

"THE POWER OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH" (A PUBLICATION OF "THE INNER-CITY CHURCH PLANTING MISSION")

INTRODUCTION

As one studies the New Testament Scriptures, and especially the Book of Acts, it is soon discovered that the followers of CHRIST in that first century were a special people...special because it is evident that they had a unique **power** working in, through, and about them. A **power** that was certainly Supernatural and Divine!

They were the CHRISTians of the first century Church. The "ekklesia" (called out and separated ones), of GOD. They were CHRISTians that made up local assemblies (i.e. - "... *the church that was at Antioch...*" [Acts 13:1]; "...*the church of GOD which is at Corinth...*" [1 Corinthians 1:2]), that were part of the larger, universal Church worldwide (See Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22; 5:23).



Paul Preaching In Antioch

What made that first century Church such a Church of **power**? How could that Church have such an eternal impact on the society of her day? Why isn't our present, modern-day Church experiencing that same **power** and having that same eternal impact? This is the purpose of this study...to discover the answers to these questions. To also discover the Biblical principles that made that first century Church such a Church of **power** and impact.

And most importantly, how can we apply those same principles to our local churches today, and thus see that same great GOD working in, through,

and about us, just as HE did over two thousand years ago!

Then we will be able to confirm with the great first century Apostle Paul when he wrote...

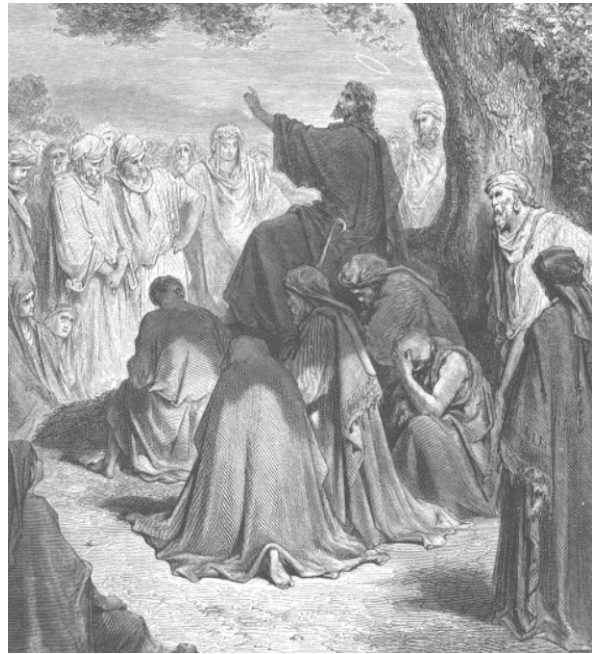
*"Now unto HIM that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the **power** that worketh in us, unto HIM be glory in the Church by JESUS CHRIST throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."*
Ephesians 3:20-21

I. It Was A Church Built By JESUS CHRIST

*"And JESUS answered and said...upon this rock I will build MY Church..."
Matthew 16:17a, 18a*

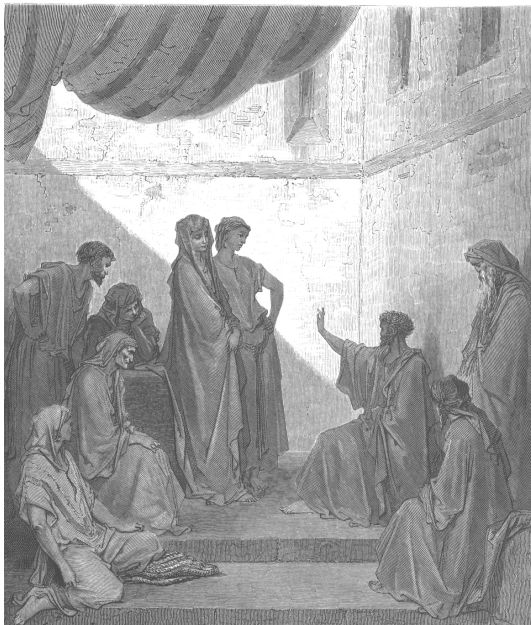
This is the first mention of the word *“church”* in the Scriptures. It is significant that this would be the first point of our study as well because we must remember that it is the LORD WHO is to build the Church, not us!

We so often are mistaken and believe that we must build our local churches. Thus, we see the proliferation of “church growth” books and seminars today. Therefore we see the use of worldly, fleshly means to “attract” people to attend our local churches. “Christian” rock concerts, liturgical dancing, potluck dinners, ice cream socials, dramas, and “fun nights” for the youth just to name a few. Indeed, so much of what we call “revival” and church growth in our American churches is just people moving from one church to another.



“...I will build MY church...”

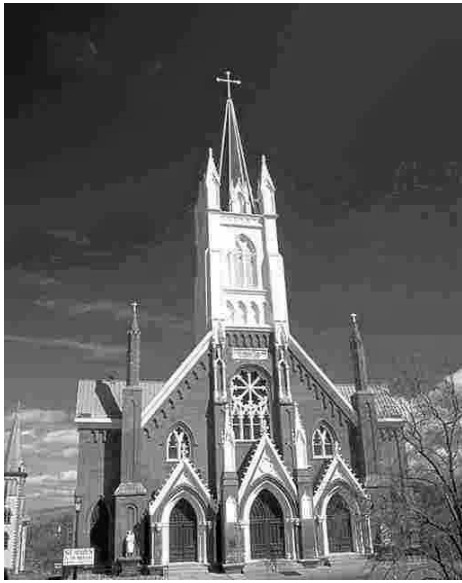
Contrast our present day local churches and these worldly means to help them “grow”, with the first century Church and the power of GOD that was displayed through her real, dynamic and spiritual growth...



Peter Teaching In A First Century House

“And they (the CHRISTians), 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, praising GOD, and having favor with all the people. And the LORD added to the Church daily such as should be saved.” Acts 2:46-47

Notice from the Scripture above that it wasn’t some “slick” outreach program that brought the wicked to salvation. It wasn’t a worldly “marketing” scheme. Nor was it entertainment at the church that brought them in. It was *“...the LORD (WHO) added to the Church daily such as should be saved.”*



**The Wicked Should Not Feel
“Comfortable” In Our Churches**

“The Apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.” Acts 5:12-13 (NIV)

Isn’t the above Scripture interesting? Notice, as *“The Apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people”*, and as *“...all the believers (were meeting) together in Solomon’s Colonnade”*, *“No one else (that is the unbelievers), dared join them...”* This was the **power** of the first century Church, and that **power** is what is lacking in so many of our local churches today! The unbeliever realized beyond any doubt that the CHRISTians of the first century were different. And *“...even though (the CHRISTians) were highly regarded by the (unbelievers)”*, those same unbelievers didn’t want anything to do with them!

This should be the same power and testimony of our local churches today as well. Instead of making our churches “seeker friendly” so that the wicked can feel “comfortable” in them, the ungodly should feel so uncomfortable, that either they repent of their sins and become CHRISTians themselves...or they never come back! Our local churches are for the saints, not the wicked. It’s a place for worship, discipleship and fellowship. The wicked cannot and should not participate in these!

So if it is the LORD’s responsibility to *“...build (HIS) church...”*, what is our responsibility in relationship to all of this? According to the Scriptures, there are many. Following are only a few...

A. We Are To Be A Light To The World And Bring Glory To GOD

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your FATHER WHO is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

B. We Are To Share The Gospel With The Lost

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...” Matthew 28:19a

C. We Are To Disciple Other Believers

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...” Matthew 28:20a

D. We Are To Minister To All People



We Are To Minister To All People

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:10

Finally, notice from our original Scripture, that our LORD said that the Church was HIS Church. We must remember this, for as we do so, we will be free from the pressure and anxiety of trying to *“build”* HIS Church in and through the flesh.

“And HE (CHRIST) is the Head of the body, the Church, WHO is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things HE might have the preeminence.” Colossians 1:18

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church

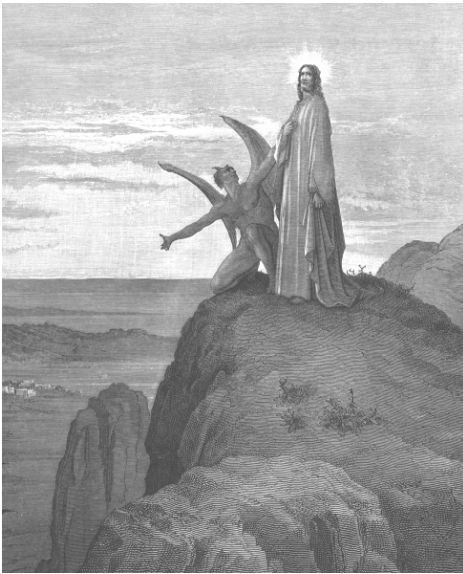


*“Dear Heavenly FATHER, please forgive us, if we as a body of believers have endeavored to build our church through worldly ways. We now see the terrible destruction that comes when we seek to minister through our own, fleshly means. We have learned from the study of YOUR Word, that if we just concentrate on obeying YOU in carrying out our responsibilities, it is YOU WHO *“...will build (YOUR) church...”*, and make it a church of **power** and impact in the community around us. Please give us YOUR grace so that YOU will be able to do this through us. In the Name of JESUS, Amen.”*

II. It Was A Church More Powerful Than Hell

“...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18b

This Scripture of course is the completion of the verses that we previously studied under Section I. There JESUS said, *“...I will build MY Church...”*



The Temptation Of JESUS

HE concludes that declaration by proclaiming, “...*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*” The implication here is, if CHRIST is the ONE building HIS Church, it will be a Church more powerful than Satan and all the forces of evil!

As one studies the history of the first century Church, it is evident that the forces of evil were active and strong against her. Yet the Scriptures reveal the great **power** that GOD gave her to overcome and defeat them. Following are just a few examples...

- A. *“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits, and they were healed every one.”* Acts 5:16

Notice how active these “...*unclean spirits...*” were in afflicting and tormenting the populace. Yet through the Church and healing, deliverance was brought to “...every one.”

