



**In the Same
Hour of the Night**

**Teaching the urgent message
of Christ urgently.**

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Let's consider some lessons that we can learn from the conversion of Simon.

Stumbling and falling will occur sometimes.

It can be terribly frustrating when we win people to the gospel only to see them struggle with previous sin. Sometimes they even completely fall away back into the world. This has led some to give up on trying. The heart-ache and heart-break is just too much for some to bear. Yet we have been called to do this. We must understand that the pull of the world is enormous. Satan works double time to pull someone that has been won over to the truth of the gospel back into the world. If he is ever going to be successful, it is most likely during those weak times after just being converted. As a prowling lion picks off the slow and weak, so does Satan. (I Peter 5:8)

Sometimes that falling will be in a big way.

It can likewise be shocking at the scope of sin that a new saint can stumble into. The trained conscience is just not there yet. They are learning, but sometimes mess up in big ways. Simon certainly did. So much so that Peter told him that he was in the "gall of bitterness and bondage of iniquity"! Definitely not a condition that anyone would want an apostle to charge them with. Yet this is exactly the condition that Simon is in. We must not be paralyzed by shock. We must expect that sometimes the convert will do things that we can not figure out why they would fall into it. Then we need to help them out, being careful lest we too be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

He was still considered converted though he fell hugely.

One thing that we will note is that even though Simon had fallen in this enormous way and was told he was "in the gall of bitterness and bondage of iniquity", he was still a saint. He still had the avenue of prayer to go to God and plead for forgiveness. Simon puzzles those of the denominational world. Some would even say he was not truly converted. Yet Luke says that he believed just as did the rest in Samaria. (Acts 8:12-13) We must remember that Jesus loves us, even when we fail hugely. This is certainly true of the new convert. Thus we must see that we must love them too. In success and failure.

The centuries have seen many different methods of teaching the gospel take precedence. The early churches of the second and third centuries would sometime spend three years training someone before they would baptize them! (Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition by Hippolytus, 17.1) This was indeed a dangerous game to play with the soul of an individual. They would indeed be well-grounded by the end of this training, but how tragic should they lose their life prior to the church agreeing to allow them to obey the gospel! (Romans 6:17)

As we fast-forward to the modern decades, we have witnessed methods change as the decades have passed by also. The nineteenth century saw the great success of the gospel meeting. A preacher could come into town, announce a meeting, and a church would be planted by the end of his effort. The twentieth century gave way to tent-meetings and the like, with similar results. Then came the cottage meetings where the teaching became more one-on-one. This required more effort, but was put into place to accommodate a changing society.

In the years since, the progression has favored shorter and shorter approaches to sharing the gospel. People are busier and thus harder to gain an audience with. Thankfully through the foreknowledge of God we are given the right through the generic command to "go" (Mark 16:15-16) to adapt the delivery method of the gospel to the audience that we are trying to teach.

This progression has largely brought about a return to the original method of teaching. As we examine the accounts of conversion in the book of Acts, there is a striking thread of continuity to note. They virtually all occurred in one sitting! While we may feel uncomfortable with the idea of teaching someone obedience to the gospel in one sitting, the teachers of the New Testament did it regularly.

In this series of lessons we will consider evangelism with a focus on the one-lesson approach as we try to teach as they did in the New Testament, "in the same hour of the night". (Acts 16)

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---------|
| Lesson One - The Conversion of the Jailor | Page 3 |
| Lesson Two - Benefits of One-Lesson Approaches | Page 5 |
| Lesson Three - Objections to One-Lesson Approaches | Page 7 |
| Lesson Four - The Conversions on Pentecost | Page 9 |
| Lesson Five - The Ancient Message | Page 11 |
| Lesson Six - Teaching the Entire Bible Heart | Page 13 |
| Lesson Seven - The Conversion of the Eunuch | Page 15 |
| Lesson Eight - Personal Responsibility in Conversion | Page 17 |
| Lesson Nine - Our Responsibility Toward the Convert | Page 19 |
| Lesson Ten - The Conversion of Cornelius | Page 21 |
| Lesson Eleven - No Effort Is Too Great | Page 23 |
| Lesson Twelve - The Role of God in Conversion | Page 25 |
| Lesson Thirteen - The Conversion of Simon the Sorcerer | Page 27 |

Lesson 13 - The Conversion of Simon the Sorcerer

Read Acts 8 in preparation.

