

The Book of Acts

LESSON
THREE

Major Themes Discussion Forum



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The Book of Acts

Lesson Three: Major Themes

Discussion Forum

With
Dr. Hans F. Bayer

Students
Larry Gwaltney
Ra McLaughlin

Question 1:

How should Christians think of the Holy Spirit?

Student: Dr. Bayer, the lesson and, I think following the book of Acts, really puts an emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the early life of the church. And at times in Acts, the Holy Spirit moves powerfully and yet impersonally, and at other times it's subtle and quietly but very personal. How should Christians today think of the Holy Spirit?

Dr. Bayer: I think it's important to remember that the presentation in the book of Acts is really the mission of God, and the mission of God begins with sending his Son... the culmination of the mission of God, was sending his Son, and then as Jesus predicts, that he would send the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, to continue to instruct, convict of sin, etc., what we read in the Gospel of John, and this is really played out in the book of Acts. So that we need to understand that the work of the Holy Spirit is to continue the mission of God. So it wouldn't be impersonal in that sense, but it would be continuing the purposes of God, and we see that as the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested. What is significant in the book of Acts is that we have little reference to the person of the Holy Spirit. Much more reference to the work of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. And you're quite right. Sometimes it is supernatural and dramatic, such as the Pentecost event, and sometimes when Paul is guided through a vision not to go into a certain area but to listen to the voice from Macedonia, it is more subtle. And I think that sensitizes us to the fact that the Holy Spirit works in different ways in different situations. But we must keep in mind that there is an overarching mission to the Holy Spirit, and as I mentioned already, it is really the exalted Christ who pours out the Spirit to his messianic people of God to equip them, not just for powerful witness, but for transformed lives, as I have mentioned. It is the power of the Spirit that really transforms us to live godly lives and to be surrendered to God so that we are authentic witnesses and not just talking words.

Student: Now you mentioned that in the book of Acts we don't hear very much about the Holy Spirit described as a person. Are there times in Acts where we can see his personhood coming through? Or do we mostly draw the theology of his personhood from other books of the Bible?

Dr. Bayer: I think we would mostly draw the understanding of the Holy Spirit's personhood from other parts of the Bible. On the other hand, we see the collaboration between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit at various points. Obviously in the Gospel of Luke at the baptism of Jesus, it is a most conspicuous Trinitarian event with the voice of the Father and the Holy Spirit equipping in a particular way the public ministry of Jesus. But we can see that at various instances in the book of Acts but more implicitly, more indirectly, and we would need to look at other parts of the New Testament to understand the person of the Holy Spirit as Lord and as the third person of the Trinity.

Student: You know, there's an interesting passage in Acts — and forgive me, I don't remember which chapter it's in — but there are some disciples who haven't received the Holy Spirit or even heard that there is one. And I think that's a fascinating statement because, you know, we look back at the Old Testament and we're accustomed to reading our trinitarianism in the Old Testament — It's fascinating to me that in the New Testament we have a group of faithful believers who have received Jesus in some sense but have not heard about the Holy Spirit and haven't received him. It's curious to me that they don't even really think about him in that sense. Is this revelation of the Holy Spirit's personhood something that's new to the New Testament, or should they have seen it in the Old Testament and just missed it?

Dr. Bayer: Well, you're referring to the passage in Acts 19 when, what it says there, the disciples of John had not heard about the Holy Spirit. And I would say there is teaching about the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. You may remember when David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, in Psalm 51 he prays that God would not remove his Spirit from him. So there is an understanding. There is a sensitivity to the Spirit of God. But certainly it becomes more prominent and comes to the fore in the New Testament. In this particular group, followers of John had not heard of the coming and the promise of the Paraclete connected with the ministry of Jesus.

Question 2: **What is the ministry of the Holy Spirit?**

Student: Dr. Bayer, I think we can all recognize that the church has a variety of views on the charismatic gifts in the church today, the way that the Holy Spirit gifts and graces believers. I'm curious to know your thoughts regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the church today, and also where you think we might find common ground between all of these different views. What can we take from the book of Acts to help bring us together and unite us in our theology? Where can we start in that?

Dr. Bayer: This is certainly a very divisive issue and a very important one. Because, on the one hand, Scripture challenges us not to quench the Holy Spirit, and on the other, we are warned that signs and wonders are not necessarily a sign of divine blessing and divine presence, so that we have to be sensitive to anti-Christian forces and realities with signs and wonders. So we are holding a tension here, and it certainly would be wrong to ignore this tension, and the book of Acts speaks to that. So my appeal would be to find common ground on what the book of Acts affirms itself. And as we read together from different traditions, from different backgrounds, different experiences, we see that the book of Acts speaks much about the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit and that there are many different phenomena, many different manifestations there.

