

The sermon

Intro

There's a time for wrestling with our own struggles. Our thoughts, attitudes, confusion towards our circumstances. There's a time for reminding ourselves of God's steadfast love. So I spent three weeks in the Psalms.

There's a time for looking at our origins. There's a time for marveling over God's actions in history. We'll get there in Genesis.

And there's a time for looking at life in the local church. We've done that in Ephesians. We'll go there again today in Acts 2.

The Bible isn't one dimensional. The Bible tells us a lot about God, us, history, the end, and life together in the local church. That's where we're going this morning in Acts 2.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Be devoted to the church (2:39, 41, 47)

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. – 2:41

“received” = they repented. Note baptism followed repentance.

And three thousand souls were added. Added to what? The church.

What I really want you to note is the pattern here: **repentance** → **baptism** → **added to the church**. There wasn't a delay in baptism. There wasn't a delay in joining the church. We're not just talking the universal church (all Christians everywhere). Those who repented were added to the local church, the Jerusalem church.

Church membership

Here at Palermo Christian Church, we have church membership.

1. We have membership classes.
2. We have a membership interview with the elders.
3. We require members to verbally agree to our doctrinal statement and church covenant.
4. We require members to have been baptized as a believer.
5. The elders receive individuals into membership.

Where do we get this from? Great question.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. – **Matthew 28:19-20**

The apostles were commanded to go into the nations and speak the gospel. As they spoke, some believed = became disciples. Jesus required that disciples made were baptized.

Before a person was baptized, the apostles had to do some evaluation. Is this person a disciple? Do they understand who Jesus is? Do they understand the cross? Have they counted the cost (Luke 14:25-33)? Have they repented of their sins? Before a person was baptized, the apostles had to be convinced this is a disciple.

The membership interview, the doctrinal statement, and the church covenant serve this same purpose. We elders are seeking to answer the question, is this person a disciple of Jesus? If so, they should be admitted as a member. If not, they should be encouraged to repent. Going through our doctrinal statement helps the membership candidate to see if they actually accept/understand the apostles' doctrine. Their willingness or unwillingness to accept the doctrinal statement helps us to see whether or not they believe the apostles' doctrine. Their willingness or unwillingness to accept the church covenant helps us to see whether or not they understand the church.

In the New Testament, local churches knew which individuals belonged to the church.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people- ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler- not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." – 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

A man in the church was having sexual relations with his stepmother (1 Cor 5:1). Paul believed this person needed to be removed from the church.

And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. – 1 Corinthians 5:2

Note several things. **First**, Paul makes a distinction between insiders and outsiders. Outsiders are the world = non-Christians. Insiders are professing Christians who belong to the local church community.

Second, the church has different obligations to the insider and outsider. Judge the insider's behavior. Remove them if necessary. Don't judge the outsider. Leave their judgment to God.

Most sins we simply bear with (Col 3:12-13). Some sins, like those Paul lists here, require removal if the erring Christian doesn't repent.

Third, there's only two categories: insider and outsider. The insider's accountable to the church. The outsider isn't. There wasn't a category of Christian who wasn't accountable to the church.

No membership word. But there's a defined group of people who were accountable to one another.

How did they tell who was an insider? Probably a written list. See 1 Timothy 5:9, 11 for a church roll of "true" widows (5:16). Hebrews 13:17 indicates pastors/elders knew which souls they were accountable to God to watch over.

How did one become an insider? Great question. As was the case in Acts 2, through baptism. The apostles verified, this person is a disciple. Need to baptize them. The individual agreed and was baptized. In baptism, the person was declared by the church a disciple and admitted into the church body. This way there were no converts isolated from the local church!

Baptism wasn't separated from church membership.

Jesus, before the cross, envisioned communities of believers who were accountable to one another.

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. – Matthew 18:15-17

How would Jesus' vision come to pass? Evangelism resulted in disciples. As disciples were verified, they were baptized. As disciples were baptized, they were added to the church.

The apostles didn't separate baptism and church membership. Neither should we. Maybe this is new? Think about it. How did someone move from outsider to insider in the New Testament?

The addition of new converts to the local church was God's work.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. – 2:47

The biblical authors ascribe conversion to God: *"the Lord added."*

Calling

God calls people to himself (2:39).

For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

There's debate whether *"calls"* means invited to believe or appointed to salvation.

Elsewhere, this Greek word means:

1. To be summoned for a meeting (Acts 6:2; 13:7).
2. To be appointed for a particular task (Acts 13:2).

Sometimes calls means invited.

For many are called, but few are chosen." – **Matthew 22:14**

Only some of the called are chosen.

Sometimes the call is limited to those who believe.

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. – **Romans 8:30**

Here everyone called has been predestined for salvation. Here everyone called experiences justification = salvation. Seeming to indicate a different form of calling than just invited. If everyone called in this way comes (they're justified), it can't be just invitation.

There's the general call given to all. All are invited. But all don't experience salvation. And there's the call limited to the predestined. Everyone called in this way experiences salvation.

So like calling can mean appointed by God to a task (Paul wasn't invited by Jesus to be an apostle, he was made an apostle), calling can mean appointed by God to salvation. It depends on context.

Application

Alright, we've covered a lot of ground.

The big ideas are:

1. Those who repented were added to the church.
2. Those who repented were added to the church by God.

There's **human responsibility**. We need to follow the pattern initiated by Jesus and obeyed by Peter.

