

EXEGETICAL GUIDE



Acts 2:37-47



**BE UNITED
IN CHRIST**

Be United in Christ

Exegetical Guide

Acts 2:37–47

BE UNITED IN CHRIST EXEGETICAL GUIDE

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Exegetical Guide Acts 2:37–47

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Be United in Christ

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Salvation Leads to Unity

The apostle Paul says that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). True conversion changes people, especially in the way they relate to other believers. A former selfish way of living life is replaced by using one’s time and possessions for the benefit of others.

Christians can pursue God together through prayer, the Bible’s teaching, or enjoying a meal together. True Christian unity is a great witness to a watching world that does not understand how someone could sacrifice so much for another. Yet the natural result of conversion is purposeful, visible unity. The result of this unity is more conversions. Therefore the gospel rightly preached and lived out is crucial for us to Be United in Christ.

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HOW TO USE A BE UNITED IN CHRIST EXEGETICAL GUIDE

An exegetical guide models how to study a passage of Scripture. The Introduction provides the context, while **Connection to Be United in Christ** highlights the text's importance for Christian unity. The Passage presents the Biblical text being studied.

We begin by **Studying the Passage** because God's messengers must convey God's words accurately. The Passage Comparison presents the text in its original Greek or Hebrew alongside seven English translations. Comparing translations allows for a better understanding of the passage and provides insight into the intent of the original Biblical manuscripts. The Structural Layout divides the passage into its component parts, because to understand what God said we must understand how He said it. It is an essential step in Bible study, but do not be discouraged if this section seems unfamiliar or daunting. The Narrative Flow explains the Biblical author's flow of thought through the passage. The Passage Overview then presents a simple outline that will form the foundation of subsequent outlines and the sermon manuscript itself. The Passage Focus distills the text into a statement that will be the main idea of the sermon. We then identify several Resources to further your study.

Having studied the passage, we are ready to begin **Preparing the Sermon**. Good preaching feeds God's people on God's Word, so our messages must be both healthful and appetizing. This is why this section begins by laying out several Sermon Ingredients that will be used to prepare a nutritious and appealing message. We must present God's Word accurately and clearly so that God's people will understand it with their minds, embrace it in their hearts, and apply it to their lives. The Passage Outline presents the passage's structure and flow while the Passage Details provide the grammatical, historical, and theological information needed to understand and teach the passage. The message is then fortified with Applications and seasoned with Illustrations. These ingredients are combined to prepare a spiritual meal to feed God's children. The Sermon Outline rephrases the Passage Outline to make it more understandable to an audience. The Sermon Manuscript for Your Use then offers an example of how the passage might be preached. Then we identify several Sermon Examples that model good preaching on the text.

Thus, an exegetical guide presents both a comprehensive analysis of one particular Bible passage and a model for studying and preaching Scripture. We pray that God will use this guide to promote love for Him, fidelity to His Word, and unity in His church.

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Acts is the second account written by Luke to a man named Theophilus. Luke was a physician and companion of Paul on some of his missionary journeys.¹ His first account is the Gospel of Luke, and his second volume, Acts, tells the story of the formation and growth of the early church after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells His disciples that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” This charge serves as an outline for the book.

The Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples in Acts 2, and they immediately begin testifying to the reality of Jesus’ resurrection in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem is established and begins to grow through the preaching of the apostle Peter (2:14–36; 3:12–26) despite persecution (4:1–3; 5:17–18, 40) and other issues that threaten the integrity of the church (5:1–11; 6:1–6).

As the opposition to the gospel increases, believers begin leaving Jerusalem and taking the message of the resurrection throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1). The church begins to add Gentiles to its numbers as the disciples continue to preach the gospel. Two specific events set the stage for the growth of the church to the “remotest part of the earth.” The first is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later known as the apostle Paul (9:1–19). The second is the conversion of Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, by Peter (Acts 10) and Peter’s defense of this conversion in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1–18). Persecution continues with the death of the apostle James and the arrest and miraculous deliverance of Peter (12:1–19).

In chapter 13, Paul begins the first of three missionary journeys from his home church in Antioch through Asia Minor and into present-day Europe. By the time Paul arrives in Thessalonica in chapter 17, those who were opposed to the message argued, “These men who have upset the world have come here also” (Acts 17:6). The people in Europe looked at Christianity not as a regional religion but as something that was having an impact throughout the Roman world. Thus Jesus’ words in Acts 1 are coming to fulfillment.

In his first journey through Asia Minor (Acts 13–14), Paul sees many Gentiles come to faith and experiences much opposition. When he returns to Antioch, some Jews from Jerusalem demand that these Gentiles become Jewish first.² Paul and Barnabas don’t agree with this requirement, and it is decided that they should go up to Jerusalem to let the apostles and elders settle the issue. This gathering of Paul and Barnabas and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem became known as the Jerusalem Council (ch. 15). The council concludes that salvation is by faith alone.

Paul’s second missionary journey (16:1–18:22) begins with a plan to revisit the churches he had started in Asia Minor, but God takes him elsewhere into Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth.

His third journey begins in Asia Minor, but he revisits Ephesus (Acts 19), Macedonia, and Greece (ch. 20) before returning to Jerusalem (ch. 21). There he is arrested and sent to Caesarea, where he remains for some time. The book ends with Paul’s transfer to Rome to face charges before Caesar.

