

Grace Church
Roanoke, Virginia

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Lesson #48

ACTS
New Testament Practices
Acts 20:1-12

Why do you go to church? Why do you do certain things as a Christian? Do you do things out of biblical conviction or out of tradition? Do you think and act a certain way because you are operating on some scriptural command, principle or precedent, or do you just blindly follow what your preacher, Sunday School teacher, local church or denomination has told you?

The goal of every Christian is to think biblically in every area of life, and until a Christian thinks and acts biblically, he will never experience the fullness of power that Christ has for him. God has laid down for us certain New Testament practices which are just as inspired of God as any of the doctrines of Scripture. Our aim as Christians should be to pattern our Christianity as closely as possible after the New Testament. Surely, there are cultural differences between the first century and the twentieth century, but there is great spiritual blessing for any individual Christian or local church which seeks to be biblical. In today's message, there are Christian practices set forth which we must implement into our personal lives and the life of our church if we are to be truly effective for Christ.

DISPLAY OF AFFECTION - Acts 20:1

“And after the uproar had ceased, . . .” – Dr. Luke, the human author of the Book of Acts, refers to the disturbance caused by Demetrius and the silversmiths in Ephesus. Paul had preached Christ in Ephesus, and so many people were trusting Christ and turning away from idolatry that the personal pocketbooks of the silversmiths and the economy of Ephesus was being hurt since people were no longer buying small silver shrines of the goddess Artemis. We know that when Christ is preached, culture and society are deeply affected as men turn to Christ. We also know that those who faithfully preach Christ are attacked by the unbelieving community.

“. . . Paul sent for the disciples and when he had exhorted them and taken leave of them he departed to go to Macedonia.” -- After the uproar, Paul left Ephesus to go to Rome by way of Jerusalem with a few side stops in between. Paul gathered the Christians in Ephesus and exhorted them. We are not told what he said, but he probably said something like this: “God chose you to salvation. You have been bought with the blood of Christ and are on your way to heaven. You are no longer your own. You belong to Christ. Do not let Satan or the world or your flesh keep you from following Christ. Rely upon the Holy Spirit. Claim the power of Jesus Christ in you. Persevere in the

faith until the end. Read the Bible; pray regularly; love one another; exercise your spiritual gifts. And above all, do not forget that Christ commanded you to go into all the world with the gospel of Christ. Do not let anyone or anything keep you from serving Christ!”

It says he had “taken leave of them” which literally is a Greek word meaning “to draw to oneself in an embrace.” It was the custom in those days for Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss, male to male and female to female (Rom. 16:16). It was also the custom to bid farewell by an embrace. Paul literally hugged the Christian men in the church at Ephesus because he felt such a fond affection and love for them. This was Paul’s flock for three years. Paul and these Ephesian Christians had a mutual respect and love for one another because Christ had taught them how to love.

Some time ago Flo English returned from a trip to Kingsburg, California where she was visiting relatives. While she was there, she met some of my flock that was with me in the ministry of Mid-Valley Bible Church in Kingsburg, my first pastorate. She told me of Ed and Ruth Heinrichs, Warren and Donna Travis, and Marvin Swanson who had sent word back to me. They sent greetings and asked me to come back and minister to them. When I heard these words, my heart leaped with joy. I remember well leaving that pastorate to go back to seminary. Upon leaving, I embraced these dear brothers and sisters in Christ and others of that flock. Tears were in my eyes. In one sense, these dear ones will always be my flock. I think I know what Paul experienced as he left Ephesus.

DOING FOLLOW-UP - Acts 20:2

“And when he had gone through those districts, . . .” -- This refers to the areas where he had previously established churches. One of the reasons Paul went to these churches was to take up a collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem.

“. . . and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.” -- Paul’s ministry in Macedonia was not one of evangelization but edification. He went back to encourage these believers who were undoubtedly facing much persecution. He gave them “much exhortation,” for he knew how important it was for these Christians to know the truth, for the truth would set them free. Paul had a burden for follow-up. He did not win men to Christ and leave them alone. Even years later he desired to go back and make sure his converts were walking in the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

DODGING PLOTS - Acts 20:3

“And there he spent three months, . . .” -- Paul stayed three months in Greece. His goal was active follow-up so Christians would persevere steadfastly for Christ.

“. . . and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia.” -- Paul intended to sail directly from Corinth to Jerusalem, for he wanted to be there for the Feast of the Passover.

However, this plot involved the ship on which he was to sail. The unbelieving Jews hated Paul because they thought him a heretic and a disturber of the Jewish religious establishment. It was their plan to rub Paul out, probably by tossing him overboard somewhere on the voyage. God was faithful to keep His servant Paul from all the evil imaginations of men.

