

A person cannot read the book of Acts with open eyes and open heart and not be amazed at the actions and activities of men and women who were the first Christians. Can you imagine people so converted to Christ on a pilgrimage that they refused to return home when their money ran out because they wanted to understand the good news about Christ in completeness? That occurred with some converts who heard the good news on Pentecost. Can you imagine a congregation so close to each other that they met every day to encourage each other as they praised God? Can you imagine finding so much joy and fulfillment in Christ that we would meet every day voluntarily, without command, to glorify God? Can you imagine having a community where Christians were not acknowledged as beneficial part of the community? That describes the earliest congregation in Jerusalem. Can you imagine willingly selling private possessions to help people you do not know but who believe in Christ? That is what Christians did in Acts 4:32-37.

One of the most amazing qualities of early Christians was their evangelistic fervor. In about 70 years, those Christians took the good news concerning Jesus Christ throughout Palestine, to Syria, throughout Asia Minor, to Europe, to North Africa, with plans to go to Spain. They commonly did this in pagan societies that were more immoral than today's world. They often did it as they faced personal sacrifice and persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Look at what Acts says about the activities of some of these first Christians. Consider Acts chapter 8.

Acts 8:1-4 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. (2) And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. (3) As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. (4) Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Later in that chapter (v25) we read where Peter and John were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. Later still after a nobleman from Ethiopia had been converted by Phillip that Philipp (Acts 8:40) found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea. ***Acts 11:19-21 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. (20) And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. (21) And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.***

The outreach of early Christians was in no way limited to the activities of Paul and Barsabas. The fervor of evangelism was characteristic of many converts to Christ. Congregations in places like Colossae and Laodicea likely existed because Christians from other places taught the people of those places. Sad to say, many Christians today do not share this commitment and zeal. Somehow the compassion of our faith is not there; but the joy in Christ was too real not to share!

In an attempt to get the magnitude of their commitment, let's try to mentally trade places with those early Christians. Let's suppose the state of Texas passed laws against Christianity.

- The preacher, elders, Bible class teachers were arrested for preaching the gospel.
- They were taken to court, and given a legal injunction against further preaching and teaching as were Peter / John in Acts 5.
- Suppose they ignored the injunction, were arrested again, and were publicly beaten for their arrogant rejection of the injunction.
- Then a zealous leader, like Stephen, gets into a religious discussion about the identity of Jesus Christ, is arrested, and is executed for his public religious stand as in Acts 7.
- Then some who hate Christians obtains the legal power to make a house-to-house search for Christians, literally dragging them out of their homes, has them jailed and tried which results in some being executed.
- The threat is so real and close that you leave your home and property to find a new place to locate.

If that were to happen today, what would you do? Many would denounce their faith; quit the church. Some would say that was fine with them because gave them a reason to not live the Christian life. Then others would probably get out of town just like they left Jerusalem.

If Texas denounced Christianity, would you go over into Oklahoma or Arkansas and if you did, would you slip in the new location quietly, go about your business, and avoid mentioning you came from the place that ran Christians out of town? Would you weep and complain about all you lost? Would you angrily denounce those who ran you out of town? Would you resent God for letting such injustice fall on you?

Or, would you rejoice at the opportunity to suffer for Jesus and tell others about the priceless joy of being a Christian seeking to convert them to Christ? *1 Peter 4:16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.* Remember, the outreach of early Christians was born in hatred, persecution, and rejection, not in the kindness of open hearts who asked for the good news about Christ.

Now to the heart of the lesson; **WHY DID THEY DO IT?** The short answer is because they loved the lord. Now if I were to circulate a sheet with the question “Do you love the Lord?” I think most of you would answer yes. John would write *1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.* Before John penned these words Jesus would say, *John 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

QUESTION: If they loved the Lord and we love the Lord, should we not be doing what they did?

Perhaps another reason that those early Christians did what they did was because they were commanded to do that! We have the same commands that they had. While it is true we are commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel, but those commands seldom motivate the kind of commitment these early Christians displayed.

When I read Acts, it seems they evangelized out of desire rather than of necessity; it was something they wanted to do. It surely would have been easier to find a quiet, peacefully place and settle in as one of “Jesus’ private followers.” These early converts discovered something in Jesus Christ that was so valuable, so cherished, and so priceless they wanted to share it even in the face of hardship.

Let me close by suggesting some of what they valued so precious. I suggest that the first Christians found in Christ something many of today's Christians never have discovered.

1 Forgiveness of sin and freedom from guilt was a priceless gift! How long has it been since you seriously thought about your forgiveness, that God remembers your sin no more, and that he does not impute sin to your life? *2 Peter 1:9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.* Let us not forget where we came from and where we are now spiritually. Our lives have been purged from our

old sins. *Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*

2. Sanctification, justification, and purification had special significance. After giving a list of unrighteous behavior, Paul writes *1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* How long has it been since you were grateful for being a new creation in Christ? It seems those early Christians had a deep sense of appreciation for what Jesus did for them. It seems they appreciated not being slaves to sin but instead were heirs to the promises of God.

Why did they do what they did? Let me suggest that it in part was their love for the Lord. Too, the command to go and preach the gospel had its impact along with the assurance that their sins had been forgiven. All these elements played a role in the early Christian sharing with others their faith even in the face of adversity. But it seems to me that the one thing that motivated them more than anything else them was inner excitement about their salvation. They were excited about these new found blessings that they had in Christ and when you are excited about something you tell others. We see this when a new grandbaby is born. Excitement and enthusiasm is contagious. So when the ball started on the Day of Pentecost, you couldn't stop it. Let us build on that excitement today.

Now here is the point. Everything they found in Christ that led to their motivation is available to us today. The more you value your salvation, the more imperative it becomes that you share it. You do not seek to force it on someone--you share it. That is the key to evangelistic zeal and fervor. To share it, you must value it. Because you are a Christian, you have something to share.

If you are not a Christian, this would be a good time to learn what it takes to become one.

Invitation