

# A First Century Church in a Twenty-First Century World: The More Things Change, The More They Stay the Same

Douglas R. McLachlan

Acts 2:42-47

## Introduction

The first church was founded on the gospel. The apostle Peter preached a Christ-centered gospel message on the Day of Pentecost which gave birth to the body of Christ. In it, he emphasized Christ's death on the cross, His mighty resurrection, and His ascension back to heaven from which He rules over His church. Peter's thesis statement comes at the end of his message: "God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). People responded as they should when they learn about the grace that God offers in Jesus Christ. Their hearts melted. They asked what they should do. Peter told them to repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ. As they responded in faith, God graciously gave birth to the first church (2:41).

When we look to the Bible (where we should always look), we see God's plan for the church at all times and in all places. So to understand how to live for Christ in the twenty-first century, we need to go back to the first century. This is not traditionalism; it is not irrelevance; it is not living in the past. It is timeless, transcendent Christianity, which is founded on Jesus Christ, Who is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8) (Philip Graham Ryken). The church of the first century was inheriting a world much like ours. Peter pleaded with his audience on Pentecost: "Be saved from this perverse generation" (v. 40). Their world was pre-Christian; our world is post-Christian. Yet, our worlds are very much the same: "perverse," because both are non-Christian. This means we can learn much from them about what it means to live for Christ in declining times.

---

The church of  
the first century  
was inheriting a  
world much  
like ours.

---

From this text, we will discover four stunning hallmarks of an authentic local church. The first century church was passionately devoted to each one of them, and we should be too.

### I. A Passion for the Word of Truth.

"The apostles' doctrine" (v. 42) means they were biblically shaped! Two critical thoughts here:

- They were serious. "Continued steadfastly" means personal urgency.
- They were specific. "In the apostles' doctrine" means doctrinal specificity.

## II. A Passion for the Work of the Church

“Fellowship” (v. 42) means they were relationally committed! Note three important truths related to “fellowship”:

- Biblical fellowship is driven by truth. That is why it *follows* “the apostles’ doctrine.”
- Biblical fellowship is defined by sacrifice—“Self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision.” (D.A. Carson)
- Biblical fellowship is demonstrated by action (v. 45).

## III. A Passion for the Worship of God

“In the breaking of (the) bread, and in (the) prayers” (v. 42). This means they were vertically focused!

## IV. A Passion for a Witness to the World

- “Those who were being saved” (v. 47). We learn three critical lessons regarding local church evangelism from this verse:
- It is a divine work—“the Lord added to the church.”
- It is a double work—“added to the church ... such as were being saved.”
- It is a daily work—“added ... daily”