¹ That Luke accompanied Paul seems clear from the shift from third person plural (they) to first person plural (we) in Acts 16:6–11.

² They demanded that all Gentiles be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses. This effectively made Judaism a prerequisite for Christianity.

Connection to Be United in Christ

The church needs unity. But where does it come from? Should we gather together with people like us to ensure unity? The book of Acts speaks of a young church whose members exhibited great unity in their thoughts and actions. Where did they get this unity? It is clear that it came from repenting and believing in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. We, as true believers, must unite around Jesus above all else to ensure that we are unified. When we repent, we value the things that Jesus valued. The result of this kind of unity is attractive to the world and can lead to God growing His church. Therefore, it is only through having the sure foundation of salvation that we can truly Be United in Christ.

PASSAGE: ACTS 2:37–47

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.³

³ While there are many fine Bible translations, the New American Standard Bible (NASB) is used here for its consistent, word-for-word translation.

STUDYING THE PASSAGE

Acts 2:37–47

Salvation Leads to Unity

PASSAGE COMPARISON

Acts 2:37–47

The Passage Comparison presents the original Greek text alongside seven English translations. Comparing translations allows for a better understanding of the passage and provides insight into the intent of the original Biblical manuscripts.

GREEK	NASB	ESV	KJV
³⁷ Ἀκούσαντες δὲ κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν εἰπόν τε πρὸς τὸν Πέτρον καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀποστόλους· τί ποιήσωμεν, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί;	³⁷ Now when they heard <i>this</i> , they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”	³⁷ Now when they heard <i>this</i> they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”	³⁷ Now when they heard <i>this</i> , they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men <i>and</i> brethren, what shall we do?
³⁸ Πέτρος δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς· μετανοήσατε, [φησίν,] καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.	³⁸ Peter <i>said</i> to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.	³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.	³⁸ Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
³⁹ ὑμῖν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακράν, ὅσους ἂν προσκαλέσῃται κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν.	³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”	³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”	³⁹ For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, <i>even</i> as many as the Lord our God shall call.
⁴⁰ ἑτέροις τε λόγοις πλείοσιν διεμαρτύρατο καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτοὺς λέγων· σῶθητε ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς τῆς σκολιᾶς ταύτης.	⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”	⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”	⁴⁰ And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

NKJV	NRSV	NIV	NLT
<p>³⁷ Now when they heard <i>this</i>, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men <i>and</i> brethren, what shall we do?”</p>	<p>³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”</p>	<p>³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”</p>	<p>³⁷ Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”</p>
<p>³⁸ Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p>³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p>³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p>³⁸ Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.</p>
<p>³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”</p>	<p>³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”</p>	<p>³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”</p>	<p>³⁹ This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God.”</p>
<p>⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”</p>	<p>⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”</p>	<p>⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”</p>	<p>⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!”</p>

GREEK	NASB	ESV	KJV
<p>⁴¹ οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀποδεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθησαν καὶ προσετέθησαν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ψυχαὶ ὡσεὶ τρισχίλια.</p>	<p>⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.</p>	<p>⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.</p>	<p>⁴¹ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added <i>unto them</i> about three thousand souls.</p>
<p>⁴² Ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς.</p>	<p>⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.</p>	<p>⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.</p>	<p>⁴² And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.</p>
<p>⁴³ ἐγίνετο δὲ πάση ψυχῇ φόβος, πολλά τε τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα διὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐγίνετο.</p>	<p>⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.</p>	<p>⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.</p>	<p>⁴³ And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.</p>
<p>⁴⁴ πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ</p>	<p>⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;</p>	<p>⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common.</p>	<p>⁴⁴ And all that believed were together, and had all things common;</p>
<p>⁴⁵ καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν·</p>	<p>⁴⁵ and they <i>began</i> selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.</p>	<p>⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.</p>	<p>⁴⁵ And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all <i>men</i>, as every man had need.</p>
<p>⁴⁶ καθ' ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, κλῶντές τε κατ' οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας</p>	<p>⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,</p>	<p>⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,</p>	<p>⁴⁶ And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,</p>
<p>⁴⁷ αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν καὶ ἔχοντες χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν. ὁ δὲ κύριος προσετίθει τοὺς σωζομένους καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό.</p>	<p>⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.</p>	<p>⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.</p>	<p>⁴⁷ Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.</p>

NKJV	NRSV	NIV	NLT
<p>⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added <i>to them</i>.</p>	<p>⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.</p>	<p>⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.</p>	<p>⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.</p>
<p>⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.</p>	<p>⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.</p>	<p>⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.</p>	<p>⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.</p>
<p>⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.</p>	<p>⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.</p>	<p>⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.</p>	<p>⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.</p>
<p>⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,</p>	<p>⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common;</p>	<p>⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.</p>	<p>⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.</p>
<p>⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.</p>	<p>⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.</p>	<p>⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.</p>	<p>⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.</p>
<p>⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,</p>	<p>⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,</p>	<p>⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,</p>	<p>⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—</p>
<p>⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.</p>	<p>⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.</p>	<p>⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.</p>	<p>⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.</p>

STRUCTURAL LAYOUT

The Structural Layout shows how the passage fits together. The left column contains the Biblical text divided into its structural elements. Main clauses are aligned left and related elements are highlighted in color. The right column explains how the various elements function in context.