We considered Acts 8 in previous lessons with regard to those being converted in Samaria and the Eunuch. Amongst those converts in Samaria there was one that truly stood out. Simon the Sorcerer. Simon the Sorcerer is a good example of problems that can arise when someone is converted. You might say that he messed up so badly that a sin was named after him. When someone tries to buy their way into a spiritual office it became known as "Simony".

1. What had Simon been doing prior to his conversion?

2. How was he converted?

3. Why do you think he was tempted by the particular sin to which he fell?

4. What was his sin?

5. What was Peter's response?

6. What was the response of Simon?

As we see, sometimes it is difficult to win someone to the truth, and then there are problems ever after conversion.

He came and died.

We must never fall victim to a line of thinking that fails to consider what Christ has already done. Much of the work of salvation has already been done by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As we have examined from I Corinthians 15 He came to this earth, lived a perfect life, died on the cross and was resurrected showing us that He has the power to resurrect us also. Romans 6 explains that we are baptized into Christ and raised to walk in newness of life after the pattern of His death, burial, and resurrection. I Peter 3:21 explains that baptism gets its power from the resurrection of Christ. The fact is that the bulk of the saving work of the Lord has already been done and is simply waiting for us to take advantage of it. We are reminded by Paul that He died for us while we were yet sinners. (Romans 5:8)

He arranges through providence.

At Genesis 22:8 we find the words of Abraham to his son Isaac. He simply tells him that God will provide the lamb for the sacrifice. Indeed he did. After looking around he found a ram with its horns caught in the brush. Abraham even called that place "Yahweh Will Provide". There was nothing supernatural about the ram getting its horns caught. But it was the work of the Lord. We must not put our God into a "miracle box" thinking that this is the only way He works. He works mostly through natural means. We hear of circumstances all the time where the searching student is brought to the eager teacher. Indeed the Lord provides.

He adds to the church.

At Acts 2:47 we read that Jesus was adding to the church daily the ones that were being saved. While we may tend to gloss over this verse, it is important to consider what is being said. Jesus is the gatekeeper. He is seeing to it that those that come to Him are being added. He is seeing to it that the wicked are not. We see that Jesus looks after His church and those that are coming to Him. We cannot overstate that enormous task it is to keep the gates of the church nor the praise that He deserves for doing so!

Lesson 1 - The Conversion of the Jailer

Read Acts 16 in preparation.

Acts 16 records Paul and Silas working in Philippi. The chapter recounts the conversion of Lydia and also the Philippian jailor. After Paul converted Lydia he began working in the town. As Paul was working in the area, a slave-girl with a spirit of divination was following him around shouting. When Paul cast the spirit out, the men who were making money from her telling people's fortunes saw that their hope of profit was gone. They seized Paul and Silas and had them thrown into jail.

Beginning at Acts 16:22 is the account of Paul and Silas as they are being thrown into jail. Answer the following questions concerning the account of the jailor's conversion.

1. Why was Paul and Silas imprisoned?

2. What happened to Paul and Silas prior to being jailed?

3. How do you think the jailor knew what to ask?

4. What do you think demonstrates the integrity of Paul and Silas in this account?

5. What can you identify as the steps to the jailor's conversion?

Lesson 12 - The Role of God in Conversion

Read Acts 10 and 11 in preparation.

The conversion of the jailor occurred “in the same hour of the night” as these events. The NASB reads “that very hour of the night”. There was no waiting. There was no scheduling of the baptism for a convenient time for the church. Nor were there many more studies with the jailor before he and his household were converted. They heard the gospel and their conversion happened that very hour of the night.

1. What did Paul and Silas do the next day?

2. What impact would this have had on the jailor’s faith?

3. Who had the responsibility of grounding the jailor?

4. What do you think that the jailor would have known prior to his conversion? After?

As we see, there was a sense of urgency in the conversion accounts of Acts. Teaching the lost did not necessarily occur over the course of many weeks or months. It happened in the same hour of the night that the individuals were converted. Not even the just the jailor, but his entire family also! An evening was enough to bring enough truth to the jailor that he could go forward in service to Christ. No doubt there was much more work to be done with him, but response was step one!

As we consider the account of the jailor’s conversion in this chapter along with the others throughout the course of this study, we want to ask ourselves how long it took to teach someone enough to come to Christ. Indeed the message of Christ is an urgent message that needs to be preached urgently. It is a matter of life or death!

No doubt we can not help to wonder at the love that God shows for those searching in the account of Cornelius and his household. This is a man that loves God, is devout, is prayerful, and a doer of good towards the needy. Yet he is lacking something. He diligently seeks it through mental effort and prayer. God obliges.