One thing that is significant that I mentioned a little bit in the lecture is that all tongues in the book of Acts are languages. They're not angelic speech, they are not something alien to human experience, but they are known languages and dialects, as Luke says. So it is miraculous, but it is certainly something that we can have access to in terms of different languages. So I would appeal to the focus that the book of Acts itself lays on the fact that the presence of the Holy Spirit is always the end product. The sequence, the modality varies, but the fact of the receiving of the Holy Spirit for each believer is given, and so I would draw attention to Acts 2:38 where that is summarized in some ways as a paradigm that is then presented in different ways and different circumstances. I have made mention in the lectures to the fact that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Samaritans, among Gentiles; these are significant progressions of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and we need to be careful that we do not simply transfer one-to-one and say this is what needs to happen now. So I would advocate an openness to the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, while seeing that the primary focus of signs and wonders, of miraculous work in the book of Acts, is the confirmation of the apostolic witness to the resurrection of Jesus. That is the primary use, or the primary function of the miraculous and the significant transcendent manifestation of the Holy Spirit. But I would not exclude that, therefore, from the experience of a life of the Christian in different circumstances. So I would want to navigate a path that is guided by the book of Acts and that is open to the work of the Holy Spirit without demanding a one-to-one copying and equation of the manifestation of the Spirit.

There are some people who teach that in the book of Acts there is a second blessing, that you may receive the Holy Spirit as a believer but then you are baptized in the power of the Holy Spirit. But it can be demonstrated that there is no foundation to a second blessing in the book of Acts. So what happens is that the terminology in the book of Acts varies; it can be receiving the Holy Spirit, it can be being baptized in the Holy Spirit, but what happens is always the same thing. Now there is a possibility in the book of Acts of being renewed in the Spirit, of having a further work of the Holy Spirit, but that can happen at multiple times. So it would not be distillable to a doctrine of the second blessing. So I'm advocating a focus on the affirmation of the apostolic witness and a careful openness to the work of the Holy Spirit without

focusing on myself, and my experience, and my emotions, because it is the mission of God that I'm called to come under.

Student: I was kind of intrigued by your use of the word openness, because in my tradition that I came out of, we really diminished the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And I suspect a lot of people who might be watching this right now come from a similar background and never really talked about it very much, or didn't want to associate with what they would consider some of the more extravagant manifestations out there. But yet, the same people would often tell me, and I felt the same, that they kind of envied people, charismatics, who maybe theologically we didn't agree with but for whom the Holy Spirit was a very real person and a very real experience. So that idea of being open it seems to me a good start toward a movement in that direction without compromising some of the other things that we've learned from other books of the Bible.

Dr. Bayer: I think also, to elaborate on that just a little bit, the work of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts is by no means limited to empowering for witness. I have argued that the event of Pentecost is very much God's Spirit writing his law on your heart. And that is a character transformation issue. That is a renewal of the inner heart and inner mind, so it is overcoming sin in our own lives. That certainly has ramifications for authentic and believable witness. So I would want to add that, that the presence of the Holy Spirit is not only for outward ministry but for internal transformation, which is exactly what Jesus says the Spirit will come, he will convict of sin and guide in righteousness. So I would that is a more comprehensive understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit that will help us not to focus too much on signs and wonders and particular supernatural manifestations, but on the miracle of the transformed heart.

Question 3: **What are the last days?**

Student: Doctor, our lesson mentions Peter referencing Joel 2 when it talks about the Holy Spirit being poured out on his people in the last days, and that had immediate reference then, and now it's 2000 years later. What does the term last days mean? Are we in the last days? And if so, what does that mean for us in terms of the Holy Spirit's application now?