Satan, through human instruments, is always trying to get people to plot against true preachers of the Word. There is always a plot by someone to get rid of a pastor, evangelist, missionary or Christian worker. When this happens, the Christian worker must depend wholly on God to fight his battles. “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, And their vindication is from Me,” declares the LORD” (Isaiah 54:17).

DISCIPLING MEN - Acts 20:4-6

“And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.” -- Paul probably insisted that these men go with him to Jerusalem in order that there would be no mishandling of the funds taken up in the Gentile churches for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Everything for Paul was to be done openly and honestly with the upmost of integrity.

The Greek text may help us here to see another reason these seven men were traveling with Paul. The word “accompanied” literally means “to stick with.” These were seven alert young men, who hung around Paul and who Paul picked to travel with him so they could learn from him. Paul was discipling these men. Paul had a traveling seminary. He was giving them on-the-job training in the things of Christ. He was teaching them doctrine and showing them how to apply it by following his example. We could call them interns, for they were in training for the ministry.

“But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.” -- Notice the words “us” and “we”, for now Luke had joined with Paul as a missionary companion. Notice also that they waited for seven days so they could meet with the Christians on the Lord's day. Apparently, the public meeting of the local church was very important for Paul and the early Christians.

DESIRING THE LORD'S TABLE - Acts 20:7a

“And on the first day of the week, . . .” – Paul stayed in Troas for seven days so he could meet with the saints for public worship. When Luke uses the term “first day of the week,” he is reckoning time by the Roman calendar and not the Jewish calendar. The first day of the week was Sunday. This is the earliest unambiguous record for the Sunday meeting of the early church. At first the early church met every day in homes and on the Sabbath (seventh day) in the Temple. “And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals

together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46). Over thirty years later, in Acts 10:7, we find the church settled on the first day of the week (Sunday) for their public worship. Other references make it clear that the church did meet on Sunday. “On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come” (I Cor. 16:2). Sunday was referred to by Christians as the Lord's Day. “I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet” (Rev. 1:10).

My personal conviction is that Christians over a long period of time changed the official day of worship from Saturday to Sunday because it was on Sunday, the first day of the week, that Christ was raised from the dead. Christians meet on the first day because this is the day of resurrection. Each Lord's Day we celebrate the resurrection. Jesus Christ is alive, and every Christian recognizes this fact by gathering together in public worship on Sunday. Each Sunday is a fresh Easter. As individual Christians, we recognize Easter 365 days a year. As Christians collectively, we recognize Easter 52 weeks each year by meeting on Sunday. Another reason for changing the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday was that Christians wanted to stress a different day of worship because they were New Covenant Christians who had experienced the new spiritual creation in Christ. The Sabbath in the Old Testament has not changed. It is still Saturday. However, New Covenant Christians have changed in relation to the Sabbath of the Old Testament. The Sabbath is only connected with the Lord's Day in the New Covenant in principle. That is, the Lord's Day, Sunday, is a special day for rest, worship and spiritual activity. A Christian should try to do things on that day he does not do on other days of the week. The Lord's Day, therefore, should be given over to Christ in a way that other days of the week are not, even though everything done on the other days of the week should be under the Lordship of Christ. My personal conviction is that no New Covenant Christian is in any way a Sabbath keeper, but Sunday, according to the pattern of the Old Testament Sabbath, is to be for rest, worship and spiritual activity.

We learn from this passage and from history that the early Christians met on Sunday night because the slaves and others had to work all day Sunday. They had long night meetings which lasted for four and five hours.

“ . . . when we were gathered together to break bread, . . . ” – The breaking of bread here probably refers to the partaking of the Lord's Table. In the first century, the church observed the Lord's Table in two phases--the Agape Feast and the Eucharist. Before the actual partaking of the elements of the Lord's Table, there was an Agape Feast (Love Feast) which was a supper (covered dish) at which time Christians fellowshiped together and shared food. This is why the Lord's Table is often referred to as the breaking of bread in the New Testament. Then there was the Eucharist which was a thanksgiving and religious observance of partaking of the bread and wine in remembrance of Christ, and this came after the Agape Feast.

This verse teaches very clearly the importance of the Lord's Table. It was observed each Lord's Day. On this occasion in Acts, the local church at Troas was gathered not

primarily to hear the Word taught, not to hear a great preacher or teacher, not to hear the choir or even to sing hymns, but to observe the Lord's Table. These Christians did not gather to be entertained or amused but to remember Christ through the breaking of bread.