- B. *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached CHRIST unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voices, came out of many that were possessed with them, and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.”* Acts 8:5-8

Once again we see the activity of “...*unclean spirits...*”, and their power to bring destruction to these suffering people. However, we see a greater **power** at work. We see the **power** of GOD bringing wonderful deliverance and healing through HIS first century Church...as they simply “...*preached CHRST unto them.*”



The Healing Of A Lame Man

- C. *“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High GOD, which show unto us the way of salvation.’ And this did she many days. But Paul,*

being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command thee in the Name of JESUS CHRIST to come out of her.' And he came out the same hour." Acts 16:16-18



The Apostle Paul

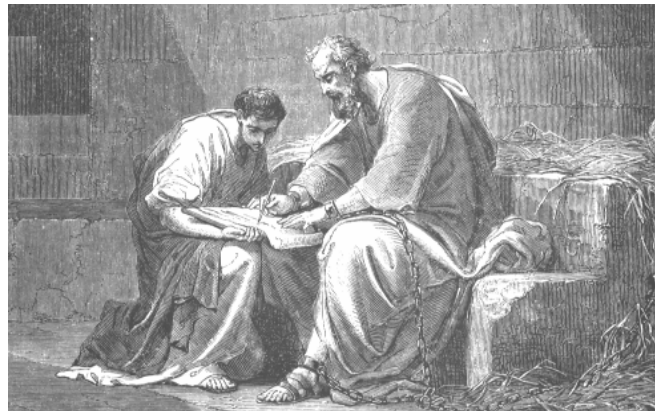
It is here that we learn of the power of just one evil *"spirit"* working through one woman. But again the LORD uses the first century Church, in this case the Apostle Paul, to display HIS **power** and defeat this force from hell.

Jesus proclaimed in our original Scripture that *"...the gates of hell (would) not prevail against (HIS Church)."* This implies that the Church was to be offensive in nature and aggressively attacking the forces of evil. We have learned from our study in the book of Acts that the first century Church definitely had this mentality.

But what about the Church today...especially in North America? In contrast to the first century Church, today we see the local church largely ignorant of "spiritual warfare". Instead, we actually see our local churches allowing these evil forces to subtly creep in through our compromising of GOD's standards and adopting the ways of the world in conducting the ministry!

Just as the Church in the first century, we must acquire and maintain a warfare mentality towards Satan and the forces of darkness. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:12...

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

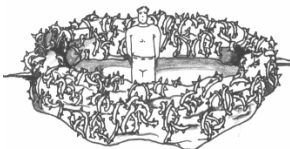


Paul In Prison Writing His Epistle To The Ephesians

Scripture teaches us of many "weapons" that we have at our disposal, so as to give each local church (and each CHRISTian within each local church), the resources to not only do battle with Satan and his evil forces, but to have complete victory over them as well. We will not take the time or space to discuss all of them here (please see the I.C.P.M. teaching entitled, *"Our Spiritual Warfare with Satan And His Evil Forces"* to study this subject in more detail); however, let's highlight one of these "weapons" which we will call "Warfare Prayer".

There are two types of "warfare prayer" given to us in Scripture that have proven to be very effective in this struggle. One is defensive in nature, while the other is offensive.

1. The "hedge of thorns" prayer.



This defensive type of prayer is based on the principle found in Job 1:6-12. Here we have the record of Satan's conversation with GOD concerning Job's righteous lifestyle. Satan comments that he would like to "attack" Job, but he cannot get at him because the LORD has...

**The Hedge Is A Weapon
Of Protection**

“...made an hedge about him and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side...” (v. 10a)

Satan desires to destroy us, our families, and our possessions, but we have this powerful weapon of protection that we can use to defend ourselves. To illustrate how this prayer can be used to accomplish this, following is a model prayer...

“Heavenly FATHER, in the name and through the blood of the LORD JESUS CHRIST (see John 14:13-14 and Revelation 12:11), I pray that YOU would bind Satan (see Matthew 12:29), right now in the life of (name of person), or, in the area of (name of place or thing). I ask YOU to build a hedge of thorns high and deep around (name of person, place, or thing). I pray this so YOU can keep Satan his evil influences from (name of person, place or thing). Heavenly FATHER, I pray all this in the Name of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, Amen.”

In light of other Scripture, there are three important elements that must be part of this prayer...

- a. We must pray that Satan and his evil forces will be bound

“Or else how can one enter into a strong man’s house (i.e. – territory), and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house” (i.e. – territory) Matthew 12:29

Much of the world is under Satan’s power. He is the “*strong man*” that is in control. As we live in this world and engage in this spiritual warfare, we need the LORD to “*...bind the strong man...*”, so in a sense, we can take over his kingdom (i.e. – his “*house*”), and “*...spoil his goods...*”



**The “Binding” Of Satan
Renders Him Powerless**



**There Is Much Power In The
Name Of JESUS**

- b. We must pray in the Name of the LORD JESUS CHRIST

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in MY (JESUS’) Name, that will I do, that the FATHER may be glorified in the SON. If ye shall ask anything in MY (JESUS’) Name, I will do it.” John 14:13-14.

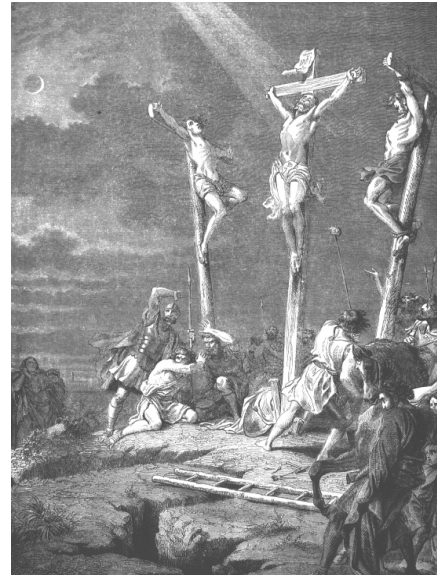
In the Scripture above, JESUS gives us this wonderful promise of receiving anything we ask if it is done in HIS “Name”. Surely the LORD wants us to have victory over Satan and his evil forces, thus we

can be assured that HE will give us this victory as we pray for it in HIS "Name"!

Following are two Biblical illustrations of the power of JESUS' Name in giving victory over Satan and his evil forces...

"And the seventy (disciples) returned again with joy saying, LORD, even the devils are subject unto us through THY Name. And (JESUS) said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Luke 10:17-18

"And it came to pass, as we (Paul and Silas) went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us, and cried saying, 'These men are the servant of the MOST HIGH GOD, which show unto us the way of salvation.' And this she did many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command thee in the Name of JESUS CHRIST to come out of her.' And he came out the same hour." Acts 16:16-18



Satan Was Defeated For All Eternity By CHRIST's Shed Blood

- c. We must pray through the blood of the LORD JESUS CHRIST

"And they (the saints) overcome him (the Devil) by the blood of the Lamb..." Revelation 12:11a

Satan and his evil forces hate the blood of CHRIST, for it was HIS blood shed at Calvary that defeated them once for all, and eternally stripped them of their spiritual power. This is why as we claim the blood of CHRIST in our spiritual warfare, Satan and his evil forces must flee in retreat and defeat!

- 2. The "prayer target" prayer

This warfare prayer is offensive in nature and is based on the principle found in Ephesians 6:18-19.

"Praying always with all power and supplication in the SPIRIT, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and for me (the Apostle Paul), that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel."

Notice this two-fold thrust in the Apostle Paul's prayer here in Ephesians 6. First of all, he admonishes us to pray for other *"saints"*, secondly to pray that unbelievers would come to know *"...the mystery of the Gospel."* As we pray for the *"saints"* to grow in their walk with the LORD and for the lost to be saved, Satan's kingdom suffers damage!

This is what "prayer targets" will do. A "prayer target" is someone we pray for (whether a CHRISTian or non-CHRISTian), when we or someone we're ministering to is being attacked by Satan and his evil forces. As we continue to do this on a regular basis, Satan soon stops his assault, because he certainly does not want his evil causes thwarted!



There are two other methods that involve "warfare prayer" that local churches are using today and are proving to be very effective in attacking and literally tearing down *"...the gates of hell..."* in whole neighborhoods and cities around the world.

One method is based upon the Scripture we looked at earlier in Ephesians 6:12. Once again, it is here that we find the instruction of the Apostle Paul...

"...we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

**We Must Consistently Pray
Against Satan And His Evil
Principalities And Powers**

"A municipality is an area of land over which there is governmental jurisdiction. A principality is an evil ruler over an area of land. There are *"principalities"* over nations, cities and districts. As we overpower these *"principalities"* (in prayer), there is freedom for the Gospel to reach the people and to bring about a marvelous turning to GOD. If, on the other hand, we fail to deal with these *"principalities"* effectively, the Gospel is hindered and people in that jurisdiction coldly reject it. Jurisdiction is directly related to ground and authority over that ground. The history of revival confirms that both GOD and Satan operate within human governmental jurisdictions. It is also on this basis that nations are judged." (*Life Purpose, Volume 2* InSTITUTE In Basic Life Principles, p. 9*)

There may be others that we do not know of yet, but following are twenty-two evil *"principalities"* that we have identified over the years, and are praying for the LORD to rebuke and defeat within the inner-cities of the world...

TWENTY-TWO EVIL "PRINCIPALITIES"

➤ Pride	➤ Mental Confusion
➤ Unbelief	➤ Bitterness
➤ Hard-heartedness	➤ Anger

➤ Addiction (alcohol/illegal drugs)	➤ Apathy/Slothfulness
➤ Immorality	➤ Religiosity/False Religions
➤ Rebellion	➤ Discouragement that leads to burnout
➤ Depression	➤ Fear
➤ Fatigue	➤ Violence, especially in South Africa
➤ Strife/Division	➤ Theft, especially in South Africa
➤ Doubt	➤ Ancestral worship, esp. in South Africa
➤ Anxiety	➤ Evil music

As we as a ministry have prayed against these specific evil *“principalities”* (and) *“powers”*, we have witnessed first-hand GOD rebuking them and bringing about real significant change in individuals and whole neighborhoods for righteousness!

The second method that the LORD is using in a tremendous way is called “prayer walks”. This too is a very aggressive and offensive type of “warfare prayer”.

With this method, one or more CHRISTians literally walk down a street, pausing to pray in front of individual homes or businesses. A variety of requests can be prayed for depending on the people living in the home, or the type of business in the building.