37	Now when they heard this,	This clause transitions from the apostle Peter’s sermon to the crowd’s response.
	they were pierced to the heart,	This clause describes the emotional response of the crowd to Peter’s sermon.
	and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”	This clause is the question the crowd asks in response to Peter’s sermon.
38	Peter said to them,	This clause sets up Peter’s response to the crowd.
	“Repent,	This clause is the main command Peter gives in response to the crowd’s question.
	and each of you be baptized	This clause is a second command Peter gives that will signify the reality of the first command.
	in the name of Jesus Christ.	This phrase explains the manner by which they are to be baptized.
	for the forgiveness of your sins;.	This phrase communicates the purpose of the crowd’s repentance.
	and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit	This clause describes the result of repentance.
39	For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”	These phrases explain the extent of the promise, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.
40	And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “ Be saved from this perverse generation!”	These two clauses introduce Peter’s final passionate plea to the crowd. This clause highlights the content of Peter’s final charge to the crowd.
41	So then, those who had received his word were baptized ;	This clause relates the result of Peter’s preaching.

and that day there were added about three thousand souls. . .

This clause explains how many people responded positively to Peter’s preaching.

42 They were continually devoting themselves
to the apostles’ teaching and
to fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and
to prayer.

This clause highlights the people’s earnest attitude and the content of what they were devoting themselves to.

43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe;

This clause begins the second half of the passage, showing the effect of the new believers’ unity on the people of Jerusalem.

and many wonders and signs were taking place.
through the apostles.

This clause explains that performing “wonders and signs” was one of the ministries of the apostles.

44 And all those who had believed were together and
had all things in common;

These two clauses explain the result of the new believers’ unity.

45 and they began selling their property and
possessions and were sharing them with all, as
anyone might have need.

The first two clauses explain what having “all things in common” means. The third clause indicates with whom they were sharing their possessions.

46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple,
and breaking bread from house to house,

These two clauses explain the regular habits of the new believers as they shared meals together.

they were taking their meals together with gladness and
sincerity of heart,

This clause elaborates on the attitude the new believers had when they spent time together.

47 praising God

This clause describes the regular attitude the believers had.

and having favor with all the people.

This clause describes the result of the believers’ unity.

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day
those who were being saved.

This clause explains how God blessed their unity.

NARRATIVE FLOW

The crowd is convicted by the apostle Peter's sermon, and they ask what they are to do (v. 37). Peter commands them to repent for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the Holy Spirit. As evidence of their repentance, he also calls on each and every one of them to be baptized in Jesus' name (vv. 38–40). Thousands respond to this message and are baptized (v. 41).

These new believers become devoted to spending time together in prayer, fellowship, breaking bread, and hearing the apostles' teaching (v. 42). The apostles' miracles cause a sense of awe among the people (v. 43), while the believers begin sharing their time and possessions with one another (vv. 44–45). They continue in this new life of generosity, fellowship, and worship, which leads to others being saved (vv. 46–47).

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Acts 2:37–47 has two main sections:

- I. THE ORDER AND BENEFITS OF SALVATION (2:37–41)**
- II. THE RESULTS OF SALVATION (2:42–47)**

PASSAGE FOCUS

True repentance leads to Biblical unity, which leads to a healthy, attractive, and growing church.

RESOURCES

Basic Resources

Fernando, Ajith. *Acts*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.

MacArthur, John F. *Acts 1–12*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1994.

Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Acts*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990.

Intermediate Resources

Bruce, F. F. *The Book of Acts*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988.

Nettles, Thomas J., Richard L. Pratt Jr., Robert Kolb, and John Castelein. *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*. Edited by Paul E. Engle. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.

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Advanced Resources

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PREPARING THE SERMON

Acts 2:37–47

Salvation Leads to Unity

SERMON INGREDIENTS

Acts 2:37–47

PASSAGE OUTLINE

I. THE ORDER AND BENEFITS OF SALVATION (2:37–41)

A. The order of salvation (2:37–38a)

1. Conviction of sin
2. Repentance
3. Baptism as a sign

B. The benefits of salvation (2:38b–41)

1. Repentance brings forgiveness
2. Repentance brings the Holy Spirit
3. The promise is not just for a select few

II. THE RESULTS OF SALVATION (2:42–47)

A. Salvation results in a common devotion among believers (2:42)

1. Devotion to the apostles' teaching
2. Devotion to fellowship
3. Devotion to taking meals together
4. Devotion to prayer

B. Salvation results in a common view of possessions (2:43–45)

1. Disciples held a belief in common possessions
2. Disciples shared with those in need

C. Salvation results in common life (2:46–47)

1. They worshipped together
2. They ate together
3. They rejoiced together

PASSAGE DETAILS

Acts 2:37

Now when they heard this,

“They” refers to the crowd that had gathered to hear the apostle Peter’s sermon after the strange manifestation of the Spirit in rushing wind and tongues of fire (Acts 2:1–13). This crowd included people from all over the Roman Empire.

“This” refers to Peter’s sermon in which he sought to proclaim that the crucified and resurrected Jesus was the promised Old Testament Messiah.

they were pierced to the heart,

“Pierced to the heart” is a figure of speech that means having a “feeling of sharp pain connected with anxiety, remorse, etc.”⁴ The people were convicted by Peter’s sermon that they had crucified their Lord and Messiah.

and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

“What shall we do?” is the crowd’s response to Peter’s charge that they killed Jesus (Acts 2:36). They ask how they can escape from being God’s enemies, a term Peter uses in Acts 2:35 for those who deny Jesus as Messiah.