Dr. Bayer: You see, it is interesting to begin to understand how the Bible speaks about time and event sequences. And I would argue that as we look at the Old Testament and especially at the New Testament, Gospel of Luke, the book of Acts, there is a much greater emphasis on sequences than on time. So when you speak about the last days, it sounds to us like there is a focus on time when, in fact, from a redemptive historical understanding of Scripture and the understanding of Jewish expectation, it would be much more, what things need to occur? And since the

coming of the Messiah, since the massive fulfillment of not only particular Old Testament prophecies but an entire anticipation of consummation, we have moved forward in the unfolding of the event sequences in God's unfolding mission, so that Peter, at this point, speaks of the end times, the culmination of the events that need to occur before the culminating day of the last judgment and the beginning of the manifested eternal messianic kingdom of God, with coming of Christ being the most significant marking point. So perhaps we need to think less in terms of time sequence and more in terms of event sequence, and then this way we can say Peter understands the time in which he is, as well as our time, as the time that has moved very close to the consummation of the event sequences. We could say not much needs to happen in the unfolding of God's redemptive historical work before the great day of the Lord. And so in that sense, we have been living in the end times since the establishment and inauguration of the messianic kingdom of God with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Question 4:

What is life like in the overlap of the ages?

Student: Dr. Bayer, the lesson talks about the last days, or the end times, in terms of the overlap of two ages, this age of sin and death and the age to come when everything is wonderful and perfect. And it says that the rabbis had this understanding that we would transition from this age to the age to come rather immediately, that it would be a fairly short period of time in which this transition would take place. And yet, the lesson describes that while this age is still going on and the age to come has started, that this transition is going to be a long time. We've gone through at least 1900 years and working on 2000 now, and we don't know when this overlap will end. What does this teach us about the nature of the last days and about what we can expect the Holy Spirit to be doing within this time? Can you give me some insight there?

Dr. Bayer: You see, that's a fascinating aspect of Jesus' teaching. That understanding of rabbis drawn on some Old Testament texts was modified by Jesus and clarified in the sense that the coming of the eternal messianic kingdom is not as you have described it, but that there is the intrusion of the eternal kingdom of God in the person of Jesus into the existing age of sin and decay, and that within that setting, the new kingdom, the new life is growing side-by-side, coexisting with the current age, and only at a future consummation point will there be the full manifestation of this new age. So this has enormous ramifications to our understanding of reality. That in a precise way is truly eschatological. Eschatological does not speak about the future as much as the intrusion of the eternal kingdom of God now. Wherever Jesus is, there is already that new eternal kingdom. And so at that marking point then the work of the Holy Spirit is that first fruit given to the believers to seal them for this age in which there is transformation, spiritual battle, growth, maturity, and evangelism testifying to the reality of Christ and his eternal kingdom as an equipment within the

context of this decaying age with its opposition, with its darkness, with its moral decay and its challenges, to be able to be a witness in this time. So the giving of the Holy Spirit is a very significant mark of empowering so that this future age that has begun already now would be realized in part in a fragile way in our own personal lives, in our churches, as a first fruit, a testimony, a witness to, the consummation of the messianic kingdom of God.

Student: Well, does the church have any reason to be optimistic? I know many people are quite content to be frozen in the sense that, okay, the Holy Spirit is here, the kingdom is here, but we can't expect much more until Jesus comes. And some people anticipate that things are just going to gradually improve, and some people just assume that things are going to get worse. Without going into any great detail, because I know that this is an issue that could go on for hours if we were going to discuss it, I would just ask, is there a reasonable basis for Christians to have hope that the Holy Spirit's ministry is going to improve? I mean, do we have to resign ourselves to either march in place or that things have to get worse?

Dr. Bayer: It's a very challenging way to look at reality because Luther once evidently said, "If the world ended tomorrow, I would plant an apple tree today." So there is this sense of hope and commitment to transformation, not only of individual lives but of the culture and setting within which we live, but at the same time realizing that that will not overcome the old age, so that we always only planned in part. The transformation that happens is preliminary, is penultimate, and we are looking forward to the day when Jesus returns and restores all things in such an overwhelming way that it will be sustained. So we have hope, but we should not be triumphalistic in our understanding of what will happen and change now. But we should also not lose hope, and give up, and remove ourselves from our societies, the economic and social, environmental problems that we face, but plant our apple tree today; in the trust in the Holy Spirit, give ourselves to this sign, to this indication of what God will be accomplishing in a much more overarching way in the future. So neither triumphalist nor fatalist would be the path empowered by the Spirit of God to stand in our age in which we live.

Question 5:

How do we draw modern application from narrative texts?

Student: Doctor, the lesson mentioned some things that believers can expect from union with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and then there are some things that are somewhat exceptional in the book of Acts because we're talking about a narrative structure. For our part, what can we do as believers when we're reading a narrative story to be able to discern what we can expect, what we have a right to expect, and what would be termed extraordinary?