For instance, if the residents of the home are known to be CHRISTians, prayer can be offered for them to grow in their spiritual walk with the LORD, and for them to be more of a “light” in that community. However, if they are known to be unbelievers, prayer is made for them to become CHRISTians. This method is being practiced on a weekly basis in some areas of India, resulting in the salvation of thousands of people and the planting of hundreds of churches!

Concerning businesses, the “prayer warriors” pause to pray in front of each place of business, for the owners, management and employees to become CHRISTians if they are not, or to grow in their walk with the LORD if they are. If the business is legitimate and honest, prayer is made for



Jesus Healing The Lunatic

them to be blessed. However, if the business is illegal, immoral or wicked in any way, prayer is made for that business to be shut down completely. Our churches in Grand Rapids have seen great success in this aspect, as we have seen pornographic stores, pawn shops, a house of prostitution and several taverns closed down in response to specific prayers!

In conclusion to this section of our study concerning spiritual warfare and prayer, we would be wise to remember that the LORD has given us another powerful weapon when combined with warfare prayer can bring us victory over Satan and his evil forces.

The weapon is “fasting”. Voluntarily going without food, so the LORD is free to unleash even greater spiritual power through us. In Matthew 17:14-21, we have the story where JESUS’ disciples are unable to deliver the “*lunatic*” boy from demon possession (v.16).

However, JESUS rebukes the demon and the boy is made whole (v. 18). Later when the disciples ask JESUS why they could not cast out the demon, HE answers by saying, “*Because of your unbelief*” (v. 20). HE then concludes by teaching them, “*Howbeit this kind (of demon) goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*” (v. 21). Evidently this demon was extra powerful, and in order for it to be rebuked, extra righteous power was needed. Fasting combined with prayer brought that extra righteous power!

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church



Dear Heavenly FATHER, please forgive us, if we as a church have failed to use our God-given resources to be a church more powerful than Satan and his evil forces. Forgive us if we have allowed these evil forces to subtly creep in through our compromising of YOUR standards and adopting ways of the world in conducting our ministries. We have learned from the study of YOUR Word that we must acquire and maintain a warfare mentality towards Satan and his forces of darkness. We have learned that if we do, YOU will make our church a church of power so that, “... the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Please give us YOUR grace so that YOU will be able to do this through us. In the Name of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, Amen.”

III. It Was A Church Bold Enough to Confront Sin



CHRIST Teaching The Disciples

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go tell him his fault between thee and him, if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or more witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church, but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Matthew 18:15-17

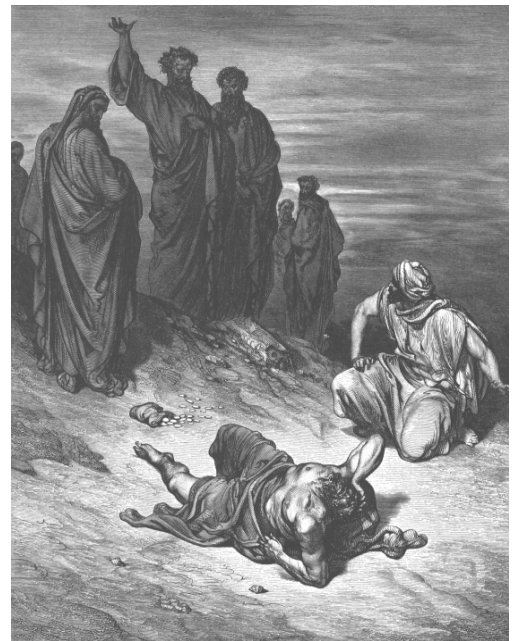
Many people would say that these are rather harsh words spoken by the LORD JESUS CHRIST. For here HE is clearly and strongly instructing the local church how to deal with a fellow CHRISTian who insists on continuing in a particular sin (the example here of one CHRISTian refusing to forgive another CHRISTian). HE actually instructs the local church to eventually discipline this sinning brother by treating him *“...as an heathen man* (i.e. – unbeliever) *...”* This of course implies that he is excommunicated from that local church!

As one studies the Scriptures, it is learned that this confronting of sin within the local church was taught and practiced regularly by the first century CHRISTians. That first century Church was a holy and pure Church, thus a Church of great **power** as well! Following are just two illustrations...

A. The Sin And Death Of Ananias And Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11

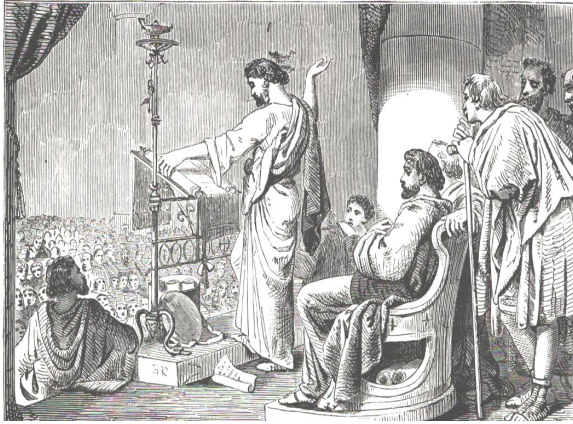
This of course is the story of a husband and wife, members of the first century Church, who decided to attempt to deceive both the LORD and the Apostles by lying about the sale of a possession of theirs. However, the Apostles, through the wisdom of the HOLY SPIRIT, discern this deception, expose it, and then confront the couple concerning it. Immediately their lives are required by the LORD in judgment. This testifies (with an “exclamation point”!), to the seriousness of this sin! Verse eleven gives us the clear purpose for this church discipline here...

“And great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things.”



Death Of Ananias

B. The Sin And Discipline Of The Corinthian Fornicator, I Corinthians 5:1-13



Paul Ministering In Corinth

This is the record of the professing CHRISTian man in the church of Corinth, who was committing immorality with “...his father’s wife” (v. 1). The Apostle Paul strongly rebukes the whole church for allowing this man to regularly follow this lifestyle, and not disciplining him by excommunicating him from their fellowship (v. 12). Paul then passes “judgment” (a concept that many CHRISTians today exclaim that we should refrain from), by commanding the church, “*To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that (his) spirit may be saved in the day of the LORD JESUS*” (v. 5). Why does the Apostle use such strong language here? Because, as he explains in verse six, “... *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*” In other words, a little sin allowed to continue in the local church will spread and “infect” the whole church! Thus, Paul concludes in verse thirteen...

“Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

According to the Apostle Paul’s second letter to this church, the Corinthian CHRISTians do indeed follow through with this discipline. And apparently the man repents and ceases to live in this sin, because Paul instructs the church...

“...to forgive him, and comfort him (and to) confirm (their) love toward him.” II Corinthians 2:7b, 8b

There was another significant aspect that gave the first century Church great **power** when it came to confronting sin. It preached repentance.

“repentance” (Greek – metanoeo) = Literally a change of mind. In relationship to sin, the act whereas an individual changes his mind about choosing to live a sinful lifestyle, and instead chooses to live a life of righteousness that pleases the LORD.

Following are just a few illustrations where repentance was preached through the first century Church...

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of JESUS CHRIST for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT.” Acts 2:38

“But Peter said unto him...Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray GOD, of perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” Acts 8:20a, 22



Peter The Apostle

INSERT

PICTURE

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“And when (the elders of the church) were come to him, (Paul) said unto them, Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Gentiles, repentance toward GOD, and faith toward our LORD JESUS CHRIST.” Acts 20:18,21

**John The Apostle Writing
To The Church Of Ephesus**

“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus (a local first century Church) ...These things saith HE (the LORD JESUS CHRIST)...Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Revelation 2:1a, 5

Contrast the boldness of the first century Church to confront sin, with the fear of the present, modern-day Church to do the same. It is significant what that great American pastor, A. W. Tozer, once said concerning this...

“As long as people can hear orthodoxy divorced from life, they will attend and support churches and institutions without objection. On the other hand, the man who preaches truth and applies it to the lives of his hearers will feel the nails and the thorns. He will lead a hard life, but a glorious one.”

Our local churches today refrain from confronting sin over fear of offending those attending, and perhaps losing their membership...especially the wealthy ones. The leaders themselves have sin in their lives, and thus are unable and unmotivated to confront the sins of others. This of course has a “trickle-down” effect, because if the leaders of a local church are living in sin, so will many of the attenders of that local church...especially the spiritually weaker ones.

There is a real lack of personal accountability. This is especially true in larger churches, because there are so many members to hold accountable. It is thus easy for members to be living in sin...even deep, gross sin, with no one able or willing to confront them concerning this sin. If by chance the sin is discovered and some confrontation does take place, very often that person will just leave that local church, find another one to attend, and begin the whole cycle of “infecting” their new local church with the same sin.



The Local Church Is Only For The Saints

Another real flaw in our local churches today is the motivation to make them “seeker friendly”. That is, to make the church a place where the wicked can feel “comfortable” and unthreatened by the convicting work of the HOLY SPIRIT. But we forget that the ungodly should feel uncomfortable, spiritually “threatened” and convicted when they come into the church. So much so, that either they believe on the LORD JESUS CHRIST for salvation and repent of their sins...or they never return. We must remember that the local church is for the saints...a place for them to participate in worship, discipleship and fellowship. The wicked cannot and should not

enjoy such involvement. This would also apply to the CHRISTian who is choosing to live in habitual sin.

If our local churches truly wish to possess and display the real **power** of GOD, we must begin to actively and thoroughly confront sin. The Scriptures of course give us very clear direction as how to carry this out.

First of all, notice from our original Scripture under this section (Matthew 18:15-18), that CHRIST HIMSELF gives us an orderly, four-step procedure in dealing with a sinning CHRISTian within the local church. To begin with, JESUS teaches us to deal with him alone (v. 15). If he doesn’t respond, he is to be confronted by “...*two or three witnesses...*” (v. 16). If he refuses to listen to them, “...*tell it unto the church...*” (vs. 17a). Finally, “... *if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*” (vs. 17b).

Secondly, concerning leaders of a church who insist on living in habitual sin, Scripture commands us to publicly rebuke them only after two or three witnesses are able to confirm their sin. No preferential treatment is to be given to any leader who sins.