1. How exactly does the text describe Cornelius?

2. What is he doing that prompts a response from God?

3. What is the response of God?

4. What else does God do in aiding Cornelius?

We can certainly see that God did much in the conversion of Cornelius. Of course, we also understand that these things happened in a time that is different than ours. The age for these types of miracles has ceased. (I Corinthians 13) Yet we know that God is still active today with regard to salvation.

How does Paul sum up the role of God at I Corinthians 3:6?

In seeing that He has a role in conversion today, we do well in considering what that role is.

great distance as he was trying to teach Cornelius. This took several days of his time just simply getting to the appointment. Winning souls requires a large time commitment.

Money

The Lord has given three categorical charges to the churches. We are to build up the saints that are there (I Thessalonians 5:11), take care of the needy saints among us (Acts 2-4), and teach the lost (Mark 16:15-16). This being the case, the treasury may be used in these three pursuits. Winning souls will require some of our monetary resources.

Heart-Ache

Converting people will bring heart-ache. It is a difficult price to pay. Studying with individuals and then grounding them is difficult and can cause a great deal of emotional distress on the part of the ones doing the teaching.

Changing A Culture

In addition to the work in teaching the lost, there is also the work that must be done with the brethren in accepting and grounding the lost. It is a culture that must be developed. This cultural work can be summed up in three ways.

Being careful in what we say.

Work must be done in helping a church see that they cannot simply say whatever is on their mind to and around new converts. Teaching the lost means being aware of their issues and being gentle around them in word.

Being careful in what we do.

We must also be careful in our actions around new saints. There may be things that we have the liberty to do, but should not around them due to their backgrounds.

Being careful in what we believe.

We must also be careful that we hold to the word of truth. A great deal of damage can be done by brethren who are not where they should be in knowledge themselves. We must be careful that we are conveying sound thoughts.

Lesson 2 - Benefits of One-Lesson Approaches

Read Acts 16 in preparation.

As we have noted from the book of Acts, one-lesson approaches were the norm in that letter. It was not until later centuries that the multi-lesson or multi-year approach was taken. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with teaching people in multiple studies, only that there may well be some benefits to the one-lesson approach that we have lost sight of.

Acts 16 records the conversions of Lydia and the Jailor. These two are good as they give a contrast. They both responded after being taught apparently one study. But they were both from two entirely different backgrounds.

1. How would you describe the background of Lydia?

2. How would you describe the background of the jailor?

3. How might their backgrounds have affected their responses?

What, we may ask, are some possible benefits to the one-lesson approach of teaching the gospel? The apostles were doing it this way no doubt for some reasons. Let's identify some of the possible benefits.

Preserved Urgency

The teaching of sinners in the New Testament was done with a sense of urgency. If the people believed and were ready, they were baptized that very same hour of the night as we have noted from Acts 16. This sense of urgency is seen repeatedly in each conversion account throughout.

1. Why do you think the message is urgent?

2. What are the dangers of not instilling urgency?

Less Distractions

A common problem when teaching the gospel is in keeping the lesson on target. It is very easy to get distracted by rabbit trails that have nothing to do with the objective at hand. As noted in the urgency thoughts, we are trying to bring an individual to the crossroad where they will choose life or death. It is not the time to talk about things that are unimportant. Or even things that may be important, but not urgent in this moment. The one-lesson approach brings in a very targeted lesson with a very clear objective that helps avoid this problem.

What are some rabbit trails you have experienced in studies?

Time/Efficiency

As human beings we are bound by our physical nature. Part of that limitation is one of time. We only have so much time to do all that we are supposed to be doing. Our time as teachers is limited and we want to reach as many as possible with the life-saving message of the gospel. Not only is the time of the teacher limited, but so is the time of the student. The one-lesson approach helps solve this issue by teaching the urgent message immediately so the teacher can move on to the next soul.

Delegation of Tasks

Sometimes our evangelists are inundated by the work they have to do in evangelism and the addition of edification tasks that are really under the shepherd's duties. (1 Peter 5) The one-lesson approach allows the evangelists to evangelize and leaves the strengthening to the shepherds to do after. (Acts 6)

Lesson 11 - No Effort is Too Great

Read Acts 10 in preparation.

Peter was called from Joppa to go to the household of Cornelius and teach them the truth. (Acts 10:5; 11:5) There was much involved in Peter going to the household of Cornelius. It was no small task. Answer the following questions regarding this task.