This is a natural question that everyone asks. People are looking for what they can do to gain eternal life or avoid eternal judgment. The rich young ruler asks this question of Jesus in Mark 10:17, and the question leads to a conversation about giving up everything to follow Jesus. The crowd asks this question of Jesus in John 6:28 after He feeds the five thousand and then tells them not to seek food that perishes but food that leads to eternal life.

Acts 2:38

Peter said to them, “Repent,

“Repent” means to “change one’s mind” or “be converted.”⁵ Here it refers to “completely changing their mind about Jesus and their attitude to Him.”⁶ Peter knows the crowd had a “corporate [shared] responsibility for Jesus’ death,”⁷ and they needed to see Him as their rightful Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36). Even the disciples had a limited understanding of who Jesus was. Since the people of Jerusalem also misunderstood who Jesus was, which led to His death, they all needed a correct understanding and acceptance of Him as Messiah and Lord.

This command places the focus on an understanding of who Jesus is and belief in what He has done. The initial focus of the gospel is never on what can be done to earn God’s favor. In Luke 24:47, Jesus tells the disciples that repentance, not doing good deeds, is necessary for the forgiveness of sins.

⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Fredrick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 523. This important reference work is the standard dictionary of New Testament Greek and is commonly referred to as BDAG after its four editors.

⁵ BDAG, 640.

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 78.

⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 972.

and each of you be baptized

“Each” signifies that while the whole crowd is called to repent, each individual must submit to baptism. We are not gathered into God’s church as one unit, but each individual makes a conscious choice to become part of the body of Christ.

“Baptized” means “to use water in a rite for purpose of renewing or establishing a relationship with God.”⁸ This action “portrays a washing and signifies what repentance produces, cleansing.”⁹ Peter explains this truth when he says, “baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). The crowd had a relationship with God: they were Jews in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. But it was not a *right* relationship. Their baptism would signify the beginning of a *right* relationship with God based on their repentance.¹⁰

in the name of Jesus Christ

“In the name of” signifies authority or reputation. It is appropriate for each person who repents to call on Jesus’ name for salvation (Acts 2:21). It is only because of what Christ did on the cross that we can turn to God in repentance. It is only through Christ that anyone can have a right relationship with God.¹¹

Peter didn’t just call the crowd to be washed (many kinds of washings were common in the ancient Near East in both Gentile and Jewish cultures). He did not want the crowds to think he was another John the Baptist, calling people to repent of evil deeds. He also didn’t want the crowds to think this was an extra cleansing required for temple worship.¹² This baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” was meant to indicate a change of their understanding of Jesus and their belief in Him as their Messiah and Lord. They had slandered His reputation by calling for His crucifixion. Now they were upholding His reputation by being publicly baptized in His name.

for the forgiveness of your sins;

The first result of repentance is forgiveness of sins.¹³ Jews were required to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins (Leviticus 4:20). Now Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is considered sufficient for forgiveness for all who repent (Hebrews 10:11–18).

and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The second result of repentance is receiving the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be given to the disciples. Peter now says that the Holy Spirit is not just for a special few but also for all who repent.

⁸ BDAG, 164.

⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 142.

¹⁰ Keener, 975.

¹¹ John 3:17–18; 6:28–35, 51–56; Romans 1:16; 3:21–26; 5:1; 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21; Galatians 1:6–9; 2:20–21; Ephesians 2:4–10, 13–16; Colossians 1:13–14, 21–22; Hebrews 10:19; 1 Peter 1:3, 18–19.

¹² Initiation rites and washings were common in the ancient Near East in Jewish and pagan cultures. Gentile converts to Judaism would have had to submit to circumcision—the sign of the covenant. But they also would have undergone baptism as an initiation rite. See the extended discussion in Keener, 975–984.

¹³ While baptism is how we initially tell that someone has repented, it is not what brings forgiveness of sins. For a detailed look at baptism: Tom J. Nettles et al., *Understanding Four Views on Baptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

The word “gift” signifies that the Holy Spirit is not earned by anything we do but is graciously given by God. The Holy Spirit unites us into the family of God (Romans 8:14–17), produces godly qualities in us (Galatians 5:22–23), is the pledge of our final inheritance in God (Ephesians 1:13–14), and is promised as part of the New Covenant (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

Acts 2:39

For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

“The promise” is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is given at the time of repentance. Peter again reminds them that the Holy Spirit is not just for those present during Peter’s sermon or even just for Jews.

“For you and your children” refers to those listening and to the subsequent generations who will also repent. In other words, this offer was not a one-time event.

“For all who are far off” probably refers to Gentiles who will come to faith. Some think it refers only to geographic distance and that Peter was thinking of Jews who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.¹⁴ Yet in Ephesians 2:13, Paul used the phrase “far off” to refer to Gentiles who have come to faith.¹⁵ That the gift of the Holy Spirit was meant for Gentiles as well as Jews is clear from the rest of the book of Acts—whatever Peter or the crowd may have thought at the time.

Acts 2:40

And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”

“Solemnly testified” is one word in the Greek and means “to exhort [strongly urge] with authority in matters of extraordinary importance, frequently with reference to higher powers and/or suggestion of peril.”¹⁶ To not repent and “be saved” would leave Peter’s listeners still in the state of being enemies of God.