Dr. Bayer: That's important. I've already mentioned that it is clear in the book of Acts itself that signs and wonders and particular manifestations of the Holy Spirit are primarily given to confirm and affirm the apostolic witness to the resurrection of Christ, but certainly there is an openness to the manifestation of the Spirit in certain ways of being guided, etc., etc., in the book of Acts. So the expectation of the individual believer should be guided by that. And I would advocate not only by the book of Acts but to look beyond that, to look into the teaching of Jesus, and to see that Jesus says: Listen to the message. If people are raised from the dead, even then, you will not believe what Moses said. So that, he makes a clear distinction between the miraculous confirmation and affirmation of words, and the true change of heart that happens when someone is yielded to the work of the Holy Spirit, and to the call to repentance, and to believe. So I would be careful on that point, but certainly to be open that where the book of Acts is very strong and clear, that the Holy Spirit will work in your life towards godliness, towards equipping you to be courageous in your witness, to be willing to suffer on behalf of Christ, that these things are very much within the purview of what you should anticipate, expect, and await. If God gives you healing, if God in a particular way quickens your heart, you may praise him as an additional blessing, but these aforementioned basics I would say would be very much at the foundation and a common ground to all believers all over the world.

Question 6:

How does the modern church relate to the apostles?

Student: Dr. Bayer, the lesson talks about how special and unique the apostles were in their role and in their office. At the same time, it recognizes they are human, but in their teaching and in their authoritative role, that they are infallible. My question is really, what place should the apostles have in our lives now? Since we don't have apostles currently, are they just a historical remnant that we appeal to for doctrinal clarification, or is there some other role that they play as the foundation of the church?

Dr. Bayer: I have emphasized a good bit the authority of the apostles in the lesson. And it is important to understand that it is not an innate authority, but it is derivative. They function as ambassadors. And an ambassador never speaks in his own authority, has his own agenda, but he always speaks on behalf of the one who sends him, on behalf of the authority that he represents. And so we need to understand the authority of the apostles in this way; that Christ is really the one that we are submitting to when we listen to the apostles. And that's an important point that the apostles, as they go out and proclaim and testify to the resurrection of Christ, and with that, the authentication of what Jesus claimed to be, that it is derivative. It is pointing to Christ. And as I mentioned before, Jesus himself shaped the understanding, shaped the framework, the paradigm of understanding in such a way that the testimony of the apostles is very much reflecting Christ. So in that way, as we submit to these messengers, we submit to Christ, and with Christ, we submit to him who sent him so

that we worship the Father with receiving the Son. So it is not innate apostolic authority but derivative, and in that sense, it is unique. There is no replication; there is no continuation of that. And that is why the church is built on the foundation of this apostolic witness to Christ with Christ the cornerstone. Now we understand that in some ways, all of it goes back to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. So in that sense, we can freely submit to the authority of the apostles because they themselves do not speak in their own authority, but they reflect Christ.

Student: Is there a sense in which any of that continues today? As you were speaking, it made me think of the idea that the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. I wonder if those are parallel ideas in any sense. Not to say that our modern preachers speak with that type of infallible accuracy or with that exact same authority, but how do those ideas relate?

Dr. Bayer: The preaching of the gospel today continues that proclamation of the apostles, but it reflects their testimony. It refers back to their testimony. So as I preach the gospel, I believe their witness exactly as Jesus prayed for in the high priestly prayer that they would believe their witness. So there is no innate authority in the preaching of the Word today, except that it is based on that authorized witness, apostolic witness, which in turn refers back to Jesus. So we have direct access to Jesus through that witness line, and therefore we still today refer to the apostolic witness in the New Testament, and then particularly also in the book of Acts, we refer back to that, because there we have the authoritative testimony, the reliable testimony to Christ, and that is our lifeline today. It is not a new teaching. It is not a new authority structure. It is the reality that is established once and for all. And that testimony is reliable, is fixed, is a guidepost for us, so that we can say we have direct access to Christ through the apostolic witness.

Question 7:

Was Paul a legitimate apostle?

Student: Dr. Bayer, Peter lists some pretty specific qualifications for apostleship in Acts 1, and given that, by what standard then can we consider Paul an apostle? And if he is, and it states that he is, then what is unique about his apostleship?