1. How far was it from Joppa to Caesarea? How long did it take Peter to travel this distance?

2. Why was this mission a challenge to the very core of who Peter was and had always been?

3. How was Peter supposed to approach this task according to Acts 10:20? Was this really possible?

4. What was he greeted with when he returned home?

As we consider the enormous magnitude of this mission that had been given to Peter, we understand that sometimes much is required of us in teaching the gospel. More to the point, there is no effort that is considered too great in teaching someone the gospel. A soul is worth the effort! So it is important for us to count the cost in the winning of souls. What are some of these costs in this enormous effort and what must be done in preparation for teaching the lost?

Time

It takes a great deal of time to teach the convert. Peter went a

What do we learn then from looking at the conversion of Cornelius with regard to evangelism?

We must obey and preach regardless of consequence.

As Peter begins his message to Cornelius, he explains that is unlawful for a Jewish man to be with Cornelius as he was. The Jews did not allow for a Jewish person to associate or visit with a foreigner. Of course, to some degree this was Jewish law that had been added to the original law of Sinai, but it was law during the day of Peter just the same. If his people were to find out about what he was doing, there would be consequences. Yet he knew that the consequence of holding his tongue and refusing to go to the Gentiles as God was directing him were far greater.

Everyone needs to hear the ancient message.

As Peter begins preaching to Cornelius and those gathered he begins by talking about Jesus and Him crucified to the crowd. While we discuss meeting people where they are, it is important to note that in the end the message is the same. We start where they are, but we end where the gospel directs. This message always boils down to Jesus coming to this earth, living among men, dying for our sins, being resurrected and ascending on high, and we being baptized to come into contact with His death and receive the blessings He paid for.

Sometimes our critics are our own brethren.

When Peter gets home it is important to note who he must report to. Acts 11:2 tells us that it was some of the circumcised believers who took issue with what Peter had done. He was simply obeying the command of the Lord and doing what was necessary to preach the ancient message to those that wanted to hear it. Yet he had to explain himself to his own countrymen and brethren. Sometimes we today simply try to fulfill the command to teach the gospel to anyone that we can and we find ourselves in hot water with our fellow brethren. We must expect that this is the case and be prepared to gently answer the critique. Peter explains the situation and his people understand. However, regardless of their understanding, he preached the message.

As with anything we strive to do in life, there are always at least two differing opinions about how it ought to be done. Proverbs 18:17 reads “the first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.” Just as there is a solid case to be made by examining the benefits of the one-lesson approach, there is also another side that does not see it as the ideal way of handling the alien sinner.

If we are to truly come to a decision about what is best, we must consider not only the benefits, but also the objections and possible problems. This is not to say that the objections cannot be answered, but they must be taken into consideration when determining the path forward.

Acts 17 records Paul delivering his sermon upon Mars Hill in Athens. It was a one-lesson study that did not go like the others. Answer the following questions from Acts 17:16-34.

1. What was the background of the people Paul studied with?

2. What does Paul do in this study different from others?

3. How was the reaction of the people different from other studies in the book of Acts?

4. What do you think may have contributed to the different response in these individuals?

What then are some objections to one-lesson approaches to teaching the gospel?

Read Acts 10 and 11 in preparation.

Acts chapters 10 and 11 record the events surrounding the conversion of a man by the name of Cornelius. Acts 10 is Luke accounting for the events as they unfolded and then chapter 11 has Luke recording the account that was told to the saints in Jerusalem by Peter when he returned home. There is much about this account that is special to this situation.

- 1. What was the first miracle recorded in this account?

- 2. What happened at Acts 10:44-48? Why?

- 3. What does Peter compare this event to in Acts 11?

While this situation had some special things attached to it for some special purposes, with those things stripped away we see that it is simply another situation of a person being won to Christ in the same way that others were won to him. Answer the following questions as we consider the conversion of Cornelius.

- 1. What does Peter say that Cornelius needed to be saved?

- 2. Why did the angel not just take care of this?

- 3. How was this household ultimately saved?

Objection 1 - "One lesson is not enough time to learn."

This is often the primary objection that individuals vocalize. "How can someone be taught the gospel in an hour?" No doubt this is a valid concern. We want to make sure that whatever we do in our effort to teach individuals that we do it the best way possible. However, the simplest way to answer this question is from scripture. How can someone be taught the gospel in one-lesson? The same way that the apostles did it. They kept the message simple. They addressed what was lacking in the hearing between where they were and what needed to be heard to be convinced of Christ as Savior. This was accomplished in one sitting repeatedly throughout the book of Acts. As they did, so can we.