“Exhort” means “to urge strongly.”¹⁷ Peter knew his crowd was confident in their Judaism, and he knew that they still needed Jesus for salvation. They needed to be strongly shaken out of their overconfidence.

“Be saved from this perverse generation” is most likely a summary or conclusion of the “many other words” that Peter used. Though Peter continued to preach to the crowd, we can be sure that we are not missing any critical points of his argument because God has given us all we need in His Word.

¹⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 166.

¹⁵ The phrase “far off” is likely a reference to Isaiah 57:19, which Paul clearly quotes from when referring to Gentiles. For arguments that “far off” refers to Gentiles and not just Jews who were spread throughout the Roman Empire see Bock, 145; Keener, 987.

¹⁶ BDAG, 233.

¹⁷ BDAG, 765.

“Perverse” most likely refers to Deuteronomy 32:5 (compare with Luke 9:41), which is Moses’ song about the Israelites’ faithlessness toward God. In this passage, Peter is not necessarily referring to great moral failures of the generation but to great unbelief about who Jesus is.¹⁸

Acts 2:41

So then, those who had received his word were baptized;

“Those who had received his word” does not refer to those who simply heard Peter’s sermon and then ignored it. “Received” means “show approval by accepting.”¹⁹ The crowd received Peter’s sermon as truth, believing that Jesus was both Messiah and Lord. In response to this change of belief about Jesus, they were baptized as a public demonstration of their changed position.

and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

“Souls” is another word for persons (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 3:20). There is debate among scholars about whether it was possible to baptize this many people in one day. But there were “a total of 150 *known* immersion pools in Jerusalem.”²⁰ If only a fraction of those were used, it would have been quite easy to baptize three thousand people in one day.

Acts 2:42

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

“Continually devoting” means to “hold fast to, continue in, persevere in.”²¹ The new disciples were regularly engaged in four activities: learning from the apostles, fellowship, breaking of bread, and constant prayer. These activities were a tangible testimony to others in Jerusalem of the unity the believers had.

“The apostles’ teaching” included the truth that Jesus was Messiah and Lord, and it included His death and resurrection.²² It also included more, for Jesus told the disciples in the upper room that the Spirit would “guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13) and that the disciples were to teach “them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

“Fellowship” means “close association involving mutual interests and sharing.”²³ It can also refer to “harmony created by shared purpose.”²⁴ This fellowship resulted in the believers’ selling and sharing possessions, eating together, and praying that led to the growth of the early church.

“Breaking of bread” could refer to either the Lord’s Supper or a regular meal, but “there is a distinct possibility that it refers to both. The ‘breaking of bread’ is best understood as a reference to the ordinary meals that the believers regularly shared, during which they remembered Jesus’ death on the

¹⁸ Keener, 990; Schnabel, 167.

¹⁹ BDAG, 109.

²⁰ Keener, 995.

²¹ BDAG, 881.

²² Acts 3:12–26; 4:2, 24–30; 5:30–32, 42; 10:34–43.

²³ BDAG, 552.

²⁴ Keener, 1002.

cross for the forgiveness of sins.”²⁵ Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 seem to imply that both a regular meal and the Lord’s Supper were taking place together.

“Continually devoting themselves ... to prayer” doesn’t mean praying every moment of every day but “gathering for regular times of prayer”²⁶ as they did in Acts 3:1. While individual prayers were certainly made (Acts 10:9), most examples of prayer in the book of Acts seem to take place in a group.²⁷

Acts 2:43

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

There is general consensus among scholars that “everyone” refers to both the new believers and the other inhabitants of Jerusalem. This seems clear from Acts 3, as Peter’s sign of healing the lame beggar drew crowds of believers and unbelievers who had similar reactions of “wonder and amazement at what had happened to him” (3:10).

“Awe” can mean “fear, alarm, fright” or “reverence, respect.”²⁸ When miraculous or awe-inspiring events like natural disasters occur, there is a mixture of fear, wonder, and reverential awe among people. The miracles that were occurring at the hands of the apostles produced positive effects, like favor among the people (2:47). The miracles also produced negative effects, like the fear people had of associating with the apostles (5:13).

“Wonders” only occurs with “signs” in the New Testament. Peter used this grouping twice in his sermon in Acts 2. In Acts 2:19 Peter quotes from the Old Testament to show that what the crowd saw at Pentecost had been foretold through the prophet Joel. In Acts 2:22 Peter says that Jesus’ ministry was validated by wonders and signs. As these signs and wonders continue with the apostles, the implication is that God is validating the apostles’ ministry as well.

At this point in the passage, the signs and wonders are taking place only “through the apostles.” This will change later in the book of Acts as the church begins to grow and spread.

Acts 2:44

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;

While devotion to the apostles’ teaching, breaking of bread, fellowship, and prayer from verse 42 is a short explanation of the habits of the new church, verses 44–47 are an extended explanation of the results of believing that took place in the early church.

“All those who had believed” is another way to refer to those who had repented and were baptized. In 2:41, Luke refers to this same group as “those who had received his word.” Luke uses several terms to refer to Christians. In verse 47, he will talk about people “being saved.” The description is less important than the result that Luke describes.

²⁵ Schnabel, 179.

²⁶ Keener, 1011.

²⁷ Acts 1:14, 24; 3:1; 4:24; 6:4–6; 8:15; 12:5, 12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:13, 25; 20:36; 21:5.

