

“Church 1.0” – 1  
**Acts 2:42-47**  
**“The Fundamentals of the First Church”**

1. Around March of 1639, in the newly-founded town of Providence, in what is now Rhode Island, a group of about a dozen adults were baptized by immersion, and started what most regard to be the First Baptist Church in America.<sup>i</sup>

2. Right about the same time, in the neighboring community of Newport, a medical doctor and Baptist preacher, named John Clarke, was also starting a Baptist church.

3. Though the First Baptist Church of Providence is usually credited with being the first, there has been no small debate down through the centuries over which church is actually the First Baptist Church. I guess it is only fitting that the history of Baptist origins in America involves some sort of dispute.

4. When we open the Bible to the book of Acts, we find what most agree to be the birth of the very first church in history, on the Day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem.

5. On that day, under the firm and faithful preaching of the Word of God, some 3,000 souls came to faith in Jesus Christ, were baptized, and joined together into a community of believers that we would recognize as a church.

6. There was much about this original church that is different from ours today. The first church was not a Baptist church (at least not in name). They did not have a sanctuary or a fellowship hall - no organized ministries or programs, and no committees had yet formed to decide how to slow-down the work that God was doing.

7. While there was much that was different and unique to that time and place, and many things that we simply cannot repeat, there are some fundamentals from that first church that are critical to all churches in all ages and all places.

8. As we seek to look into the Word of God to find instruction and direction for our church, there are three aspects of this first church that we ought to seek to replicate within this body of believers. First of all, notice:

### **I. THE VALUES PRIORITIZED IN THIS CHURCH**

1. You can tell a lot about a church by the things it values. The priorities of a church will determine the course and direction of that church.

2. A recent issue of *The Christian Index*, contained an article about a church in Ashland, OR, called The Church of the Holy Light of the Queen. In March, the

church won a federal court ruling that allows the church to import a hallucinogenic tea that it uses in its regular services.

3. The tea contains trace amounts of the chemical DMT, and the church claims that only by drinking this particular tea can a “church member have a direct experience with Jesus Christ.”<sup>ii</sup>

4. The Christians that made up the first church, in Acts 2, were not concerned with highs and hallucinations. The daily life and activity of that initial assembly of believers centered on some very basic priorities.

5. Verse 42 gives a snapshot of the things this first church valued and practiced. It says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

6. This verse points us to a couple of things that we too should value, and therefore prioritize in the life of our church. First of all, notice that they prioritized:

#### **A. Attention to the Word of God**

1. Notice again verse 42. It says that they... “continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...” That phrase “continued steadfastly” literally means to give constant attention to something.

2. This early church, therefore, gave constant attention to the teachings and principles that were being related to them by the apostles, such as Peter and James.

3. The doctrines about Christ, His atonement, His resurrection, and His return, were important to these people. The message of the gospel was something they desired to know better.

4. Today, the teachings and doctrines of the apostles have been preserved for us in the inspired Word of God. The Bible is our link to the apostolic message of the gospel.

5. Much like that first assembly, we must value the Bible, and the truths it contains and proclaims. In all of our gatherings there ought to be the goal of giving attention to the preaching, teaching, and study of the Word of God.

6. I recently watched a few minutes of the broadcast of a large church in another part of the country. The pastor is a young man, and he was speaking to a huge congregation on the subject of marriage and intimacy.

7. On the stage with him, was a large bed, fully made, with pillows and a bed spread. I suppose the bed served as a prop, or visual aid, to support the subject of his message.

8. After listening for a few minutes, something struck me as odd. While the fellow had a bed on the platform with him, he did not have a Bible. He spoke about the Bible here or there, but he certainly was not preaching the Bible.

9. Something is wrong when a church service is more about what you see than what you *hear*. That was not the case with the church in Acts. This early church valued, and therefore prioritized giving attention to the Word of God.

10. Notice not only that they prioritized attention to the Word of God, but notice also that they valued and prioritized:

### **B. Assembling for the worship of God**

1. Look again at verse 42. It says, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Notice those three things, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

2. The word “fellowship” speaks of sharing things in common. It has the idea of people spending time together, practicing and participating in the same things.

3. The phrase “breaking of bread” can refer simply to eating a meal, or in this case, it likely speaks of partaking in the Lord’s Supper – the Communion.

4. In the original language, the word “prayers” has an article before it so that it literally reads, “the prayers”. It speaks of a prayer service, where public prayers are offered.