Objection 2 - "The convert will fall away."

It would seem logical that the less time spent with a person prior to being baptized then the less people will remain faithful. However, this is not the case. We keep very specific statistics. What we have found is that we convert a higher percentage of people through one-lesson approaches and a higher percentage of the converts remain faithful than through other approaches. The conversion rate for multi-lesson approaches tends to be about 1 in 100 and of those people that are converted, about 25% remain faithful. (Biblical Evangelism, Harold Comer) Through the keeping of stats in using the Big Picture presentation, we have found that we get a higher percentage of people to agree to a study, about 75% of those studied with are converted, and of those people about 65% remain faithful. Far better stats than through other approaches.

Objection 3 - "The convert will not be properly grounded."

This concern is not just a valid concern, but it is a fact. A person cannot be properly grounded in one lesson. We must remember that this is not the goal. The goal is to help them get right with God as quickly as possible. The grounding of the convert is left to the shepherds and others to be done after conversion. This is what was done in the various accounts in the book of Acts and works well when done by us today. (Acts 16:40)

Read Acts 1-2 in preparation.

Too often churches tend to write off individuals who are weak. In some churches the weak are the only ones that are ever “disciplined” by the congregation. Yet the scripture tells us that we are to be patient and long-suffering toward the weak. What then are some of our responsibilities toward the weak.

We must gently admonish them to repent as needed.

Leaving a life of sin is a task that takes much work and varying amounts of time. We can not expect a new convert to have it all figured out over night. There will be times that they will be ignorantly carrying on in some activity that is sinful. There are other times that they may fall back into old habits that are sinful. As seasoned saints, we must expect that this is the case and try to gently correct them. Hebrews 5:1-4 explains that the Jewish high priest could deal with people well because he was prone to the same weaknesses as they. We must remember that we have similar struggles to the new convert that are common to man. Just as we would wanted to be helped gently, so should we do to others. (Matthew 7:12)

We must be patient with them.

It is a lot of work helping new converts to be established. It is often painful, even heartbreaking work, as we work with them. Yet it is what we have been called to do. It will not happen in one night. It will not happen in one month. It will not happen even in one year. While it will vary from person to person, the over-reaching requirement is patience. We can not allow ourselves to get fed up with helping them and be harsh with them driving them away. (II Thessalonians 3:13)

We must teach and encourage them.

The new convert is going to require a lot of teaching. It is easy for us to take for granted the many things that we learn over our years of service to Christ. We acquire vast knowledge about how the Lord dealt with His people in the Old Testament, what it means to the New Testament saint, and what the saint has to look forward to. Bringing someone up to speed with regard to these things will take a lot of focused instruction. We must teach and encourage the new convert so that they will have the same deep faith that we have acquired.

In Acts 1 Luke records the words of Jesus to His apostles before He ascends back into Heaven. At this point Jesus has spent forty days since His resurrection teaching them the things of the Kingdom. (Acts 1:3) Naturally they wondered when all that He was teaching them would come to pass. Just before He ascended they asked Him when these things would come to pass. (Acts 1:6) His answer was simply that they did not need to worry about times, but simply know that it would all begin and Jerusalem and to wait.

Acts 2 records for us the day of Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. “Pentecost” simply meant the feast that was fifty days from passover. “Pentecost” is the Greek term for the “Feast of Weeks” as spelled out at Deuteronomy 16:9-10. Thus this is seven weeks from the day Jesus rose from the dead. It is on this day that the Spirit came as had been prophesied (John 16:13), the first gospel sermon is preached, and the day that the church is instituted with the first converts being made. 3000 converts to be exact! (Acts 2:41)

1. What peculiar thing happened on this day?

2. What passage does Peter give as this fulfilling?

3. What prophecies does Peter quote and why did he quote each of them?

There are a number of lessons that we can take away from the account given in Acts 2. Let's consider some of these lessons together as think about the urgent message preached.

The message was tied to the prophecies they knew.

One would do well to note that there are many sentences in Peter's sermon that are offset indicating that it is quotation from the Old Testament. This served a couple of purposes.

For one it shows that the events of that day were the ones that had been looked to prophetically for ages. It is the day that they were all waiting for. Beginning with the prophecy in Joel, Peter makes well the point that the death of Jesus at the hands of his countrymen was no accident. It was prophesied.