“Against an elder (applicable to anyone in church leadership), receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I (Paul) charge thee before GOD, and the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.” I Timothy 5:19-21

Notice from this Scripture that when a church leader is publicly reproved, this naturally compels the rest of that local church to examine their own lives to determine whether there is any sin in their life that must be confessed and repented of. This should also motivate a local church to carefully research the past of any prospective leader to discover whether there have been moral failures or other types of serious sin.



“Pastor” Timothy

Thirdly, as noted earlier...“GOD never intended unconverted people or carnal CHRISTians to feel comfortable in HIS church(es). In the (first century) Church, no man dared to join himself to the believers, even though all the people held them in high esteem because of the good works that they were doing in the community (see Acts 5:13). It is vital that the highest possible standards be reinforced and encouraged by all those within the (local) church. Those who do not live by these standards will feel very uncomfortable because they will be judged by those within and without the (local) church on the basis of these standards. We (must) be committed to maintaining a pure church, rather than a popular church. Our goal will not be to evangelize sinners in our church, but to build up and equip the saints to be effective in evangelizing...first their own children and then those in the community. We (must) not compromise GODly standards or the requirements of worship in order to attract non-CHRISTians to our meetings. Instead, we will maintain the highest levels of spirituality by exhorting, “... *one another daily ...lest any ... be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*” (Hebrews 3:13). Note: the preceding quote was taken from Page 12 **“The Power of the Living Church”** *Institute of Basic Life Principles*.



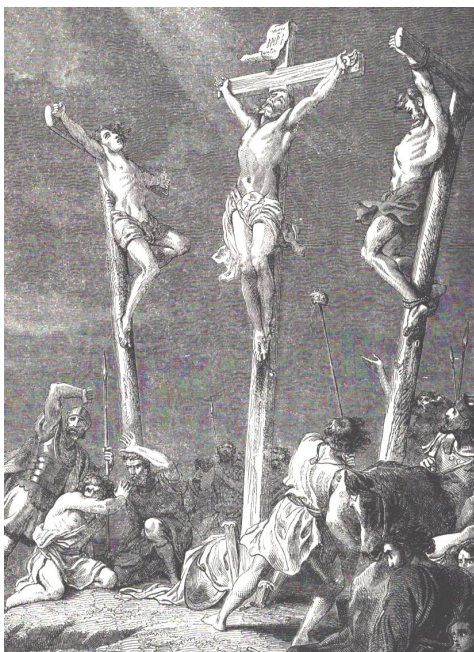
Bill Gothard
(From *The Institute Of Basic Life Principles*)

Next, as also explained earlier in our study, our local churches need to preach “repentance” more. We learned that this was a common theme in the messages of the first century Church. Because of this, the saints and unbelievers alike were constantly being confronted with the need to confess and forsake their sins.

Finally, our local churches need to regularly remember the LORD’s Supper together. One of the main purposes of the LORD’s Supper is for self-examination. Proper self-examination will compel believers to strive for true holiness of life. Within the definitive passage of Scripture where the LORD’s Supper is explained, the Apostle Paul writes...

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the LORD, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

I Corinthians 11:28, 31-32



**CHRIST Gave HIMSELF
For The Church**

The Apostle Paul, when writing to the local church in Ephesus, explained that someday JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF would completely sanctify HIS universal Church. May we today allow HIM to continue that work in our local churches!

“...CHRIST also loved the Church, and gave HIMSELF for it, that HE might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that HE might present it to HIMSELF a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Ephesians 5:25-27

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church



*“Dear Heavenly FATHER, we have learned from the study of Your Word, that it is YOUR Divine will that our church be a holy and pure church. A church that regularly addresses and confronts sin. Please forgive us if we have been more concerned with large numbers attending our church rather than promoting a holy and pure church. We now realize that a pure and holy church will be a church of **power** that will have a great, eternal impact on the world around us for YOUR glory! We humbly ask for YOUR grace so that YOU will be able to do this through us. We pray this in JESUS’ Name, Amen.”*

IV. IT WAS A CHURCH THE HOLY SPIRIT MOVED IN REGULARLY

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the HOLY GHOST, and began to speak with other tongues, as the SPIRIT gave them utterance.” Acts 2:1-4



The Descent Of The HOLY SPIRIT

Stop and meditate for a moment on what made the first century Church so influential in its community. Why did GOD so clearly bless it and use it for HIS glory? Why was the **power of GOD** so evident in and through it?



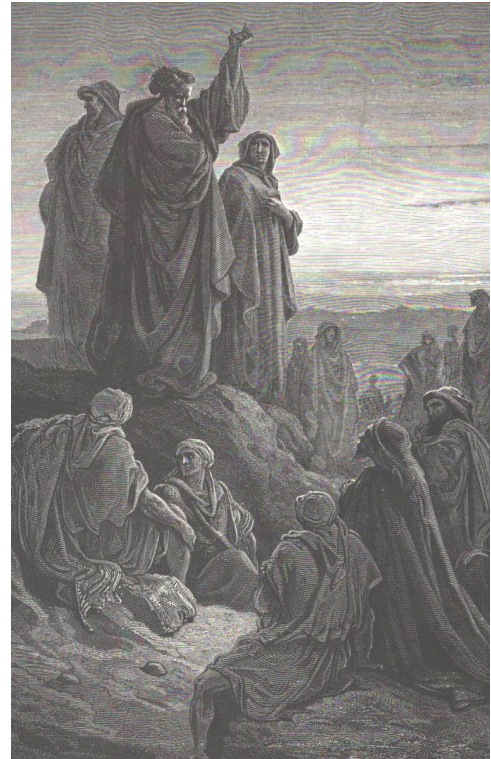
JESUS Sending Forth The Apostles

The answer is very clear as one studies the history of that Church throughout the book of Acts. It was a Church the HOLY SPIRIT moved in and through on a regular basis!

The Scripture above is often referred to as the beginning of the Church. Notice the HOLY SPIRIT’s unique and prominent role. There they were, that small band of believers, waiting for the promised *“COMFORTER... the SPIRIT of TRUTH...”*, WHOM JESUS said would come to help them be witnesses for HIM (see John 15:26-27). It was then that HE *“filled”* them, and *“...gave them utterance”* to be a vocal church of **power** for the LORD’s glory.

O how our local churches in America today need this same filling of the HOLY SPIRIT. So often we seek to do the work of the LORD and the church in our own flesh and strength, instead of waiting for the SPIRIT to fill us and empower us. No wonder we do not witness the same moving of the SPIRIT as those first century CHRISTians did!

Following are several other Scriptures from the book of Acts that illustrate the powerful moving of the HOLY SPIRIT in and through that first century Church. As we study each one, we will give a brief commentary and then make application to our local churches today.



A. Acts 4:31, 33

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the HOLY SPIRIT, and they spake the Word of GOD with boldness. And with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the LORD JESUS, and great grace was upon them all.”

The Apostles have just been told by the Jewish leaders that they must cease to teach in the Name of JESUS (see v. 18). The Apostles then report to the other Jerusalem CHRISTians of this persecution (see v. 23). It is then that they all pray, asking the LORD to give them boldness to continue to speak HIS Word, and to continue to miraculously heal the sick through them (see vv. 24-30). The LORD then answers their prayer in this mighty and powerful way recorded above, by literally shaking the place they have gathered in, filling them with HIS SPIRIT to speak HIS Word *“with boldness”*, and giving them *“... great power ... and great grace...”* to be witnesses for HIM.

The Apostles Preaching The Gospel

APPLICATION:

The LORD still desires to manifest HIMSELF through our local churches today. Perhaps not in the same ways described above, but HE will fill us with HIS SPIRIT and enable us to make an impact in our communities for HIM, if we cry out in true humility and sincerity!



Philip And The Ethiopian Eunuch

B. Acts 8:29

“Then the SPIRIT said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.”

Philip is one of the early first century evangelists. He has had a successful ministry in the city of Samaria (see vv. 5-13), and now the LORD leads him into the desert area of Gaza (see v. 26). As he is there, an authority from the country of Ethiopia is traveling through, “... *sitting in his chariot ...*” and reading from the book of Isaiah (see vv. 27-28). It is then that the HOLY SPIRIT literally speaks to Philip to go and minister CHRIST unto him (see vv. 29-35). In verses 36-38, we see the wonderful result of that ministry.

APPLICATION:

The LORD still greatly desires to “speak” to our local churches and their individual saints today. However, we are so often guilty of not listening. We are too busy with our programs and own agendas that we cannot hear HIM when HE tries to guide, instruct and lead us. If we do learn to discern HIS “voice” and HIS leading, we too will begin to see HIM work in powerful ways that we never have imagined!



Peter The Apostle

C. Acts 10:44-45

“While Peter yet spake those words, the HOLY SPIRIT fell on all them which heard the Word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT.”



Many Of Our Churches Have Become Entertainment Centers

The Apostle Peter had a powerful, first century ministry, especially to the nation of Israel. But now GOD sends him to minister to the Gentiles (see vv.1-22). Peter immediately obeys, and preaches the Gospel to Cornelius and his household (see vv. 34-43). As recorded above, the HOLY SPIRIT moves in a wonderful way...even while Peter is preaching.

APPLICATION:

The Word of GOD is just as powerful today as it was in Peter’s day. Many of our local churches tend to depart from sharing it. Rather, the emphasis is placed upon the music, drama or entertainment of the people. Social programs, building programs, etc. take priority over preaching the Scriptures. We must return to preaching GOD’s Word, if we hope to experience the real moving of the HOLY SPIRIT in our churches!

D. Acts 13: 2, 4a

“As they ministered to the LORD and fasted, the HOLY SPIRIT said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. So they, being sent forth by the HOLY SPIRIT...”

This is the story of two prominent, first century Church missionaries, Barnabas and Saul. It's the story of their "call" and their going "*forth*" to minister. Notice the important role of the HOLY SPIRIT in this process. HE both separates and sends them out. One can study the rest of the book of Acts, and discover the powerful ministry both of these men had in spreading the Gospel of the LORD JESUS CHRIST throughout their first century world.

APPLICATION:

Our local churches today need their different spiritual leaders. Pastors, elders, teachers, missionaries, etc. We too need the HOLY SPIRIT to "*separate*" and send them "*forth*". If we allow HIM to do this, they will also have a powerful impact on their communities around them!