²⁸ BDAG, 1062.

The believers “were together,” and they “had all things in common.” There is disagreement about whether “were together” refers to the believers gathering in the same physical place or whether it refers to them having the same mindset. While all three thousand believers hardly spent all of their time in the same place, the rest of the passage indicates that at least smaller groups of Christians were spending considerable time together.²⁹

Having “all things in common” was a mindset the early believers had in which they viewed themselves and their possessions as available to other believers if needed. This was not a requirement of believers but an attitude of valuing people’s needs over their possessions.³⁰

Acts 2:45

and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

The outcome of valuing people over possessions is the willingness to sell possessions for the sake of other believers in need. There are no apostolic statements against owning personal property. The phrase “as anyone might have need” does not imply that possessions were sold as soon as one became a believer. It implies, instead, that when needs among believers did arise, others were willing to share their possessions to meet those needs.³¹

Acts 2:46

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple,

“Continuing” is the same word translated as “continually devoting” in Acts 2:42. That Luke would repeat this attitude twice in just a few verses means that this new way of life is not temporary or fleeting. These people are not the seed that fell on rocky soil, which had no root (Luke 8:5, 13).

The idea of “continuing with one mind” also occurs in Acts 1:14 where one hundred twenty people were gathered in prayer awaiting the promise Jesus made to them before He ascended.

“With one mind” is a common theme among the believers in Acts.³² It means “with one mind, purpose, or impulse.”³³ They believed the same things about Jesus, were empowered by the same Holy Spirit, and were united in their desire to glorify God. Christian unity does not just mean that believers show up in the same place. True unity influences every aspect of a believer’s life, from how he spends his time to how he views his possessions to whom he eats meals with.

²⁹ The Greek dictionary (BDAG, 363) states that this figure of speech, which is translated “were together” refers to being “at the same place.”

³⁰ This is evident from the situation that transpired in Acts 5 with Ananias and Sapphira. The issue that caused their deaths was not their stinginess but lying about how generous they were.

³¹ Bock, 152; Stott, 83.

³² Acts 1:14, 2:46, 4:24, 5:12, and 15:25. Paul also uses the term in Romans 15:6.

³³ BDAG, 706.

The believers were gathering regularly “in the temple,” which “provided the largest available open space in Jerusalem,”³⁴ and it could easily have held the three thousand believers. As this group of believers was predominately Jewish, the temple would have been a natural place to gather for prayer and teaching.

and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,

The believers not only gathered regularly in the temple but also spent time together in smaller groups sharing food together. This was not a new religion that revolved around a central location or even a central figure. Their fellowship and unity didn’t just occur when the apostles were present.

“With gladness and sincerity of heart” indicates that these gatherings were times of true, joyful fellowship, not coerced or mandated meetings. Christian unity and fellowship is the natural result of true conversion.

“Gladness” is a word used often in the Greek translation of the Psalms and is often translated “joyful shouting.”³⁵ These were not somber ceremonies but times of heartfelt celebration.

Acts 2:47

praising God and having favor with all the people.

The joyful fellowship among early believers included praising God. True believers know the source of their new life and fellowship, and they give praise where praise is due.

“Having favor with all the people” implies that the new believers had a positive impression on their community.³⁶ While persecution did come and should be expected in the life of all Christians (2 Timothy 3:12), our unity should favorably impact our neighborhoods, work places, and communities (Philippians 2:15; 1 Peter 2:12). God’s unified church should bring peace, justice, and mercy to any community where it has been established.

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This growth is the result of the unity, joy, and good reputation the members of the early church had on those around them. The new life of the believers was attractive, and God continued to use their unity to add new believers to the church. This description of growth in Acts is not a promise that growth will happen when believers are unified. However, church unity and the apostles’ teaching were used by God to grow His church.

³⁴ Keener, 1031.

³⁵ Psalm 29:6, 105:43, 118:15, 126:2, 126:5 (LXX).

³⁶ There seems to be an echo to the Exodus event here as well. As God formed His people in Egypt, He granted them favor with the Egyptians. But here, instead of plundering those in Jerusalem, they had something to offer.

APPLICATIONS

- Christian unity begins with salvation. When disunity is present, people in the church should make sure they are united around their Savior, Jesus, and not around something else like personal preference, age, ethnicity, or socioeconomic factors.
- Christians should be devoted to activities in life that draw them closer to God and one another. They should learn about God from His Word, spend time with other believers, and celebrate the Lord's Supper together as a reminder of what God has done for them in Christ, and pray together.
- Christians should view all that they have—possessions, talents, and gifts—as potential blessings to others believers who have need.
- Christians should find joy in spending time together. They need to make the fellowship of God's people a priority in their lives. This can't be just a Sunday morning activity. Through regular fellowship, Christians learn about one another's needs, encourage one another with God's Word, strengthen one another through prayer, and build up one another through sacrificial care.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Several people ignored orders to evacuate their neighborhood in Hawaii. A lava flow from the Kilauea volcano eventually destroyed the last road out, and they were trapped. Despite ignoring the warnings, the residents were rescued by the very government that warned them to flee from the volcano's wrath.
- I receive mail almost everyday, but much of it ends up in the trashcan. And while I might keep the bills, the mail I really welcome and accept with joy are personal notes or cards. To receive the gospel is not like receiving junk mail but like receiving mail that one accepts and keeps.
- Frederick Nietzsche, a nineteenth century atheistic philosopher, claimed that we could find our true selves by looking back at life and finding the things that made us happy. The Bible says that we find our true selves—and truly become happy—when we submit to God's reign in our lives and seek unity with others, not individual happiness.