It also met these folks where they were at. These people knew much of the Old Testament. Thus when Peter speaks to them he makes his case from the Old Testament. It was passages that they were familiar with. All he had to do was point to the relevance of the day. He met them where they were.

The message was direct.

In our modern English we might would say that Peter did not pull any punches. The point being that this would have been a very awkward message to say the least. It was designed to make people feel uncomfortable. To make people feel exceedingly sorrowful for the atrocity that they had perpetrated. Thus we find Peter bluntly telling this crowd that they put the Messiah on the cross some fifty days prior. (Acts 2:36)

The message was highly emotional.

No doubt when a people such as the Israelites were told that they had waited centuries for the Messiah and then crucified Him, this was highly emotional. They were devastated at the thought of what they had done. Thus we see their reaction at Acts 2:37. They were pierced to the heart. Peter masterfully made them aware not just of the facts of the day, but also of what it meant for each of them. This message involved more than the intellect. It was to convict their conscience, emotion, and will as well.

In looking at the Eunuch over the last couple weeks one thing is clear, he would have been quite weak after his conversion. He was a student of the Old Testament, but his knowledge of that even was quite limited as indicated by his question to Philip. He was only taught by Philip for a short amount of time before he was converted. Then after his conversion Philip was immediately snatched away leaving the Eunuch on his own. No doubt there were many gaps to fill in for the Eunuch. We do not know how the Lord went about doing that exactly with him, but no doubt he was taken care of.

Last week we considered the responsibilities that the weak, new Christian has in coming to Christ. This week we will consider the responsibilities that the seasoned saints have toward this convert. The Thessalonian letters help us greatly with regard to learning these responsibilities. Answer the following questions, appealing to reference books or online materials if needed.

1. How long had the Thessalonian church existed when they received this first letter? The second letter?

2. What had the accomplished in this amount of time?

3. What had Paul apparently done in his time with them?

4. What should they do toward the weak and fainthearted?

What are some of these responsibilities that the convert has?

To work out their own salvation.

Paul tells the Philippians at 2:12 to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Each one of us is responsible for our own salvation. We may want to blame others for our failures, but on the last day if we fall short it will be due to our own action, or inaction.

Specifically, the apostle explains that working out our own salvation with fear and trembling means to carefully obey our Lord. He goes on to say that we must obey, without grumbling, but in such a way that is beyond reproach being lights to the world. If we are going through this life carefully trying to obey all that the Lord has commanded, we will not fail in working out our own salvation.

To follow through with their commitments.

Every time a person comes to Christ they are making various commitments. They are committing to worshipping with the saints. (Hebrews 10:25) They are committing to repent. (Romans 6:12) They are committing to be busy doing the tasks that Christ has given them to do. The Eunuch no doubt had a tough work ahead of him. He would be following through with these commitments largely by himself until such time that other souls could be established. But these commitments had still been made by him and must be followed through with. He may have largely been responsible for carrying the gospel to his region and churches being planted by his effort.

To bear their own burdens.

Galatians 6:1-5 speaks about two different types of burdens. Namely, burdens that we can help one another with and burdens that we must carry alone. There are some things that other people can simply not do for me. I must increase my faith. I must study. I must pray. I must be a worker. While others may offer me support in those endeavors, it is up to me to carry them out. The Eunuch did not even have much in way of supporters at the moment. Yet He had to carry out those responsibilities regardless. Indeed the new convert has much to do.

Read I Corinthians 15 in preparation.

We often talk about the ancient message today. It is our goal to adhere to what was originally taught. It is our goal to preach what was originally preached. There are a number of places that we could turn to enumerate the benefits of doing this.

1. Why does Jeremiah 6:16 say we should ask for the "ancient paths"?

2. What do most choose to do?

When we examine Acts 2 we see what the ancient message was that was preached in its most basic form. This simple message was apparently what the apostle Paul continued to deliver as he went about teaching the lost and planting churches. Answer the following questions from I Corinthians 15.

1. What did the gospel do for the Corinthians? How?

2. How does Paul summarize the message he preached?

3. How does this summary correspond to Acts 2?

4. What was being denied among the Corinthians? Why does Paul say this is a problem?

What are some lessons then that we can take away regarding the ancient message that is to be preached?

It is more than just stating facts about the resurrection.