E. Acts 16:6-7

"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the HOLY SPIRIT to preach the Word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the SPIRIT suffered them not."

The Scripture above is the record of one of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. As this Scripture asserts, Paul and his party, "*...were forbidden of the HOLY SPIRIT to preach the Word in Asia...(and) Bithynia...*" They are sensitive to the SPIRIT's leading here, and instead take the Gospel into Europe (study the rest of the book of Acts). They of course have a very productive ministry there!



We Need To Humbly Seek GOD's Will

APPLICATION:

The LORD desires to guide HIS church in these days, just as HE did in Paul's. However, our local churches today tend to implement their own plans, then ask GOD to bless them. This is the opposite of GOD's way. Instead, we need to humbly and diligently discern what the LORD wants to do, then work with HIM. Just as with Paul and the first century Church, HE has given us HIS HOLY SPIRIT to help us!

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church

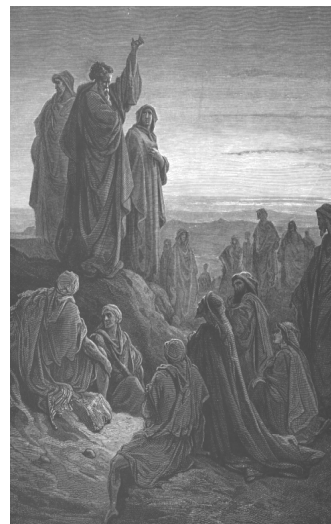


"Dear Heavenly FATHER, we thank YOU for YOUR Word and the record within it of how YOUR HOLY SPIRIT moved regularly through the first century Church. Please forgive us LORD if we have hindered HIM from moving within our church. We have learned that if we allow YOUR HOLY SPIRIT to move in and through our church, our church will be a church of power that will bring YOU glory and expand YOUR kingdom within our community. Please give us YOUR grace so that YOU will be able to accomplish this through us. In the Name of JESUS, Amen."

V. It Was A Church Burdened To Preach The Gospel To The Lost

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words...it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the Name of the LORD, shall be saved. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even ad many as the LORD our GOD shall call.” Acts 2:14, 21, 39

Here we have the very first sermon preached by the “infant,” first century Church. Notice one main theme was the need for the people to *“repent”* and be saved (see v. 38). We see the wonderful result of this powerful sermon, as Scripture records, *“Then they that gladly received (Peter’s) word, were baptized, and the same day there were added unto (the Church) about three thousand souls.”* (v. 41)



**The Apostles Preaching
The Gospel**

We in our local churches today, often neglect to be concerned with a lost and dying world around us. Yes, we are able to care for the saints, to seek to nurture and disciple them all we can, but not to the point where many of our churches are today. They become so “introverted”, they have no burden and zeal to reach out to the lost. **We must never forget that the local church that is not reaching out to the lost is a church that is “dying” or “already dead”!**

We can study the New Testament and learn even more how the first century Church emphasized this important aspect of the ministry. First of all, by looking at their teachings; then secondly, by observing their lifestyles...

A. Teachings From The New Testament Emphasizing The Need To Reach The Lost



“...and ye shall be witnesses unto ME...”

1. The LORD JESUS CHRIST

“But ye shall receive power, after that the HOLY SPIRIT is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto ME both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Notice that this was CHRIST’s very last earthly commission to the leaders of the first entury Church. This same commission is for our local churches today!

2. The Apostle Paul

“Awake to righteousness, and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of GOD, I speak this to your shame.” I Corinthians 15:34

“For from you sounded out the Word of the LORD not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to GOD-ward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything.”
I Thessalonians 1:8

Two local first century Churches, the one in Thessalonica, Paul commend for spreading “...*the Word of the LORD*...” The other in Corinth, Paul rebukes because the lost living around them “...*have not the knowledge of GOD*...” May our local churches today seek to emulate the church in Thessalonica, rather than the one in Corinth.



St. Paul Preaching To The Thessalonians

3. The Apostle Peter

“But sanctify the LORD GOD in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”
I Peter 3:15

Here Peter admonishes us to always be available to share “...*the hope*...” of salvation through the LORD JESUS CHRIST with “...*every man*...”. Are we willing to obey this command today?

B. Lifestyles From The New Testament Emphasizing The Need To Reach The Lost

1. The Apostle Peter

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the LORD.” Acts 3:19



Ancient Jerusalem

This was Peter’s second recorded sermon to the unbelieving Jews.

2. The Persecuted Saints from Jerusalem

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.” Acts 8:4

Persecution had uprooted the Jerusalem Church from her home. This was GOD's way of spreading HIS Gospel to, "... *Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*" (see Acts 1:8).

3. The Evangelist Philip

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached CHRIST unto them." Acts 8:5

The Samaritans were despised by the Jews of Philip's day. Yet this did not discourage the first century Church in reaching out to them with the Gospel of salvation.

4. The Apostle Paul

"And he (Paul) spake boldly in the Name of the LORD JESUS, and disputed against the Grecians, but they went about to slay him."
Acts 9:29

Notice from the Scriptures that Paul "...*spake boldly*...". This boldness was indeed a characteristic of the first century Church. Unfortunately, many of our local churches today and most of the individual CHRISTians within them are afraid to confront the lost.

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church



*"O LORD GOD in heaven, we praise YOU for the testimony of YOUR first century Church, and how she had a sincere burden to preach the Gospel to the lost. We have learned from the study of YOUR Word that if our church is not actively reaching out to the lost, it will eventually become weak and die. Therefore we cry out to YOU FATHER, to please give us a burden and sincere desire to share YOUR wonderful plan of salvation with the lost and dying world around us. We realize that if we allow YOU to do this through us, our church will be a church of **power**, used by YOU to bring YOU glory and enlarge YOUR kingdom within our community. We pray this in the Name of our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, Amen."*

VI. IT WAS A CHURCH COMMITTED TO GOD'S WORD

"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine..."
Acts 2:42a

Within this brief statement of Scripture above, we find a wealth of truth that testifies of the first century Church's devotion to the Word of GOD. We discover this by defining three key words...



"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine..."

“continued” = to persevere strongly in something

“steadfastly” = firmly and intently

“doctrine” = teaching

The **“Apostles’ doctrine”** (i.e. - teaching), was GOD’s Word of course. Whether it was Scripture that had already been revealed (the Old Testament), or Scripture that was now being given through them (the New Testament), it was in this teaching that the early saints firmly and intently persevered in through personal study and application. This of course was a key to their **power**. GOD’s Word was a central part of their lives!



Our Churches Have Become Entertainment Orientated

Contrast this to our present-day local churches and most of the individuals within them. Scripture is not a very important part of their lives. Rather than the Word of GOD being the most important aspect of the worship service, more and more time and attention is given to “special music”, drama presentations, liturgical dancing, “fellowship dinners”, and the whole entertainment mentality. In relationship to individual CHRISTians, most will confess that they have very little time or interest for GOD’s Word in their everyday lives. Is it any surprise that so many individual CHRISTians and so many of our local churches are spiritually weak and “sick”?!

The Scriptures clearly declare that those Apostles who were Divinely inspired to write the New Testament, emphasized to the first century Church the great importance of learning and living out those Scriptures in their everyday lives. Following are several examples...

A. The Apostle Paul

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of GOD may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”
II Timothy 3:16-17

Here the great Apostle instructs Timothy, a first century pastor, that because **“all Scripture”** comes from GOD, it is **“profitable”** for every area of life. Thus it helps the follower of GOD to be **“perfect”** (i.e. – complete), and equipped to do **“...all good works.”** O how our local churches today need to instruct their people these very same truths!

Paul immediately proceeds to teach Pastor Timothy further, saying...

“I charge thee therefore before GOD, and the LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO shall judge the quick and the dead at HIS appearing and HIS kingdom, preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the Truth, and shall be turned into fables.” II Timothy 4:1-4



“Pastor” Timothy

“As long as people can hear orthodoxy divorced from life, they will attend and support churches and institutions without objection. On the other hand, the man who preaches truth and applies it to the lives of his hearers will feel the nails and the thorns. He will lead a hard life, but a glorious one.”

A.W. Tozer

Notice the great importance Paul places on communicating the Word of GOD to others (i.e. – *“preach the Word”*), by using *“doctrine”* (the same word in the original Greek used in Acts 2:42a), to *“...reprove, rebuke, (and) exhort...”*

One only has to study the book of Acts to discover how the first century Church boldly and consistently proclaimed the Word of GOD to the world around them. Following are but a few illustrations...

“...and they (the CHRISTians in Jerusalem), were all filled with the HOLY SPIRIT, and they spake the Word of GOD with boldness.” Acts 4:31b

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.” Acts 8:4

“And the Word of the LORD was published throughout all the region.” Acts 13:49

Contrast this with many of our local churches today who are afraid to proclaim certain portions of the Scriptures, (i.e. - the doctrine of the blood of CHRIST, the sinfulness of man, the need for repentance and the judgment of hell, to name a few) fearing that they will offend those attending.

In II Timothy 4:3-4, Paul warns Timothy that,

“...the time will come when they (i.e. - professing CHRISTians in local churches), will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the Truth and shall be turned into fables.”

Sadly, these two verses describe many of our modern-day churches today!



The Disciple James

B. The Disciple James

“But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But shoos looketh into the perfect Law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” James 1:22-25

James was a significant leader in the first century Church. First, he emphasizes the need to not only “...*be a hearer of the Word...*”, but “...*doers of the Word...*” as well. Then he admonishes his readers to “...*continueth therein...*” That is, to be someone who regularly spending time in studying, meditating and living out the Word of GOD in their life. He then reminds us that the follower of CHRIST who does this, “...*shall be blessed in his deed.*”



“...as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word...”

As noted earlier, most professing CHRISTians in our modern-day churches, if they were honest, would confess to having very little time for GOD’s Word. Is it any surprise that they are spiritually and emotionally weak...and thus our local churches are weak as well?!