Dr. Bayer: First it is significant to note the qualification requirement for replacing Judas. It's a wonderful testimony to understanding that these people must have heard, listened to, lived with, and been shaped by Jesus, so not just anybody could be replacing Judas. And I would argue Paul could never qualify to replace Judas directly. So in that sense, we need to uphold the wonderful criteria established in Acts 1 to replace Judas. And Mathias rightfully takes that place. He stands there with the other apostles in the beginning of the book of Acts as a witness who nods when Peter speaks. So he's there. He's testifying to the truth of that testimony. Now regarding Paul, it is very significant to note that he was not a follower of Christ during his

earthly ministry. In fact, he was the enemy of the early church because the early church worshiped Jesus, and according to his understanding as a pharisaic Jew, that was blasphemy and that had to be persecuted, and that is why he went to Damascus, why he went elsewhere to seek to have the early Christians blaspheme Jesus, as he says himself in Acts 26. So what about the apostleship of Paul? Paul himself is one of the opponents of the gospel. You see the dynamic in the book of Acts of internal and external growth despite internal and external opposition. Paul is a member of the external opposition, and now you see that God can reach into the external opposition and have one of the great enemies of the church, a very well-trained Jewish rabbi, become one of them. He crosses the line from opponent to participant through the appearance of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Now when Jesus appears to Paul, he gives him an apostolic commission; you will be a witness for me, you will suffer for me, a witness to the Gentiles. So we can certainly say that the criterion of having encountered the risen Christ, being a witness to the resurrection, is part of what Paul can claim for his particular apostleship, and in 1 Corinthians 15, he says very much that. But he does identify himself as one abnormally born. Yes, he was also instructed by revelation during the time in the desert. But in some ways, I would say the apostleship of Paul is distinct from the apostleship of The Twelve, and yet it is a significant collaboration and corroboration of the reality of the risen Christ that not only trained followers testify to the reality of the resurrection of Christ, but the most outspoken enemy also testifies to the reality of the risen Christ. So the handshake in Jerusalem between those apostles who were systematically trained by Jesus and Paul is, in fact, the joining of two trajectories of witness lines that testifies to the reality of the resurrection of Christ. So he is an apostle, he has encountered the risen Christ, and he is authorized on behalf of Christ with the particular authority of an apostle to testify the gospel to the Gentiles.

Question 8:

Do the apostles have authority over the modern church?

Student: Dr. Bayer, we've been talking about the authority that the apostles possessed, and we've spoken a bit about how that authority worked in the early church. I'm interested to see what you think about how we should respond to that authority today. You know, we live in a world where we often reject authority, where authority over us is perceived as a bad thing. How should we respond to the apostles and how should we think about their authority in our own Christian lives?

Dr. Bayer: That's very important since today we do have examples of abuse of authority in the church not only outside. And so when we use the word authority and refer to the authority of the apostles, for some listeners, that would be very, very depressing and would need to be rejected. So it is very good to reflect on the nature of their authority, and perhaps Paul is a good example. When we look at the ministry of Paul, we do not see an authority of pushing around his weight, of demanding and of commanding, but we see a broken man, we see a humble man. We see a man who has

suffered much, who is willing to work with his own hands so as not to burden churches that should perhaps support his ministry so as to have a clean conscience before God and before the people to be able to minister the gospel. So in 2 Corinthians 6, perhaps the long list of the various trials and tribulations Paul has endured would be a good starting point to understand what kind of an authority, what kind of leadership we have in the early apostles. And certainly that echoes the ministry of Jesus. When we think about the Philippian hymn in Philippians 2:5-11, we see how Jesus himself humbled himself, and let go of privileges in order to serve you and me. How much more then should a follower of Christ, who has only delegated authority, follow in the footsteps and in the pattern of humility and servant leadership to exercise the derived authority, or derivative authority, in the way of appeal rather than command, in the way of example rather than expecting somebody from someone without living it out yourself. So it is an open letter. It is a transparent natural authority, and then again, as I mentioned, not innate but derivative. And when we reflect on that, it is a wonderful outgrowth of the lordship of Christ that his apostles, the main testifiers to the reality of the resurrection of Christ, would themselves reflect the character, demeanor and humility of the Lord they serve, and with that authority then appeal to humility, to obedience, to surrender, not to them as much as to the one that has sent them. And so that in the end, the body of Christ is being built up to humility before Christ. So build on the foundation of the apostolic witness in this more holistic understanding is a wonderful example then for us if we are elders or leaders in our churches, if we have a responsible function in our churches that we would do likewise.

Student: Does that mean the church is really going to have to address a change in strategy? I mean, we live in an age of hyper-individualism, and yet we are preaching submit yourself to the authority of Christ.

Dr. Bayer: I think very much so. I see it in my own life, and we can recognize our default mode of being our own master rather than submitting to the lordship of Christ.

Question 9:

How did special revelation impact the apostles' ministry?