Why is the partaking of the Lord's Table so important for the Christian? The Bible says that when Christians are partaking of the Lord's Table they are sharing or fellowshiping with Christ in a way they cannot fellowship with Him in any other way. "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing (fellowship) in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing (fellowship) in the body of Christ" (I Cor. 10:16)? Of course, the bread and wine are only symbols, and Christ is in no way present in the elements, not even in a spiritual sense. However, Christ is spiritually present to the believer's faith in a very special sense when partaking of the Lord's Table. There is some kind of special grace imparted to the believer when observing the Lord's Table, providing the Christian is in fellowship with his Lord. However, this grace is sanctifying grace and not saving grace. Therefore, the Lord's Table should always be observed with great respect and reverence, and it should never be a common exercise.

The Lord's Table, however, does not always have to be taken in a quiet, somber, sanctimonious atmosphere, for it can be taken before, during or after a time of praise, joy and fellowship. Remember, the Lord's Table was always observed at the end of the Agape Feast in the New Testament, and almost always in the warm, casual environment of a home.

One further note is that the New Testament seems to indicate that any group of Christians can partake of the Lord's Table without having an ordained minister to administer the elements. The Lord's Table can be observed at home in small groups or at the church in a large group. It is, however, important for Christians to observe the Lord's Table on a regular basis in the local church. My personal preference would be to observe the Lord's Table every Sunday, according to the pattern of Acts 20:7.

DELIGHTING IN THE PREACHED WORD - Acts 20:7b

"... Paul began talking to them, ..." -- This first century service was not devoid of the Word of God. Apparently, after the Agape Feast and the Eucharist (Lord's Table), Paul then opened up the Word of God to these dear saints in Troas. In fact, we can assume the preaching of the Word occupied more time than did the Lord's Table, but it came after the Lord's Table.

In Roman Catholic theology, the whole worship service, the mass, is centered around the Lord's Table and hardly any stress is placed upon the preached Word. In Protestant circles which today are largely liberal, there is little emphasis upon the Lord's Table or the preached Word. In evangelical circles, there is much emphasis upon the preached Word (praise God), but very little stress upon the Lord's Table. The ideal situation, biblically, is a gathering to observe the Lord's Table on every Lord's Day, and a solid

preaching of the Word of God. The reason this was possible in the early church was that they met for four or five hours at a time.

The three highlights of a Christian's life should be when: 1) He is partaking of Holy Communion; 2) He is hearing the preached Word, and 3) He is exercising his spiritual gifts in service for Christ.

“ . . . intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.” -- This was Paul's last evening in Troas, and Paul took this final opportunity to preach to them the Word of God. We are told that he preached until midnight. Paul understood that the saints needed spiritual food as well as physical food, and the only way to grow in grace was through an understanding and application of the Bible. We do not know what Paul preached, but we know he was preaching to Christians and not to non-Christians. Perhaps that is why his message was so long, for he could not hold the attention of unbelievers for hours. Paul undoubtedly taught them doctrine and then the application of that doctrine. He must have covered most every major point of theology for he went on right up to midnight.

Paul is our example today. When we are preaching to Christians, our sermons should be longer in length and filled with doctrine and applications of that doctrine. Paul preached more than 15 minutes, and apparently these people loved the preached Word and were willing to sit by the hour to learn and apply God's Word. They did not leave at one minute after twelve noon because the preacher was not finished with his sermon as so many do today. People who like short sermons should remember the words of a great preacher who said, “Sermonettes are for Christianettes.” Some people say that “a man who thinks by the inch and preaches by the yard ought to be dealt with by the foot.” Paul would have been booted out of most churches today, evangelical and liberal. He would have been put out of liberal churches because of his solid Christian doctrine and out of evangelical churches for his methods and his love to preach the Word for hours at a time.

It is reasonable to assume that Paul did not preach for three or four hours straight. His method was to preach a while and then let people ask questions. There may have been some prayer and sharing in between his teaching of the Word.

DELIVERING MEN - Acts 20:8-10

“And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.” -- Luke tells us about the lamps to give an explanation as to why Eutychus fell asleep. The room was crowded, hot, and the burning torches were using up much of the oxygen in the room. These conditions might make anyone fall asleep. At least Eutychus had an excuse, for there are many people who fall asleep under my ministry under the best conditions. That could be the fault of the preacher or the listener.