C. The Apostle Peter

“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby...” I Peter 2:1-2

Apparently, Peter is writing to recent converts to the LORD JESUS CHRIST because he refers to them “...*as newborn babes...*” Instead of continuing on in their old sinful lifestyles of “...*malice...guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and...evil speakings...*”, he admonishes them to “...*desire the sincere milk of the Word...*”

“desire” (Greek-epipotheo) = an earnest, intense longing for

CHRISTians within our local churches today desperately need the HOLY SPIRIT to move in their hearts and give them “an earnest (and) intense longing for” the Word of GOD. What a mighty display of GOD’s **power** we would then experience in our day!

D. The Apostle John

“And hereby we do know that we know HIM, if we keep HIS Commandments. He that saith, I know HIM, and keepeth not HIS Commandments, is a liar and the Truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth HIS Word, in him verily is the love of GOD perfected, hereby know we that we are in HIM.” I John 2:3-5

Here John clearly makes the connection to these first century followers of JESUS CHRIST, that if they profess to “*know*” CHRIST personally, they will prove this relationship by obedience to “...*HIS Commandments.*” John and these first century CHRISTians realized that they could not obey “... *HIS Commandments*” unless they spent time studying, “...*HIS Word...*” The wonderful result of all this was that “... *in* (them) *verily* (was) *the love of GOD perfected* (i.e. - completed) ...”

Obedience to CHRIST and “...*HIS Commandments...*” is not taught as much as it should be in our local churches. We should not be surprised then that so many of the saints today do not really “*know*” the LORD in a personal, intimate way!

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church



*“Precious FATHER in heaven, we humble ourselves before YOU, acknowledging our sin of neglecting the study and application of YOUR Word. We praise YOU for giving us the example of the first century Church, and their commitment to it. We sincerely ask YOU to give us a real hunger and desire to not only spend time in YOUR Word on a daily basis, but to also apply it to our lives by actively living it out through obedience. We have learned that as we allow YOU to develop this within us, our church will be a church of **power** and impact to the community around us. In the NAME of JESUS CHRIST, Amen.”*

VII. IT WAS A CHURCH THAT ENJOYED TRUE FELLOWSHIP

“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’...fellowship...” Acts 2:42b

Here we have another brief statement from Scripture, and again, much insight into what helped the first century Church to possess such **power**.

“fellowship” = a sharing in common

As one studies the first century Church in the book of Acts, it is discovered that this “sharing in common” was indeed a very important part of her life. Notice from the short passage in Acts 2:42-47, seven aspects of this *“fellowship”* that they enjoyed...

A. They Enjoyed Studying GOD’s Word Together

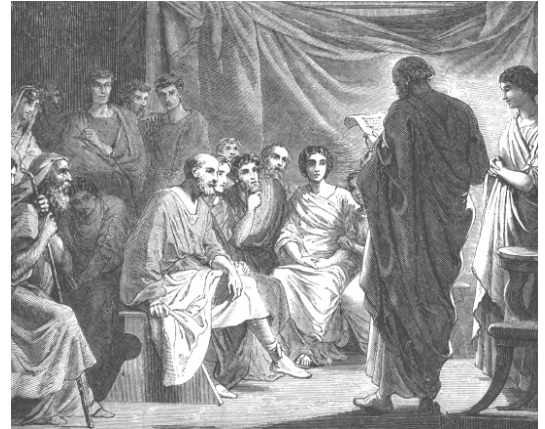
“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine...” (v. 42a)

B. They Enjoyed Remembering The LORD’s Supper Together

“And they continued steadfastly in (the)...breaking of bread...” (v. 42c)

C. They Enjoyed Praying Together

“And they continued steadfastly...in prayers.” (v. 42d)



Early CHRISTIANS In Rome Listening To A Reading Of The Epistle Of Paul

D. They Enjoyed Sharing Possessions Together

“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.” (vv. 44-45) See also Acts 4:32-35

E. They Enjoyed Worshipping GOD Together

“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple...praising GOD...” (vv. 46a, 47a)



The Macedonians Giving Gifts To Paul

F. They Enjoyed Eating Meals Together

“And they, continuing daily...breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with gladness...” (v.46)

G. They Enjoyed Seeking Unity Together

“And they, continuing daily with one accord...and singleness of heart...” (v.46)
See also 4:32a

Notice also from these verses, four wonderful results that these CHRISTians experienced because of this *“fellowship”*...

1. They Experienced Genuine Terror

“And fear came upon every soul...” (v. 43a)

“fear” (Greek-phobos) = dread, terror

It is amazing that as these first century CHRISTians enjoyed this *“fellowship”* together, a real “dread” and “terror” of GOD was realized. Apparently, they knew that the moving of GOD they were experiencing was genuine!

2. They Experienced Genuine Miracles

“...and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles.” Acts 2:43b

We of course hear so much today about so called “miracles” within professing CHRISTianity. Physical “healings” and “deliverances” from demons to name but two. There is no doubt that some of these are genuine, but so many are insignificant and difficult to document and prove (i.e. - migraine headaches, sore backs, arthritis, etc.).

But study the book of Acts, and discover *“...many wonders and signs...”* that were genuinely powerful and Divine. Following are but a few...



Peter Healing The Lame Man

- a. The healing of the *“...man lame from his mother’s womb...”*
Acts 3:1-9

- b. The raising from the dead of “...*a certain disciple named Tabitha...*” Acts 9:36-41
- c. The deliverance of Peter from prison. Acts 12:5-16

3. They Experienced Genuine Acceptance

“...and having favour with all the people.” Acts 2:47a

What a testimony to the LORD moving within the early Church, and her influence amongst the surrounding community, that “...*all the people*” would hold her in such high esteem!

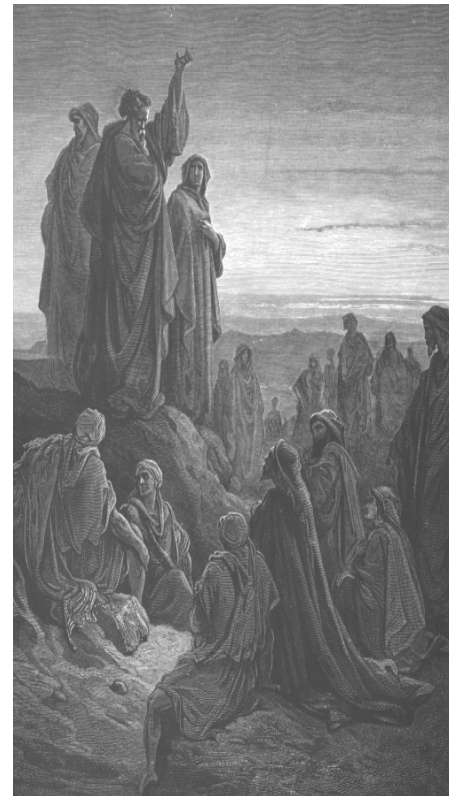
4. They Experienced Genuine Conversions

“And the LORD added to the Church daily such as should be saved.”
Acts 2:47b

It is significant that the Scriptures record here that “...*the LORD added to the Church daily such as should be saved.*” This means that these were genuine conversions, and that this was genuine Church growth.

Contrast these truths with our local churches today. Much of what we call “church growth” and “professing CHRISTianity” is simply people moving from one church to another and false professions of salvation.

We live in a society today that encourages individualism and a “looking out for oneself”. Unfortunately, this same thinking has invaded many of our local churches today. Because of this, we as followers of the LORD JESUS CHRIST are missing out on many of the rich benefits that accompany true *“fellowship”*.



The Apostles Preaching The Gospel

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church



*“Dear Heavenly FATHER, we have learned from the study of YOUR Word, that it is very important that we as a local church regularly practice a Biblical “fellowship” together. We have learned that as we do, we will experience a Divine and dynamic **power** that will benefit us, and bring YOU the glory YOU deserve. So once again, we cry out to YOU to please help us in carrying out this aspect of the ministry. We ask for these things in the Name of our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, Amen.”*

VIII. IT WAS A CHURCH DEVOTED TO PRAYER

“And they continued steadfastly...in prayers.” Acts 2:42c

Prayer is acknowledging one’s need for the LORD. Herein lies another testimony as to why these first century believers experienced such **power** in their midst. They were a people dedicated to acknowledging their need for the LORD by spending time in prayer.

Remember two word studies we conducted earlier in our study...

“continued” = to persevere strongly in something

“steadfastly” = firmly and intently

For the first century Church, prayer was not some religious routine or ministry afterthought, but was obviously a discipline that was a central part of their corporate life. It was a part of their ministry that they “firmly and intently persevered strongly in”.

We know that this was so because of two reasons. First of all by studying their teachings, then secondly by observing their lifestyles...

A. Teachings From The New Testament Emphasizing The Need To Pray

1. The Apostle Paul

“Praying always with all prayer and supplications in the SPIRIT, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplications...” Ephesians 6:18a

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” Colossians 4:2

“Pray without ceasing.” I Thessalonians 5:17



Paul The Apostle

With the definitions of *“continued”* and *“steadfastly”* from Acts 2:42 in our thinking, we see how Paul emphasizes to those first century CHRISTians the

importance of *“Praying always...”*; *“...watching...with all perseverance...”*; to *“Continue in prayer...”*; and *“Pray without ceasing.”*

Oh how our local churches today need to heed these same admonitions! Unfortunately, this is a discipline greatly lacking in modern CHRISTianity. Indeed, this is a discipline very few followers of JESUS CHRIST and even fewer local churches enter into!

All one has to do to witness this is attend the typical “mid-week prayer meeting”. Notice that the actual prayer time is relatively brief (15-30 minutes), and the number of people participating is almost always a very small percentage of the total church body. If a local church was to call for a time of both prayer and fasting, you would see the percentage drop even further. But if that same local church was to have a “potluck dinner”, you could expect almost 100 percent attendance!

2. The Disciple James



“Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the LORD, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the LORD shall raise him up, and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess our faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James 5:13-16

The Disciple James

In this Scripture above, James teaches about prayer and its relationship to the healing of the saints. It is evident from this passage, that James and his fellow first century believers considered prayer and the, *“...anointing...with oil in the Name of the LORD...”* to be a very important part of their corporate ministry. Prayer was not an option to them, but essential, even for their physical well-being. But even beyond that, they knew the great **power** of, *“...effectual fervent prayer...”* coming from, *“...a righteous man...”* would bring about tremendous results!