Student: Dr. Bayer, how is the fact that the apostles were given special revelation supposed to affect our understanding of their ministry in the early church?

Dr. Bayer: It's important to reflect on the nature of their prophetic commission. You see, when Jesus came and made particular claims that were affirmed through the resurrection of Christ, foundational truths were established. I've mentioned the fact that Jesus himself identifies himself as the Lord of David in Psalm 110:1. Once that's established, there is a revelation truth through Christ that then enables the apostles to make further applications and to see further implications of that established truth. So one example would be the prophetic ministry of Peter in the first Pentecost speech,

that he can say this is that, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit corresponds to Joel 2. This is a prophetic authority that we would not have. He makes that link, but in some ways it is already derivative; it follows through, for instance, on the promise of Jesus that he would send the Paraclete, the Spirit, to continue to lead his church. So yes, there is a prophetic authorization of the apostles, but in some ways it is fleshing out what has already been established. Another example would be the vision that Peter receives before he goes to the house of Cornelius. He sees the vision of the unclean animals and he's supposed to eat. There you see it is not new revelation in the sense of understanding the messiahship of Jesus. It fleshes out the consequence that there is purity in Christ even for Gentiles. He is supposed to learn that the gospel does not only apply to all Jews, even those who live far away, but even unclean Gentiles. And so I would argue that there is a prophetic ministry, but it is fleshing out the consequence of what is already foundationally established in the reality, in the claim, in the teaching and the revelation of Jesus himself.

Student: Dr. Bayer, what you've said makes sense for much of what I see in Acts, but what about something like Acts 15 where we have this council in Jerusalem that's convened to discuss the issue of the inclusion of the Gentiles, and we come down to circumcision, which in the Old Testament is the sign of the covenant. And yet, at this council, they say, okay, we're just going to take that away. Is that not some sort of new revelation that the apostles had received in order to make that judgment?

Dr. Bayer: Certainly there is a new aspect to the fact that the apostolic council agrees and decides that no requirement of circumcision should be made for Gentiles. But as you reflect on Colossians 2:11-12, you see that Christ affected the circumcision of the heart which is necessary for circumcised Jews. And since he affected that circumcision both for Jews and Gentiles, it follows that the necessity of the circumcision of the flesh is now replaced, is no more a requirement as God is applying that work in such a specific and deep way. Now obviously in the Old Testament we have an appeal to the circumcision of the heart as well, in Deuteronomy 10 for instance. So it has always been God's goal to have people with a circumcised heart. But you can see that the decision of the apostolic council, looking back on the finished work of Christ, would draw out the consequence of that finished work and say, this is the basis of salvation and reconciliation with God, not the particular covenant sign of circumcision that was significant among Jews up to this point. And so I would argue that we have a sense of revelation there, but it still is derivative to the reality and the substance of the finished work of Christ, and the application of that finished work in circumcising the hearts of both Jews and Gentiles. And Paul would elaborate on that in Romans 2 as well, so that the goal is that both Jews and Gentiles are purified before God in their hearts based on the finished work of Christ.

Student: So there's a sense in which these new revelations are reapplications of existing revealed principles and knowledge about the character of God?

Dr. Bayer: That's well put.

Student: How then would we apply that to something, say...? I'm not trying to trip you up, but I'm curious. How do we apply that to something like Agabus and his prophecy of famine?

Dr. Bayer: Yes, there I would say it is not a new revelation about the foundations of the Christian faith but is a particular guidance in terms of events that are to happen that at different times and different circumstances throughout redemptive history God has made known. So yes, there is a revelation aspect, but it is not foundational.

Question 10:

In what sense is the church necessary?

Student: Dr. Bayer, I think it's easy for Christians to take the church for granted today. Many of us were raised in it and just knew it our entire lives. What I'm wondering... your lesson says that the church is necessary, which I think a few people might be surprised to hear. A lot of them just take it or leave it, even if they had been raised in it. In what sense can we say that the church is necessary?