There is a widespread belief today that we need to simply preach Jesus. The idea being that all we should ever do is talk about Jesus, what He did, and what a loving person He is. While these are great things to talk about and are true, there is more to the story than this. This type of preaching stems from the doctrines of Calvinism. The idea being that we do not have to do anything toward our salvation. Also that we do not have to do anything to maintain our salvation. Yet the Bible clearly teaches that there are things that we must do!

Just believing the facts will not save demons. (James 2:19) Nor will it save us. I Corinthians 15 made clear that the brethren there had to respond to the gospel by receiving it, standing in it, and then holding fast to it. There was much for them to have done and to keep doing. Jesus was preached to the Eunuch in Acts 8, apparently including the response to the word, baptism. One can not be obedient simply to facts. (Romans 6:17)

It needs to take importance.

Paul told the Corinthians that he preached Christ and Him crucified to them as of first importance. He had an order to the things that he preached. We can do much harm if we do not present the ancient message foremost, urgently and in its simplicity. They needed to know what Christ had done for them and how to take advantage of it first and foremost. The same is true today. We must order our preaching by putting the things of highest priority and urgency in the first slot.

Only it can save.

Paul preached the saving message to them. Only that message could save. There was nothing else that could accomplish this. Just as Christ was resurrected, so would they be as believers in Him. The resurrection to life of believers in Christ is made possible by the resurrection of Christ. They had to hold to the ancient message, otherwise there was no hope for them. We instill hope today through preaching that same word.

The gospel is all about personal responsibility. It is about developing self-control. This world is about indulging the flesh in whatever the flesh wants. The way of Jesus says that we put aside the desires of the flesh and instead subject ourselves to the will of Jesus Christ. This being the case, a person who has submitted themselves in obedience to the waters of baptism has their work cut out for them. There is much to do.

1. What do you think the Eunuch knew at his baptism?

2. What church was the Eunuch baptized into?

3. What would the Eunuch then need to do when returning to his home?

4. How do you think that he could accomplish these monumental tasks?

5. How do you think the one-lesson approach might have hindered him in this circumstance?

It is clear from examining the conversion of the Eunuch that there is much for the new convert to do. There are varying problems that must be worked out with the individual. There are obstacles with regard to study and worshipping with the saints. Yet the convert has responsibility given them by Christ.

to him. He was to go meet a chariot. He was to preach Jesus to the passenger in that chariot. What was the message that was preached?

It's Substance

The substance of the message preached was obviously Christ and Him crucified. When Philip approaches the chariot he hears the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Specifically he is reading from Isaiah 53. The Eunuch is puzzled by the statement. Is the prophet speaking of himself or of someone else. Philip knows the answer and begins there preaching Jesus to him.

While many today would want to point out that the message was simply about the Savior and His death for us, there was more to the substance of the message than this. The facts are of know importance if the Eunuch does not know how to take advantage of what has been made available. It is evident from his request to be baptized when he sees water that Philip taught him, not only the fact of the death of Jesus, but also how to receive the blessings that Jesus paid the price for!

It's Nature

In one word the message was urgent. We note the urgency from several different angles. It was urgent as the Spirit had Philip run up to the stranger's chariot. It was urgent as Philip was willing to hop right in with this stranger. It was urgent as the Eunuch immediately requested baptism upon seeing water. It was urgent as Philip was willing to immediately comply with his wish. The message is one of life or of death. All of these things evidence that fact.

It's Outcome

The Eunuch went on his way rejoicing. He had been saved and added to the Lord's church just as had happened in Acts 2. This was certainly worthy of celebrating. It was such a wonderful thing, that even after Philip disappears, he just goes right on rejoicing. A man being snatched up by the Spirit (Acts 8:39) was the second greatest thing that happened that day for the Eunuch!

We noted previously that the message of Acts 2 was highly emotional. It was not a manufactured emotion as is seen in many pulpits today. Rather it was a genuine emotional response to a message that touched the entire heart of the individuals. Peter did not have to resort to oratory trickery. He was simply preaching the message of Jesus Christ in its simple form and it produced emotion in the hearers. They made the connection between the prophecies that they had heard from their youth and the man who had just died on the cross for their benefit.