5. What do all these things have in common? They are all things that take place when a body of believers assembles for worship. These are the things that go on at a church service.

6. If you read on in this text, in verse 46, it says that this first church met together, in some capacity, on a daily basis. They loved to be together so much that they assembled every day of the week; not just on Sunday.

7. In our day, the trend is to have fewer services, and to gather less and less. Many churches only meet one time a week; on Sunday morning.

8. When we turn to the Scriptures, while there is no specific text requiring a Sunday night service, or a Wednesday night prayer meeting, what we find in the example of Acts is that gathering together for worship is a priority, and that the assembly of the saints is something we ought to value.

9. The writer of Hebrews actually encourages us to assemble *more*, as we draw closer to the return of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:25). Regardless of what the trends of our day may be, like this first church, we ought to value and prioritize the meetings in which we assemble for the worship of God.

10. When your church meets, you ought to be there! We, as a New Testament church, ought to prize and value the opportunities we have to assemble in the name of Jesus!

11. There is a second fundamental that we find in this first church. Notice not only *the values prioritized in this church*, but notice also:

## **II. THE VIRTUES PRACTICED IN THIS CHURCH**

1. Sometimes rightly, and sometimes wrongly, churches tend to get labeled by a particular trait or characteristic. People will say, "That is a friendly church," or, "That is the formal church," or, "That is the emotional church," or, "That is the wealthy church."

2. As you read on in Acts chapter 2, you get a pretty good picture of the life and spirit of this original church. There were a number of practices and virtues that marked this first church, and should mark all of their descendent churches as well.

3. First of all, in this original fellowship:

### **A. There was singleness**

1. Look at verse 44. It says, "And all that believed were together..." The word translated "together" literally means "in one place, one time, or one purpose."

2. The idea is that this first church was a unified group. Verse 46 says that they were "with one accord". That phrase literally means "with one mind", or "unanimous".

3. As hard as it is to imagine, this first assembly was a church where all the people were in agreement and were of the same mind. There was singleness in the mindset and direction of the body.

4. Several years ago, research was done regarding the success or failure of major corporations. The survey found that 95% of failures among companies are due to internal problems.<sup>iii</sup>

5. Likewise, there are many churches that are struggling and failing because there is too much conflict and not enough cooperation. Members of a church cannot battle one another and bless one another at the same time.

6. Within this first church, there was not only singleness, but notice also that:

### **B. There was selflessness**

1. Look back at the text, and notice verses 44 and 45. It says, “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.”

2. In this first church, if someone within the congregation had a need, the need was met by the other members who were willing to selflessly and sacrificially give.

3. In other words, these people did not go to church simply to get; but to give. They were not just consumers; they were contributors. The church was a body in which they could give what they had to offer, and receive what they needed as well.

4. Unfortunately, most churches have too many members who only want to watch but not work, sit but not serve, listen but not labor, take but not tithe, show up but not stand up.

5. Such was not the case in this first church. This church was made up of Christians who understood that a selfish saint is a contradiction in terms.

6. Notice not only that the virtue of this congregation was scene in its singleness, and its selflessness, but notice also that:

### **C. There was sweetness**

1. Look again at verse 46. It says that as this original body of believers met together on a daily basis, they, “...did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”

2. The word “gladness” is translated from a word that speaks of exuberant joy. It sometimes refers to singing and dancing. The word “singleness” in verse 46, comes from a word that literally means “without rocks”. It describes something that is smooth and pleasant.

3. While many churches are about as joyful as a funeral home, and as pleasant as a root canal, that was certainly not the case with the first church; nor should it be with ours.

4. The assembling of God's people ought to be marked by smiles, laughter, joy, excitement, and a sweet spirit of love, friendship, and community.

We should be able to say with the songwriter:

*There's a sweet, sweet Spirit, in this place,  
And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord,  
There are sweet expressions on each face,  
And I know that it's the presence of the Lord*

5. In this first church, the Spirit of Christ produced virtues that were lived out in the life of the church. There were no programs, just the practice of Christ-like character.

6. There is a third fundamental that we draw from this first church. Notice not only *the values prioritized in this church*, and *the virtues practiced in this church*, but notice also lastly:

### **III. THE VITALITY PRESENT IN THIS CHURCH**

1. The old, mountain evangelist, Vance Havner, used to say, "It's about time we quit playing church in these services that start at eleven o'clock sharp and end at twelve o'clock dull."