Dr. Bayer: In the lecture, I emphasized that the church is necessary to continue the apostolic witness to the reality and the work of Christ, but I think we need to go a little deeper and begin at the beginning, and that is that God has always sought a people for himself. In fact, when we look at the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, the known Septuagint, the translation of words that refer to the people of God is *ecclesia* which then later was used for the messianic church in the New Testament. So there is always a sense in which God seeks a people unto himself that he redeems unto himself, and the primary purpose there would be to reflect God's glory, to worship the reality of the creator of this universe so that the people would reflect the glory of God and be transformed, and as such, testify to his salvation, testify to his work among the people. So it's a larger understanding of the church as the people of God who reflect his glory. So in the lecture, I emphasized the testimony aspect of it, that it is actually much greater. So the church is not only necessary for witness, the church is the very manifestation, the very window to the world through which the world can see the glory of God and is to see the glory of God. So there is a great commission then for the church to be purified, for the church to humble itself before the risen Christ, and to be renewed, and to reflect the character of God, and then obviously also to speak the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Student: So then it's necessary for Christians to be part of that in order to participate in that transformation and in that building of godly character. Is that the kind of thing you're saying here? That if we exclude ourselves from that arena in which all of that is taking place and God is pouring out his grace, that we don't benefit from that. Even if we go home and preach the Gospel to somebody else, we

may be carrying on the witness in some sense, but we are divorcing ourselves from that arena of blessing and transformation.

Dr. Bayer: Precisely, and we can see that in the book of Acts. I have mentioned the breaking through of barriers; that the dynamic of the gospel is breaking through barriers and a new people of God is being brought together from Jews and Gentiles. What is that? That is a community of believers. So the mission of God is not individual salvation. It is individual salvation in the context of a body of Christ, of a community of believers that together in their relationships and their individual lives reflects the glory of God. So we can see the formation of the messianic people of God in the very effect of the outpouring of the gospel work in the book of Acts. So it is a non-negotiable. It is a foundational aspect of God's mission that he would manifest himself not only in individual lives but in the corporate entity of the church, and that visualizes by relationships, by interactions, by authority and submission structures, the very person and nature of the Triune God.

Question 11:

How should we live in anticipation of Jesus' return?

Student: Dr. Bayer, in the book of Acts, we find the apostles who at least initially might suspect that Jesus is coming back fairly quickly, and their response is to build a church for long-term goals that can exist beyond their lifetime. You mentioned earlier that Luther had the idea that if I knew Jesus were coming back tomorrow, I would plant an apple tree today. That doesn't seem to be the mindset of many Christians in our day. There seem to be a lot of people believe and even hope that we are in the last generation before Christ, and they expect him to come back all the time. At regular intervals, we have new books published, Jesus is coming back in 10 years, or maybe it will be 5 years. How should we really be thinking about this? Even if we really think Jesus is coming back tomorrow, should we be following the apostles' model, or does the circumstance of the modern world require us to adopt a different strategy?

Dr. Bayer: I believe the biblical focus and also the focus of the book of Acts is not so much on time sequence but event sequence, as I have mentioned. And even in the early church, I believe there were two extremes as reflected in 1 and 2 Thessalonians particularly. One extreme was Jesus is coming back today or, at the latest, tomorrow. These were people who said therefore we do not need to work, we do not need to transform the culture, we do not need to become active in our world because Jesus is coming back tomorrow. And then there were the other ones who had such a delay expectation of the coming of Christ that they would say, I need to organize my life, I have to be responsible to raise my children, I have to find employment. Who knows, Christ may never come back. So there are these extremes that Paul deals with, and I believe the center in the book of Acts and in the entire New Testament, the biblical understanding of the future is to have a readiness for the nearness of Christ at all

times, getting our lives in such order that if he came today, our lives would be in such order that we are ready to be with him, and yet not to speculate on particular times. So that we would have a living, alive, expectation and anticipation of the coming of Christ without falling into the trap of these two time faults of an extreme near expectation or an extreme far expectation. And I think that has a particular impact on our lives, namely that we really anticipate the coming of Christ, but we do not speculate on our own understanding, but we put our focus on watching and praying, which is what Jesus instructed his disciples to do in terms of the anticipation of the future. So I think that's very important for us to see that that is being taught in the book of Acts as well.

Student: So if I'm hearing you right, then as individuals and as the church, we should plan for the long term in terms of the things that we do, buildings that we erect, the strategies we come up, the missionaries we send out, but at the same time, we live as though Jesus is coming in the next hour.

Dr. Bayer: I think that is a good way to put it. I would say we have a future indicative. The reality of the coming of Christ is as sure as the death and the resurrection of Christ. So we live suspended between the past indicative of the finished work of Christ and the future indicative of his coming, but we do not speculate. So, we live in an alive life to him today, and as you said, we look forward to his coming now, and yet we do not speculate on the particular timing.

Question 12:

Was character or experience more important for church officers?

Student: Dr. Bayer, when the apostles were creating criteria for the establishment of church officers, they really stressed that person's character issues. I find that interesting, because the apostles' own background, sterling character or not, seems to be their office is derived from the experience of the miraculous and big events. If that's the case then, why in looking at church officers, did they stress the character so much rather than, for instance, their own personal experience of what they may have seen or heard?