SERMON OUTLINE

Salvation Leads to Unity (Acts 2:37–47)

INTRODUCTION

I. SALVATION IS FOUNDATIONAL TO CHRISTIAN UNITY (2:37–41)

- A. The prerequisite for salvation (v. 37)
- B. The call to repent (v. 38a)
- C. The promises of God (vv. 38b–39)
- D. The language of salvation (vv. 40–41)

II. CHRISTIAN UNITY INVOLVES ALL OF LIFE (2:42–47)

- A. Unity requires our devotion (v. 42)
- B. Unity requires our possessions (vv. 43–45)
- C. Unity requires our life (vv. 46–47)

CONCLUSION

SERMON MANUSCRIPT FOR YOUR USE

Salvation Leads to Unity (Acts 2:37–47)

INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Nietzsche, a nineteenth century atheist philosopher once said, “There is one road along which no one can go, except you. Do not ask where it leads; go forward.”³⁷ More recently, the train conductor in the Steven Spielberg movie *Polar Express* communicated a similar idea when he told the little boy, “The thing about trains . . . it doesn’t matter where they’re going. What matters is deciding to get on.”

For both the conductor in *Polar Express* and Nietzsche, the journey to true happiness and peace is the inward journey that is unique to each one of us. We live in a culture where individualism runs rampant. If I feel it or experience it, it must be true for me. Whatever train I get on must be the right one for me, regardless of where it goes or how it affects others. This means that you don’t have the right to evaluate my feelings on a subject for there is no objective truth, only my truth.

The church is not immune from this worldview. Personal preference can drive our choices of whether we enjoyed a Sunday morning or not. Did the songs make me happy? Was the coffee strong enough? Was I undisturbed by the people sitting around me? Did the pastor’s sermon move me? Was I able to get to lunch on time?

But it’s not just that we demand the Sunday morning experience be all about us. We do the same thing with our faith. The personal quiet time with God—as vital as it is—can seem more important and more edifying than the gathering of the local church body. Our personal view of Scripture and what it means can take precedence over centuries of consistent Christian thought. Our personal choices and decisions, particularly those pertaining to our faith, don’t need the wisdom of those we call our brothers and sisters in Christ. Whether we acknowledge it or not, this self-centered individualism *has* affected the church.

Is this what the early church looked like—a gathering of individuals, who remained their own, each with his own opinion about how things should be done? The book of Acts gives us a look into how the members of the early church viewed themselves and how they responded to one another. It gives us a glimpse into what brought them joy. And it shows us that instead of looking inward to find meaning for their life, they looked up to God. And when they did, they found a great desire to embrace one another and forgo their individual lives.

Acts 2:37–47 highlights the unity of the early church. Verses 37–41 speak about the foundation of our unity: our salvation. Verses 42–47 speak about how this unity affects all of life.

³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thoughts Out of Season*, vol. 2, trans. Adrian Collins (Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, 1910), 106.

I. SALVATION IS FOUNDATIONAL TO CHRISTIAN UNITY (2:37–41)

A. The prerequisite for salvation (v. 37)

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

“What shall we do?” is a great question—depending upon whether or not you follow through with the answer. But before we get to Peter’s answer, we must deal with what led to the question in the first place. Why was the crowd asking Peter what they needed to do?

The crowd had just witnessed the rushing wind and tongues of fire and miraculous translation of the words of the apostles. Peter then explained to them, from the Old Testament, that what they had witnessed was the fulfillment of what God had promised He would do in the last days (Joel 2:28–32). The center of God’s work would be in the person of the Messiah. Peter told them that Jesus, who had recently been crucified, was both the Messiah and the Lord of Psalm 16—Yahweh Himself. He also pointed out that while the crowd was in favor of His crucifixion, God raised Him from the dead.

How would you react if you found out that you had been in favor of the death of your king? And not only were you in favor of his death, but you also helped convince the authorities to carry out the execution. But now, miraculously, He has been raised from the dead and is reigning over all creation. Would that worry you? It should.

How would you feel? Overwhelming guilt? Remorse? Fear? Likely you would feel all three. Treason in many countries, including the United States, is punishable by death. Anyone who tries to remove a lawful figure of authority by having him killed, especially if it’s a king, is going to be in a great deal of trouble. These people understood and owned their guilt.

But God was also working in their lives. Scripture says that “they were pierced to the heart.” This indicates that God was already changing their hearts, and in the realization of what they had done, true remorse would have given them an overwhelming desire to make things right. It would lead them to ask, “Brothers, what shall we do?” They weren’t just looking for a loophole; they were genuinely convicted by the Holy Spirit and were hoping something could be done.

Do we understand that even though we were not present in Jerusalem two thousand years ago, we are also guilty of putting Jesus on the cross? Jesus did not die simply because He was handed over to the Romans by the Jewish people. He chose to die to pay for the sins of the very people who handed Him over, the traitors who denied His claims that He was their king. But those present in Jerusalem at that time were not the only ones who needed forgiveness for their rebellion.