There's **divine sovereignty**. Ultimately, it's God who adds people to the church.

We follow the apostolic blueprint while trusting God to bear fruit in our midst. God uses human vessels to add people to the church (e.g., Peter preached and obeyed Matthew 28:19-20).

In terms of human responsibility, this is what I want to stress. Our evangelism needs to be intentional. We're not just trying to connect non-Christians to Jesus. We're also trying to connect non-Christians to our church.

We encourage sinners to repent and believe. And we tell them the next step is baptism and added to the church.

I'm invested in Palermo Christian Church. I want Palermo Christian Church to be biblical. I want Palermo Christian Church to have a future. This means, when we're ministering to non-Christians in this local area, we're trying to connect them to Jesus and our church.

A horrible model would be inner city New York City evangelism where we talk to people on the street, get them to say a prayer, and then leave. Essentially figure out the Christian life for yourself. That's spiritual malpractice. Peter evangelized, baptized, and brought people into the church.

When we're ministering to non-Christians who don't live here, we try to connect them to a church where they live. If my non-Christian parents, who live elsewhere, get saved, I already have the church picked out.

Practical question: am I trying to connect non-Christians to Jesus and his church?

Point 2: Be devoted to the apostles' teaching (2:42)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, – 2:42

The church was devoted **"to the apostles' teaching."** There were a set of core doctrines, what Paul calls *"the faith"* in 1-2 Timothy (e.g., inerrancy of the Bible, Trinity, fall of man, substitutionary atonement, resurrection of Christ, justification, etc.) Teaching was big part of their community life. Which is obeying Matthew 28:20. Make disciples → baptize them → teach them to observe everything Jesus commanded.

"devoted" = a devotion to the apostles' teaching. They clung tightly to it and continued in it. Their faith was based on the apostles' teaching, not their own ideas.

Jesus taught. Often explaining the Old Testament. His disciples recorded his teachings. The apostles passed down those teachings to the churches that were formed. When the church went astray, the Reformation returned us to the apostles' teaching. We keep sticking to the apostles' teaching today.

Application

Local churches exist to preserve the apostles' doctrine. Local churches exist to teach the apostles' doctrine within. Local churches exist to live out the apostles' doctrine in community. Local churches exist to spread the apostles' doctrine to non-Christians.

Teaching the apostles' doctrine is critical. That's why we have a sermon, Sunday school, the ladies study, men's breakfast, etc.

The apostles' teaching is foundational to local church community.

Practical question: in what way am I personally devoted to the apostles' teaching?

Point 3: Be devoted to fellowship (2:42-47)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. – 2:42

Fellowship (2:42) = the intimate relationship between believers that's expressed by participation in shared gospel activities, and by participation in each other's lives.

Fellowship happened when they ate meals with one another ("*breaking of bread*").

Fellowship happened when they prayed together.

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. – 2:43

There was an aroma of awe (awestruck, amazed, shock) God's power was displayed through miracles. 2 Corinthians 12:12 speaks of "*the signs of a true apostle*" = apostles possessed miraculous gifts.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. – 2:44-45

Don't think socialism here. People still possessed personal property. The Jewish authorities were anti-Jesus. Repentance came with consequences. Some lost employment. Some lost family support. So those with abundance sold off property to support those who were in need. They came to value one another more than personal possessions.

Like family, Christians looked out for each other.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. – 2:46-47

They met together regularly.

In the temple, they met at Solomon's portico (Acts 3:11; 5:12), a large hall that was approximately 650 ft. long, 50 ft. wide, and 43 ft. high. The portico was like a large porch attached to the temple that covered people from the elements. The space was suitable to contain large gatherings.

As they praised God together and rubbed shoulders with fellow Jews who didn't follow Jesus, in their homes and at the temple, they gained the favor of unbelievers. People were drawn to their love for one another, their zeal for God, their gladness, and their generosity. They were a winsome community. God was in their midst and it was obvious to on-lookers.

Application

In my attempt to connect repentance/baptism/added to the church, I could have given the impression that the church exists to judge one another and remove another.

Not my goal. Removal is a last resort. It's just that those discipline passages give us insight into church life. The ideal is learning truth together, praying with and for one another, spending time together (church gatherings and in homes during the week), generously caring for one another, rejoicing in God together, and gaining the favor of non-Christians together.

When one among us goes astray we care. So we reason with them, urge them to repent, pray for them, and give them time to repent. We seek the erring brother/sister together. Not because we want them gone. We seek them because we don't want them ruined by sin, we don't want sin to spread within the church, and we don't want the church's reputation soiled in the town.

We never want it to reach the removal point. We want restoration.

The church can/should be a community of learning, deep friendship, prayer, generosity, gladness, and praise. A community that gains the favor of the world.

Practical question: how do I do fellowship at Palermo Christian Church?

Conclusion

Peter spoke about forgiveness of sins. We need God's forgiveness because we've broken his commands. We sin. We do life our own way, not God's way.

God is holy, so he can't overlook sin.

So God sent Jesus to the cross to die in the place of sinners, so that whoever believes can experience forgiveness of sins and experience eternal life.

To receive benefits from Jesus' death, we must repent. God punishes sinners who don't repent in hell. We must change our minds about God, sin, Jesus, ourselves. We must turn from our sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Then get added to the church through baptism.