1. What does Acts 2 say was their emotional response upon hearing the sermon?

2. What did they do after experiencing this emotional response?

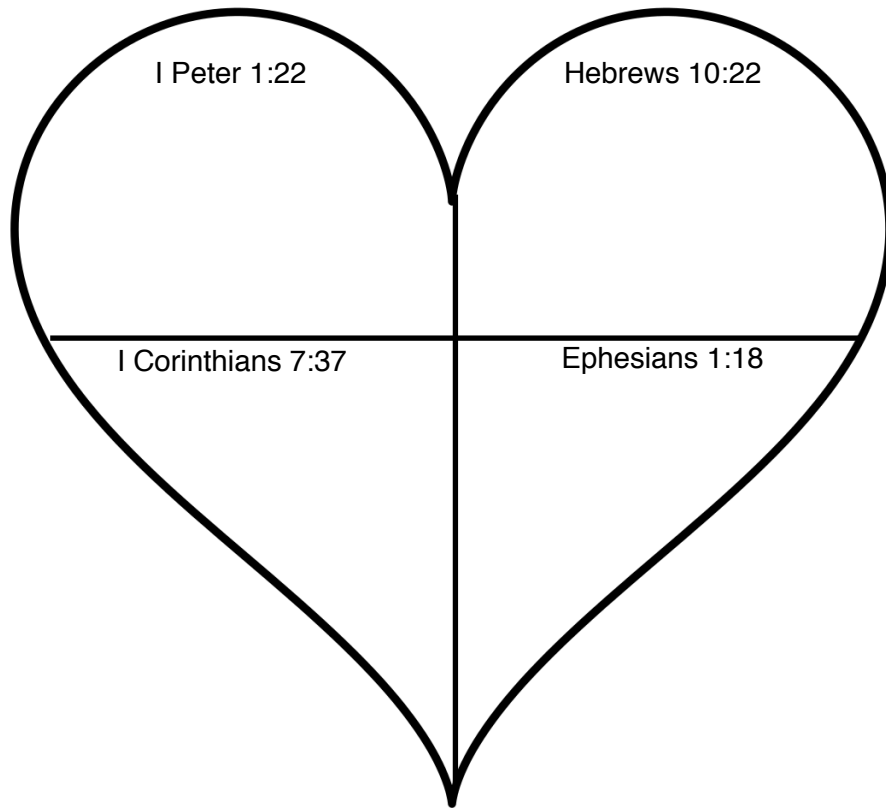
3. What of the hearers in Acts 7? What was their emotional response? What did they do?

4. Why do you think the outcome of these two instances was so drastically different?

So here we see that two very similar sermons were preached. Two very similar emotional responses are recorded. Yet, two opposite reactions are observed. In one situation the hearers subjected their will to the Master. In the other they hardened further against the speaker and killed him! The difference between the two is the hearer. Specifically the heart of the hearers. It is apparent that gospel preaching convicts the

entirety of the subject's heart. What then are the parts of the Bible heart and how do we preach to all of them?

Fill in the following chart with the various parts of the Bible heart as found in the verses.



Of course, today we would not speak about the heart so much as we would call it the mind. Yet in the ancient way of speaking this was called the heart.

Good preaching reaches all areas of the heart. Too often teaching people boils down to simply conveying facts. This is not what was done in examining the conversion accounts in our New Testament. Their intellect was appealed to certainly. However, the goal was also to touch the emotional, conscience, and will centers also. The whole heart was preached to with great success. Whatever method we choose to use, we must be careful that it is convicting the entire heart.

Lesson 7 - The Conversion of the Eunuch

Read Acts 8 in preparation.

The church had been at peace and doing well in weeks prior to the events of Acts 8 according to verses like Acts 5:14 and Acts 6:7. Then at Acts 7 the entire operation is thrown into turmoil. After selecting Stephen to be one of the deacons as noted at Act 6, he is brought before the rulers to give a defense of his actions and is ultimately stoned to death simply for serving Christ well! The first recorded martyr. Such an upsetting thing that even Jesus is represented as standing at the right hand of God rather than sitting as is usual. (Compare Acts 7:55 with Acts 2:34, Hebrews 1:3, and Hebrews 12:2.)

After this horrific event occurred a violent persecution of the saints was led by a man named Saul against the church of Christ. His people were being dragged from their homes and imprisoned and ultimately killed. (Acts 8:3; Acts 26:10) The church was scattered as a result. They were scattered into the very regions that had been prophesied by Jesus at Acts 1:8 (see also Acts 8:1), namely Judea and Samaria. Phillip, one of the seven, went down to Samaria and began teaching the lost there with the result that many were believing.

1. How many does Luke say were responding?

2. Who was one of these converts?

3. What was his downfall and why?

Peter had come into the region to complete the work that Philip had begun. Acts 8:25 records that Peter was done and he and the other headed home. Philip had a different mission given