Of course most of our local churches today do not realize that this same **power** through prayer is at their “disposal”; not only for physical healing, but for financial provision, discerning GOD’s will, etc. Instead, if we are ill, the first thing we do is call the doctor. If we need money, we descend into bondage through borrowing money from the bank. If we are facing a major decision in our life, we consult everyone but the LORD through HIS Word and prayer. No wonder our churches are in such trouble!

3. The Apostle Peter

“But the end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” I Peter 4:7



“sober” = to think clearly

“watch” = to be alert

Here the Apostle Peter exhorts his first century readers “to think clearly” and “to be alert” through prayer, because “...*the end of all things...*” is near.

This same admonition is for us today of course, and O how we need to obey it! Our local churches today seem to be dull of reasoning and spiritually “asleep”. Being more devoted to sincere, HOLY SPIRIT-led prayer will certainly change this. We need to remember that a local church will take on the “personality” and spirituality of its leadership, especially concerning this subject of prayer. If the church leadership encourages and practices this discipline of prayer, so too will the congregation. If the church leadership does not, neither will their people.

B. Lifestyles From The New Testament Emphasizing The Need To Pray

1. The One Hundred And Twenty Disciples

“And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty). Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that (JESUS) was taken from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of HIS resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, THOU, LORD, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two THOU has chosen. And they gave forth their lots an the lot ell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles.”
Acts 1:15, 22-24,26



**Peter The Apostle
Believed In Prayer**

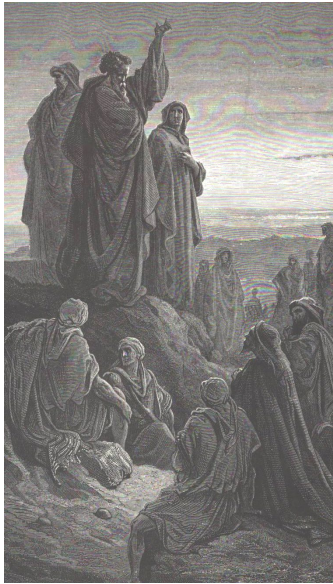
We find in this Scripture above, a very important decision that the infant Church was faced with...who would replace the departed disciple Judas? What was the very first thing they did to discern the will of GOD? They prayed!

O how our local churches need to follow this example! How tragic that we so often resort to fleshly means to try to determine GOD’s will, and then perhaps as a last resort, consider prayer.

2. The Saints In Jerusalem

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the HOLY SPIRIT, and they spake the Word of GOD with boldness.”

Acts 4:31



**The Apostles Preaching
The Gospel**

The context here of course, is the Church in Jerusalem has just experienced her first persecution. The Jewish leaders have imprisoned the Apostles Peter and John for healing and preaching in the Name of CHRIST (see vv. 1-4), and now have threatened them to cease this ministry (see vv. 13-22). Upon being freed, the two Apostles immediately return to their fellow CHRISTians to report what has happened (see v. 23). What was the very first thing they did in response to this? They prayed see vv. 24-30)! GOD then shows how much HE appreciates their prayer by answering them in three very powerful ways. First, *“...the place was shaken where they were assembled together...”* Secondly, *“...they were all filled with the HOLY SPIRIT...”* Thirdly, *“...they spake the Word of GOD with boldness.”*

We can be assured the LORD desires to manifest HIMSELF in supernatural ways in our churches as well. And indeed HE will, but we must also take care of our responsibilities too. One of those responsibilities is to pray!

3. The Twelve Apostles

“Then the twelve (Apostles) called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of GOD, and serve tables. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.” Acts 6:2,4

The first century Church is growing, and with it, her many responsibilities. One such responsibility is the care of the widows (see v. 1). The question arises, who will minister to them? It is decided that GODly men, other than the Apostles should be appointed *“...over this business”* (see v. 3). The Apostles instead

would, *“...give (themselves) continually to prayer...”*

The young Church realized that in order for her to truly be a success, her leaders had to spend much time in prayer!



We Need To Spend More Time In Prayer

How very different it is in our local churches today. Sadly, so very few of our spiritual leaders spend any significant time in prayer. They have time for the church softball team, fellowship dinners, pastor conferences, etc., but very little time to pray. Is it any surprise that our local churches are so spiritually weak? If our churches hope to experience any genuine, eternal success in our day, our leaders must spend much time

in prayer!

4. The Church Leaders in Antioch

“As they ministered to the LORD, and fasted, the HOLY SPIRIT said, Separate ME Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” Acts 13:2-3

Here Barnabas and Saul are about to embark on their first missionary journey together. The little church in Antioch realizes how important this new ministry is, so they take the time to fast and pray before sending them forth. Read and study further in the book of Acts to see how the LORD uses these two men in a powerful way to expand HIS kingdom abroad.

How very unusual it is to see our local churches of today following this Biblical pattern of prayer and fasting. As noted earlier, prayer in itself is rare enough, but prayer with fasting is almost unheard of. Yet, if we desire to know GOD’s

will and leading as the first century Church did, and if we desire to make a significant impact in the communities around us, we must return to practicing these all important spiritual disciplines!



Paul Preaching At Antioch

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church



*“Our Precious Heavenly FATHER, we rejoice because of the witness and example of YOUR saints from the first century, and how they were devoted to prayer. We have learned that when we pray, we are acknowledging that we need YOU, and O how we need YOU in these days that we live. Please forgive us for neglecting this important part of the ministry, and help us to be more committed to this discipline. We realize that if we will practice this discipline from sincere hearts, we will witness a whole new moving of YOUR HOLY SPIRIT, and a whole new **power** in our church that will bring YOU glory and expand YOUR Kingdom within our community. We pray this in the Name of our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, Amen.”*

IX. IT WAS A CHURCH THAT MINISTERED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

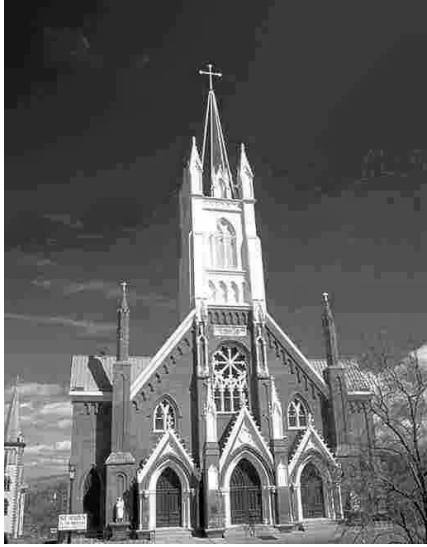
“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple, who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee, in the Name of JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he leaping up stood, and walked...” Acts 3:1-3, 6, 8a



First Century Temple In Jerusalem

This is the initial, supernatural miracle administered by the first century Church. This was definitely Divine, for who could heal a, “...*man lame from his mother’s womb...*” instantly, but the LORD alone? This is the **power** of JESUS’ Name. The first century Church knew this **power** and ministered regularly with it.

To minister, “...*in the Name of JESUS CHRIST...*”, means to minister with and through HIS **power**, not our own. It means to minister with and through HIS authority, not ours. When it comes to confronting the powerful forces of darkness and evil, when it comes to ministering to a lost and dying humanity, and when it comes to serving the saints of the local church, we have no power or authority in and through ourselves.



It Is Only Through “...the Name of JESUS CHRIST” That Our Churches Will Have Power!

This too is another problem in our local churches today. WE too often rely on our own weak and feeble efforts to minister to others. We design and implement our programs, we “market” our churches like businesses and we use the principles of the world to help them “grow”. Although our churches appear outwardly “successful”, there is no real **power** within. If we desire to see the same supernatural, Divine **power** that the first century Church possessed and displayed, we must rely upon and implement the same “source” of that **power**, “...the Name of JESUS CHRIST”!

As we give further time and space to this subject, we will first discover that this was a teaching commonly taught by the New Testament writers of Scripture. Secondly, we will learn of more examples of the first century saints practicing this principle.

A. Teachings From The New Testament Emphasizing The Need To Minister In The Name Of JESUS CHRIST

1. The LORD JESUS CHRIST

“For where two or three are gathered together in MY Name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:20

Here JESUS HIMSELF instructs us concerning the **power** of ministering in HIS Name. HE simply teaches us that if we will meet with others, (whether in a formal or informal setting), through HIS authority HE will meet with us.

Sadly, in many of our local churches today, JESUS CHRIST is not present. Instead, we are more concerned with programs that keep people entertained, and expensive building structures that cause us to be slaves to the banks because of indebtedness to them.

2. The Apostle Paul

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the LORD JESUS...” Colossians 3:17a

The great Apostle makes it very clear here, every word we speak and every action we take, we are to submit to HIS authority and do so through HIS power.



Many Of Our Local Churches Are Enslaved To Banks Through Indebtedness

Not so in our local churches today. We tend to do things contrary to the above. We first devise our programs and build our buildings, then we ask GOD to bless them; instead of relying on HIS power and ministering through HIS authority.

3. The Disciple James

“Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the LORD.” James 5:14

Is there **power**, “...*in the Name of the LORD*” to bring healing to the saint who is ill? According to this Scripture there is. When prayer is made for the sick in this way, healing is Divinely given because we ask for it through the authority and **power** of JESUS CHRIST.

It is extremely rare in our day to see this principle practiced in our churches. Instead, CHRISTians rely on doctors and medicine. Because of this, large numbers of our people are in continuous ill-health, large medical bills are incurred, and the LORD is robbed of receiving great glory through HIS miraculous healing power.

B. Lifestyles From The New Testament Emphasizing The Need To Minister In The Name Of JESUS CHRIST

1. The Apostle Peter

“And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, JESUS CHRIST maketh thee whole, arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.” Acts 9:32-34

This is just one example of Peter healing the sick through the Name of the LORD. For other instances, study Acts 3:1-7; 5:15-16; and 9:36-41.

2. The Apostle Paul

“And (Paul) was with (the other Apostles) coming in and going out of Jerusalem. And (Paul) spake boldly in the Name of the LORD JESUS, and disputed against the Grecians, but they went about to slay him...” Acts 9:28-29.