2. This first church was certainly not a perfect church, but no one could ever accuse it of being a dead church. In this text, and throughout the book of Acts, the church is marked by vision, victory, vigor, and vitality!

3. What this church may have lacked in organization, money, programs, and facilities, it more than made up for in life and power. We learn from them that a supernatural vitality is more critical than anything else we may have as a congregation.

4. The life and vitality of this church were evident in a couple of areas. First of all:

#### **A. There was action in this church**

1. Look back in our text, and notice verse 43. It says, "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles."

2. There was an awe and reverence for God that developed among these people, as God worked through the apostles to perform miracles and give signs as confirmation of the message of the gospel.

3. While the signs and wonders may change, the church should still be a place in which God is working. Lives ought to be changed and people ought to be touched through the ministry of the church.

4. When we gather for worship, we should come expecting to see God move in our midst, and do something powerful. We should come anticipating someone getting saved, or someone getting help in our services.

5. If you look down at the first two words of verse 47, you will find that the power of God was accompanied by the praise of the people! As God moved in power, they glorified Him by giving Him praise!

6. I assure you there was nothing quiet and dead about the services in this first church. There was action in this church!

7. The father of Methodism, John Wesley, once said, "Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come for miles to watch you burn."

8. Life and action in a church will draw people from the dead routines of this world and this life. The church that catches on fire is an attractive, magnetic thing.

9. Notice not only that there was action in this church, but the life and vitality of this congregation was seen in the fact that:

### **B. There was addition to this church**

1. Look down at the close of this chapter. Verse 47 says, "...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

2. On a daily basis, men and women were being converted to Christ and added to this church. Imagine baptizing all of those people! No wonder they had to meet every day!

3. While not every church will be a large church, every church should be a growing church! A church, by its nature is supposed to be an organization that exists to add to its number.

4. Churches are not supposed to be like forts, in which the faithful hole-up and wait for the end of the world to come. Churches are supposed to be families, who seek to reproduce and grow and enlarge their ranks.

5. The late Pastor Adrian Rogers once said, "A church will either evangelize or it will fossilize, but it will not stand still."<sup>iv</sup>

6. We may never see people being saved on a daily basis, but if the day ever comes that we stop seeing folks getting saved at all, we might as well plan a funeral, because our church will be dead.

7. In 1935, the members of the Sudan Interior Mission were forced to leave their mission field when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia at the onset of World War II. The missionaries grieved and worried over the small band of believers that made up the church they had started.

8. After nine years of service, the missionaries had led 48 natives to Christ, and now they had to leave them by themselves to carry on the work of the church. It was not until July 4, 1943, that the missionaries were able to return.

9. When they came back, what they found amazed them. The small group of 48 believers had grown, even under the persecution of Mussolini, to over 18,000.

10. The vitality of a church is evidenced in its addition! A growing church may not always be a mark of a good church. However, a good church will always be growing!

1. The most current statistics on churches in America indicate the 70 to 80% of churches in our country have either stopped growing, or are declining. As a result, 3,500 to 4,000 churches will close their doors this year.<sup>v</sup>

2. As a result of these numbers, churches are trying everything under the sun to stay afloat, and to be relevant in a culture that increasingly pays little attention to the church and the faith.

3. Instead of trying new things, perhaps what churches need to do is look back, not to the 1950's, but to the first century, and the first church.

4. The fundamentals that made the first church powerful are still relevant in our day. Still today, we need a commitment to the Word of God. We still need assemblies that are marked by singleness, selflessness, and sweetness.

5. Lastly, more than we need new programs and a new agendas, we simply need a fresh breath of divine life and vitality to blow through our gatherings and our efforts.

6. As we go forward, we need not a new model, but a new appreciation and application of the original model.

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<sup>i</sup> Roger Williams, *wikipedia article*, accessed 4/24/09,

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger\\_Williams\\_\(theologian\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Williams_(theologian))

<sup>ii</sup> Church can brew hallucinogenic tea, 4/9/09, *Christian Index*, accessed 4/24/09,

<http://www.christianindex.org/5370.article>

<sup>iii</sup> McHenry, Raymond, McHenry's Stories for the Soul, (Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody, MA, 2001), p. 43-44

<sup>iv</sup> Rogers, Adrian, Adrianisms – Vol. 2, (Love Worth Finding Ministries, Memphis, TN, 2007), p. 156

<sup>v</sup> Stetzer, Ed, Comeback Churches, (B & H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2007), p. 19