

# THE NEW CHURCH

(Acts 2.42-47 and Matthew 16.13-21)

This is the start of a new series on...the new/growing/persecuted/global church.

I hope we will all be challenged and encouraged as we look at the 1st century church!

Acts is a dramatic book! And by the way, Luke is a very careful historian.

In Acts we have...

Pentecost, healing a cripple, conflict with the authorities, Ananias and Sapphira, Stephen stoned, Philip and the Ethiopian, Paul converted, the story of the Roman Centurion Cornelius, Peter miraculously delivered from prison, Paul's journeys...

Acts 2 is the birth of the Church. It's something totally new, different from Judaism, though rooted in it. It's the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy about the pouring out of the Spirit, "the New Way" (this is how they referred to the first Christians).

I was excited when I first read Acts 2.42 as a young Christian and realised what it was all about – conversion and then building up young followers of Jesus.

Perhaps we think it's different for us now – not so dramatic – a bit discouraging? Is the Church of England growing? Are there redundant churches? Are there any miracles? None of us actually saw Jesus in the flesh, unlike Peter and co.

And quite a few of us are getting old now – is it time for retirement as Christians?! *But* the worldwide church *is* growing (especially in China!). Miracles are happening (e.g. at the Northumbrian Healing Centre). The Spirit lives in/inspires/directs us. And the Lord *does* use older people – we *don't* retire as Christians!

What would make us more like those early disciples?

- Chapter 1: they *waited* for power, and they prayed unitedly
- Chapter 2: they *knew* the scriptures (Peter quoting them in his sermon)
- Chapter 2: they *followed up* the young converts (we will look at verse 42 in detail)

Yes, we have to earn our living, pay taxes and bills, do housework; *but* we should make living for Jesus our first priority – Note that old chorus “Living for Jesus”.

It’s a balance: we are in the world but not of it. We must always be ready to share the gospel. At coffee tomorrow, ask friends “Did you have a good weekend?” and see where the conversation goes...

So, let’s examine verse 42:

**Teaching:** Note it’s the *Apostles’ teaching*. Beware of all the weird, persuasive, politically correct ideas around today... “All religions are the same... it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere... I believe in reincarnation... you need your good deeds to blot out your bad deeds... God helps those who help themselves... the only thing that matters in life is my personal fulfilment and happiness... if two people really love each other, isn’t that the only thing that matters...”

Are *any* of the above ideas Biblical? What does the teaching of the Apostles say about these issues?

**Fellowship:** we need to support and be supported, corrected, challenged. Christianity is not designed for isolated individuals. Compare a burning coal which needs to remain in the fire or it will go out and get cold. Sunday should be highlight of the week!

**Breaking of Bread:** The Communion service is a reminder of forgiveness. Some (or most of us?) find it very hard really to believe we are 100% forgiven and loved by God! (But note “See, I have engraved

you on the palms of my hands" - Is 49.16; The Lord "forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases" - Ps 103.3; "I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends" - John 15.15).

**Prayers:** "You have not because you ask not" says James 4.2. It's good to pray alone, and good to pray with others. Note Brother Lawrence, the 17th century French monk, practicing the presence of God. No prayer will lead to no power and to doing things in our own strength.

So, how is our church going/growing? How is our faith going/growing?  
Go back to Acts 2.42.