**The Apostle Paul
Knew The Power Of
The Name Of JESUS**

Paul has not been a CHRISTian for very long and already he is boldly proclaiming CHRIST in Jerusalem. What gave him this Divine authority and **power**? He, “...*spake in the Name of the LORD JESUS...*”!

“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain

by soothsaying, the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the MOST HIGH GOD, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this she did many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the Name of JESUS CHRIST to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”
Acts 16:16-18

Paul experienced much opposition almost everywhere he ministered. Many times it was openly demonic. Yet the demons had to flee as he would, “...*command (them) in the Name of JESUS CHRIST...*” !



Paul Ministering In Corinth

“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples, and he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on HIM which should come after him, that is, on CHRIST JESUS. When they heard this, they were baptized in the Name of the LORD JESUS.”
Acts 19:1, 3-5

John the Baptist’s disciples had been baptized, but only concerning, “...*John’s baptism.*” But now they needed a Divine authority and **power**, so Paul baptized them, “...*in the Name of the LORD JESUS.*”

Do we in our local churches today, desire this same Divine authority that the first century Church ministered under? Do we long for the same supernatural **power** to be displayed in and through our local churches today? If the answers are indeed “Yes” to these two all-important questions, we must then remember that they will only be realities if we minister, “...*in the Name of JESUS CHRIST*”!

“...that ye may know what is the hope of (CHRIST’s) calling, and what the riches of the glory of HIS inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of HIS power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of HIS mighty power, which HE wrought in CHRIST, when HE raise HIM from the dead, and set HIM at HIS own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under HIS feet, and gave HIM to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is HIS body, the fullness of HIM that filleth all in all.” Ephesians 1:18b-23



“...that we may know...the exceeding greatness of HIS power...”

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church

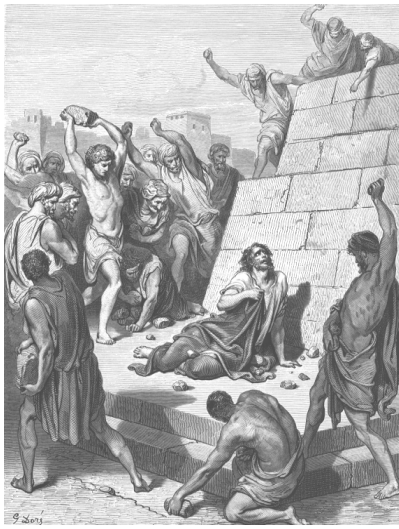


*“Our Precious Heavenly FATHER, we thank YOU once again for YOUR Word. We praise YOU for using it to instruct us concerning the importance of ministering in the Name of JESUS CHRIST. We humbly acknowledge that we have not been serving under the authority and **power** of HIS Name, but attempting to do so in and through ourselves. Because of this, we cry out to YOU to forgive us. We now ask YOU to help us to always put aside our own fleshly, human efforts of ministry and service, but instead to always minister and serve with and through the might authority and **power** of JESUS’ Name. We now realize, that as we follow this instruction, YOU will use us to advance YOUR glory and YOUR Kingdom within our community. In JESUS Name, Amen.”*

X. IT WAS A CHURCH WILLING TO SUFFER PERSECUTION

“And as they (the Apostles Peter and John), spake unto the people, the priests and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through JESUS the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day, for it was now eventide.” Acts 4:1-3

It is within the Scripture above, that we have the record of the infant Church’s first persecution. We will learn later that this would be the first of many.



Martyrdom Of Stephen

This concept is so foreign to our local churches in America today of course, We have enjoyed living and ministering in peace and prosperity for so long, we have accepted the notion that persecution could never happen to us. Yet how can we think this way? If the first century Church was required by GOD to experience persecution, why not our local churches today? If this was such a common part of those early CHRISTian's lives, why not the same for us?

As we now study GOD's Word in more detail, we will first of all learn of several more instances of the first century Church's persecutions. May we be greatly encouraged by her GODly responses. Secondly, we will study several teachings from the writers of New Testament Scripture, and how they taught their first century readers (but also us today), the need to not only prepare for righteous persecution...but indeed expect it! May the LORD help us to respond accordingly.

A. Lifestyles From The New Testament Revealing Their Persecution Experiences

1. The Twelve Apostles

"...and when they (the Jewish religious leaders), had called the Apostles, and beaten them, they commanded them that they should not speak in the Name of JESUS, and let them go."
Acts 5:40

GOD has been accomplishing, *"...many signs and wonders..."* through the Apostles (see vv. 12-16). Because of this, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem have the Apostles arrested (see vv. 17-18). However, the LORD supernaturally delivers them (see v. 19), and commands them to continue to preach HIS Word (see vv. 20-21). Again the Jewish leaders seek to stop their ministry (see vv. 22-28). It is then that the Apostles wax bold and proclaim, *"We ought to obey GOD rather than men"* (see v. 29). It is this great courage on behalf of the Apostles that eventually brings about them being *"beaten"* and threatened in verse 40. Notice two wonderful results because of this persecution...

- The Apostles leave their persecutors, *"...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for (CHRIST's) Name."* (see v.41)
- *"...daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach JESUS CHRIST."* (see v. 42)

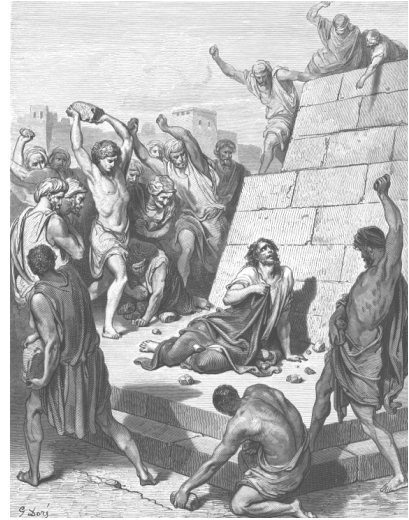


The Burning Of CHRISTian Martyrs In Rome

Would we who consider ourselves followers of the LORD JESUS CHRIST display such fearless boldness in the face of persecution today? Even more so, would we be able to actually rejoice because of that persecution?

2. The Deacon Stephen

“When they (the Jewish religious leaders) heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon GOD, and saying, LORD JESUS, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, LORD, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” Acts 7:54, 59-60



Martyrdom Of Stephen

This of course is the account of the infant Church’s first martyr (there would be many, many others!). Stephen preaches to the Jewish leaders, and his theme is their very own unbelief. (see vv. 2-53). His tremendous boldness causes his murderers to be, “...*cut to the heart...*” with conviction, which leads them to stone him to death in verse 59. As he dies, he responds as the LORD JESUS CHRIST responded when HE was crucified ... he actually prays for his killers to be forgiven!

How would we respond today if we were faced with such intense opposition for the cause of CHRIST? Would we be willing to sacrifice our very life for HIS glory?

3. The Apostle Paul

“And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city, and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch...” Acts 14:19-21



The Apostle Paul

As we study the life of the early Church, we discover that the Apostle Paul has a prominent role. We learn of his self-sacrifice, his boldness, and his zeal for the LORD. He also knew great persecution.

The Scripture above is just one instance where he actually is martyred...but God raises him up from the dead. This experience does not discourage him however, but rather only strengthens his resolve to bring the Gospel to the unbelieving world!

Are we willing to exhibit such self-sacrifice, such boldness and such zeal? Are we willing to experience great persecution? If we were so privileged, would we allow that very persecution to strengthen our commitment to the LORD?

B. Teachings From The New Testament Revealing Our Need To Expect Persecution

1. The Apostle Paul

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of CHRIST, not only to believe on HIM, but also to suffer for HIS sake.” Philippians 1:29

Here Paul asserts that suffering for CHRIST is a gift to be received, just like salvation. This implies that persecution is indeed a special privilege for the followers of the LORD JESUS CHRIST!



Persecution Can And Will Arise Even In America!

“Yea, and all that will live GODly in CHRIST JESUS shall suffer persecution.” II Timothy 3:12

There is no doubt left here by Paul.

He clearly exclaims that persecution shall come to every saint, *“...that will live GODly in CHRIST JESUS...”*!

2. The Apostle Peter

“For even hereunto were ye called, because CHRIST also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow HIS steps.” I Peter 2:21

Remember that JESUS CHRIST is our *“example”* in every area of life, so too concerning suffering and persecution. HE of course, suffered tremendously...even giving HIS life. Here we are commanded to, *“...follow HIS steps.”*

“And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled...” I Peter 3:13-14

The Apostle Peter knew what he was talking about concerning suffering persecution. He was one who experienced it often himself, and he tells us here that if we have this same privilege, we can actually be *“happy”* because of it!



Peter Knew What It Was Like To Suffer For CHRIST.

We cannot be assured that we will someday be privileged to experience the same intense and extreme type of persecution that the first century Church experienced, however, we must take these Scriptures that we have studied to heart. So if we indeed are called to suffer for the LORD's Name and glory, we will be prepared and equipped.

A Prayer Of Commitment For Our Church



*“O LORD GOD I heaven, we praise YOU for the testimony of YOUR first century Church and the encouragement they are to us for being so willing to suffer righteous persecution for YOUR glory. We now see that this was another characteristic that made her such a powerful influence in the world around her. LORD, we acknowledge that we have been a church unwilling and even fearful of experiencing real persecution ourselves. Thus we cry out to YOU, asking YOU to give us a heart willing to suffer for YOUR Name...even to die for YOUR glory, if YOU indeed call us to do so. We realize that as YOU give us this kind of heart, our church will have a whole new **power** to expand YOUR kingdom within our community. We pray this in the Name of our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, Amen.”*

CONCLUSION

We began this study by asking two very important questions concerning the first century Church. First of all, what made her such a Church of **power**? Then secondly, how could she have such an eternal impact on the society of her day? The answers to these questions have been answered by discovering these ten Scripture principles that these first century followers of CHRIST implemented in their individual and corporate ministries.

We also asked a third important question. How we in our local churches today could apply these same principles, and thus see that same great supernatural and Divine **power** work in, through, and about us, to have that same eternal impact on our society today? The answer of course, as we have learned, is to simply follow these above stated principles by the grace and through the SPIRIT of GOD.

MAY WE INDEED ALLOW HIM TO DO SO!

“Now unto HIM that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto HIM be glory in the church by JESUS CHRIST throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

Ephesians 3:20-21