Dr. Bayer: That's an interesting question, and I wonder if there's a little bit of a hidden false dichotomy. I would argue very much, and I have tried to illustrate that with 2 Corinthians 6, that as much as the apostles were particularly gifted and commissioned, and as much as there was a miraculous confirmation and affirmation of their witness, very much so were they living letters, transformed hearts. The real miracle in Paul was not his miraculous abilities, but that an enemy of the gospel was an outspoken witness and servant of the risen Lord. Very much a character issue. Very much a transformation of his heart away from pride to dependency, away from heavy authority to a servant leadership approach. So I would argue that the critical scholarship that has said there was a charismatic phase in the early church and then it

went to the phase of office with calling of elders and appointing deacons is in some ways a false dichotomy. Look at Stephen. He was called to minister as a deacon, and yet he was filled with the Holy Spirit. So in many ways, in the calling of the church officers, it would be assumed that they are living under the authority of the triune God, that they received the Holy Spirit in transformation and enablement to witness, but their character needed to reflect the fruit of the Spirit, the work and manifestation of the Spirit rather than simply being young, that their lives needed to testify to the reality of the Spirit of God. So I would argue that we can see these two elements side by side without necessarily expecting the miraculous manifestation with the call of church officers. And I've already tried to illustrate that and demonstrate that, that signs and wonders and miracles were particular affirmations of this unique foundational apostolic witness to the reality of Christ. But I would say that leaders in the church, if we look at James 5, are still called to pray for the sick and to look to God for his intervention and perhaps healing. So I would see those lines coming a little more together, while maintaining a particular authorization, a supernatural authorization, of the apostolic witness to the reality of the resurrection of Christ.

Question 13:

Why did the apostles take joy in their suffering?

Student: Dr. Bayer, I'm curious about the nature of the apostolic experience in the early church. We talked a little bit before about how God blesses and shows his approval of people by blessing them. We've talked about how persecution and martyrdom and hardship are in some ways an exception to that general rule caused by the corruption of the world. What I'm curious about is why the apostles, when they were persecuted in the book of Acts, responded with joy? Why did they rather than say, wow, I wish I could have avoided that exception, why did they embrace it and rejoice that they had been counted worthy to suffer for Christ's Name's sake?

Dr. Bayer: That is an important aspect of the understanding of the apostles as followers of Christ, and certainly we need to first quote Peter who said, if you suffer for your own stupidity, don't count yourself as a martyr for Christ. So we need to be very careful that we do not develop a martyrdom complex by being offensive to other people, and then because of their rejection, consider ourselves sufferers for Christ. So we have to be very careful there that we do not misinterpret our own foolishness in this way. But as we testify to Christ, as we live before him, and as these apostles followed in the footsteps of Christ, they certainly understood that God's love is one of discipline and purification. And God's love is one of testifying in and through suffering. Even in Hebrews 5:7, it says that when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that the cup would be removed, that he would not have to undergo that particular form of suffering. It says that his prayer was answered. And how was his prayer answered? It was answered in the resurrection of Jesus rather than in the protection from suffering. So I think there is a profound truth here that we see exemplified by the apostles embracing the reality of persecution and suffering, because this world in its satanic

expression and its human resistance to the authority of God, will oppose the very purpose of the Master, and will certainly oppose those who follow in his footsteps so that there is a particular form of suffering and persecution that comes with being associated with the light. So I would say that is the ministry of the apostles to the followers and to us, to make us sober followers and to preserve us from a health and wealth gospel that would say if you believe enough, you will neither be sick nor suffer, rather than to say commit your ways to the Lord and he will lead you also in and through suffering. So that we understand that our protection is the presence of God and the ministry of God rather than our physical wellbeing. Let me illustrate that, to conclude, with the way Paul accepted his suffering. He was persecuted. He was interrogated. He was under house arrest. And he could have claimed his citizenship, his Roman citizenship, and he could have tried to avoid particular investigation. But he appealed to Caesar; I believe not to protect his own life and his own wellbeing. He appealed to Caesar because he saw an opportunity to testify during and in that investigation, during and in that difficult time. So he was not seeking his own. He was seeking the glory of God, and he yielded to that, not in an unhealthy martyrdom complex, but in a healthy dedication to the glory of God. And that is what we are called to follow and to count our lives in such a way that we would give ourselves to the glory of God.

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