted in Acts 2 (in Jerusalem), and can be traced as the gospel progresses to Judaea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-12) and then throughout the world (Col. 1:6, 23).

The fact that the gospel was taken throughout the world in the first century was due in large measure to the loyalty of these gathered in Jerusalem, as they continued day by day in the "apostles' doctrine." Whenever the opportunity availed itself (in their case, because of persecution), they were prepared to teach others. How does this compare with the Lord's people today? Are you loyal in your service to God? Are you prepared and willing to teach others?

The Church of Christ at Jerusalem- 6

The Lord's church in Jerusalem was composed of a **listening, learning, lively, loving** and **loyal** group of individuals (Acts 2:37-46). In our concluding thoughts about this amazing group of Christians it will also be seen that (for a while, at least) they were **likeable**.

Acts 2:47 states, "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." As seen, they had "favour with all the people." Considering the love they demonstrated for each other and their loyalty to the cause of Christ, it is little wonder that they were highly favored in the eyes of the community at the beginning. This trait, however, was short-lived.

While it is good to be held in high esteem by those around us, it is much more desirable to have the favor of God (Acts 5:29). For Christians in the first century, this favor which they had in the eyes of the world quickly eroded as the world began to see the consequences of truth and thus began to attack its messengers (Acts 8:1). Consequently, it is not surprising to read near the end of the book of Acts these words by "the chief of the Jews": "For as concerning this sect, we know that it is every where spoken against" (Acts 28:22). Now, the church, which at the beginning had "favour with all the people," is spoken of as "a sect" and is "every where spoken against." Neither the people nor the doctrine had changed. The knowledge that the truth condemned the worldly lifestyle of so many of these accusers is what made the difference. As seen in the valiant lives of these Christians, while the Lord's people should certainly seek to be likeable, such approval of the world cannot be maintained at the expense or compromise of truth.

-Eddy Gilpin