“And there was a certain man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; . . .” – Eutychus was probably a teenager, for the Greek uses the word

which means “young man.” Everyone agrees that Eutychus should have never fallen asleep during Paul's message, but there may be two sides to this young man. The lack of oxygen, a long week's work behind him, and Paul's long message caused him to fall asleep. He was, however, at the meeting so he did have some interest in the Word of God. However, why was he sitting in the window? Had he arrived late for church and had to sit in this inconvenient place? Maybe he was a typical teenager who was not all that excited about church and his folks had sort of forced him to go. Furthermore, why would anyone fall asleep on the Apostle Paul? A person may fall asleep under my ministry but not under Paul. Maybe Eutychus had been out too late on Saturday night and now he could not be attentive to the preached Word. Whatever his reasons or motives, he began to nod, his eyes rolled back and he was falling asleep. If we could have asked Eutychus if he heard the message, he probably would have replied, “Oh, I'm not sleeping. I'm just resting my eyes. I'm hearing everything, honestly.” Someone has said, “A great preacher is a man who can communicate to people when the majority of his congregation is asleep.”

It is a comfort to me when I realize that men fell asleep when the Apostle Paul preached, for there is hardly a Sunday in my own ministry when some dear brother or sister does not fall fast asleep while I'm preaching. I really only get offended when they begin to snore.

“... and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead.” -- Eutychus fell right out the window, tumbling three stories, probably hitting some pavement below. When they got to Eutychus, he was dead. He was killed instantly.

Liberal theologians, attempting to explain away the supernatural, suggest that this man was not actually dead but was stunned from the fall. Paul merely gave him mouth to mouth resuscitation and he was revived. However, the Bible says he was dead, and Luke, being a doctor, confirmed his death. What we have here is supernatural phenomena.

“But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, ‘Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.’” -- Apparently Paul did something very similar to Eutychus that Elisha did when he restored the life of the son of the Shunammite woman.

“When Elisha came into the house, behold the lad was dead and laid on his bed. So he entered and shut the door behind them both, and prayed to the LORD. And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm. Then he returned and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes” (II Kings 4:32-35).

When Paul said, “His life is in him,” he did not mean he was still alive, but that his life

had returned to him.

Paul had the sign-gift of miracles which has apparently passed out of existence today. No one is raising the dead today. However, there is divine healing through individual prayers, and through the anointing of oil and the prayers of the elders.

“Is anyone among you sick? 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 offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him” (James 5:14, 15).

All Christians should live in expectancy of the supernatural in healing. God is still delivering men from sickness today, not through faith-healers, but through believing prayer.

Some time ago, I preached a message on James 5:14, 15. Since that time several people have called the elders and the elders have anointed them with oil and prayed for them. We prayed for Doug Shackelford, and he experienced amazing recovery from lung surgery for a man 66 years old. We prayed for Judy Rossbacher that God would stop her bleeding and she would not lose her twins and her pregnancy would be blessed of God. The very next day Judy began to show improvement. She had taken hormone shots but, until the time of prayer, they were not taking effect. The elders have also prayed over Ken Swisher for a mass around his liver. Ken says that he has had no real pain since the time we laid hands on him. While he still had some infection in his liver, two canals (tubes) were opened up in his body without any medicine and this occurred sometime after we anointed him with oil and prayed. God is still healing today through prayer.

DEVOTED TO BODY LIFE - Acts 20:11, 12

“And when he had gone back up, and had broken bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.” -- After the raising of Eutychus, Paul and the other Christians went back into the upper chamber and had a common meal (a 2:00 a.m. snack). These Christians spent the whole night enjoying body life, which is the life of the body of believers in Christ sharing the life of Christ. They were conversing with one another, fellowshiping together around Christ and sharing each other's experiences. What an exciting time this must have been, and this certainly sets a precedent for all night praise and prayer services for Christians. Paul was having such a wonderful time that he could not tear himself away from his fellow Christians, even though he had a long walk ahead of him the next day.

All Christians must have body life in order to be healthy, normal Christians, for we all need to build, encourage, and exhort one another to practical godliness of life. “And they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted.” -- During the sharing time much of the conversation centered around Eutychus who was raised from the dead. This, of course, strengthened and comforted the Christians.

CONCLUSION

For you who are unsaved, I want to ask a question, “Why did Luke record this miracle of raising Eutychus from the dead?” He certainly had more in mind than just a physical deliverance. Eutychus is an illustration of how God raises dead sinners to new spiritual life in Christ. God actually takes people who are hardened to Christ, indifferent to the gospel, blinded to the glories of salvation and shoots life into them so they come alive, responding to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

If you will accept Christ as your personal Lord, who has the right to rule in your life, and accept Him as your personal Savior, who will deliver you from the guilt and penalty of sin, you will then be saved and learn that God shot life into you. Your first step is to exercise faith in Christ, and then you will discover you are alive in Christ. You will realize what it means to be raised spiritually from a life of deadness. Trust Christ and live!