The whole world since Adam and Eve sinned has rejected God as its king. The whole world has “sinned and fall[en] short of the glory of God” as Paul writes in Romans 3:23. We all want to live our lives independent of God’s rule. Jesus was not only willing to die for the sins of the people who had Him crucified, but He was also willing to pay the penalty for everyone’s sins—for each one of you would have done the same thing had you been present in Jerusalem.

The crowd with Peter knew it needed a way to escape the judgment of God. Do we? Or are we like the people who ignore the government’s warnings about impending natural disasters, who get trapped by rising floodwaters or lava flows, and then have to be rescued by government helicopters?

Do you know that, without some intervention on God’s part, we will be found to be enemies of God as Peter said in Acts 2:35 and that we will face God’s wrath? Praise God that there is an answer to the question “What shall we do?” God has something better than a rescue helicopter.

B. The call to repent (v. 38a)

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ

Repent! It sounds easy enough. One word. There’s no long, drawn-out, elaborate path to take, no complicated ritual to perform, no classes to sign up for, no fees to pay. Just repent. But what does that mean? In the context of Peter’s sermon, it meant two things. It meant changing their understanding of who Jesus was and then accepting Him as their Messiah and Lord. We sometimes use the words “repent and believe.”

First, the people needed to understand who Jesus was. He wasn’t just a carpenter’s son from Galilee. He was the promised Old Testament Messiah, and He was the Son of God. So repentance meant the crowd had to change their view of Jesus’ identity: from someone worthy of death to someone worthy of allegiance. Second, it meant accepting Him as the risen Messiah and Lord. They didn’t just need to understand what Peter said about Jesus; they needed to believe it. Therefore, when Peter called the crowd to repent, he called them to correctly understand who Jesus was and what He did and then believe in Him.

So how would Peter know if the people repented? He called them to do one more thing. He called them to be baptized in Jesus’ name. Why would he do this? Was this baptism necessary for salvation?

Baptism was common in the first century. When a Gentile converted to Judaism, he would be baptized as a sign of his conversion in addition to being circumcised. Jews would also participate in ritual washings before going to the temple. And John the Baptist called people to be baptized as a sign that they desired to change their behavior. But these were all Jews or Gentiles who had already converted to Judaism, as Luke tells us in Acts 2:10.

Peter was not calling them to cleanse themselves before going to the temple. Nor was he calling them to be baptized in order to change their outward behavior. We need to understand that Peter was calling them to publicly testify to this change of understanding and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Messiah. And when they called for Jesus’ crucifixion, they had publicly slandered Jesus’ name. Now Peter was calling for them to publicly embrace Jesus’ name as a sign of their true understanding and trusting of Him as Lord and Messiah. Baptism didn’t save them. Baptism testified to the watching city what the people thought of Jesus: He was Messiah and Lord—their Lord.

C. The promises of God (vv. 38b–39)

for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

While there are several blessings that result from salvation (the first half of Ephesians contains many), Peter mentioned two specific ones: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. For Peter to offer God’s forgiveness was astonishing. For Jews, forgiveness came through sacrifice. Now, Peter said, it would come through repentance, because Jesus’ death on the cross was *the* sacrifice. Once for all, Jesus paid the debt for all who would come to Him in repentance. Bulls and goats were no longer a necessary sacrifice. As the writer of Hebrews says in 10:11–12, “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering

time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.”

We must make sure we believe this. Humans want to perform for God. We want to show our worth in some way. But repentance says, “Jesus’ sacrifice, and not my own effort, is what I need.”

Second, Peter offered the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was critical to the new disciples’ understanding of their role in God’s kingdom. The nation of Israel was to attract the other nations to God in the temple where He dwelt. Now, God the Spirit would indwell each believer who would, in turn, take God to people wherever that believer went.

These two radical shifts in the way people related to God were not meant just for the crowd listening to Peter. This new promise was available for future generations and even Gentiles. The Jews listening to Peter’s sermon most likely would have thought “all who are far off” meant other Jews scattered around the Roman Empire at the time. Yet the Holy Spirit, speaking through Peter, certainly meant more by “far off” than just geography. Paul, in Ephesians 2:13, would use the same language to talk about God bringing the Gentiles to faith.

D. The language of salvation (vv. 40–41)

And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”

Verses 40–41 summarize what happened immediately after the crowd’s question. Peter continued to strongly encourage them to consider the importance of his words. To “solemnly testify” is used in situations of extraordinary importance and often implies the idea of some danger involved. This is critical for us to understand. Peter was not just giving his audience another option to the temple sacrifices. Jesus was the only option for a relationship with God. That is why Jesus would say in John 3:18, “He who believes in Him [the Son] is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Without Jesus, everyone is in danger of eternal judgment.

And then Peter said that the crowd needed to “be saved.” The Bible uses various words and phrases for what it means to come into a relationship with God through Jesus. To be saved means to be removed from the danger of those who reject Jesus as their Messiah. That is the danger for every generation, including ours. Each generation is perverse, based on their rejection of Jesus as the only way to come to God. It is a perversion to think that we can earn God’s favor.

This call to repent and be saved is a call to each of us as well.

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Luke then uses another phrase to describe the people who repented: “received his word.” “Received” here is not the same thing as receiving a piece of junk mail and ignoring it or receiving a phone call from a telemarketer and hanging up. “Receive” means to show approval by accepting. The word they received was the gospel that Peter was proclaiming. To “be saved” (v. 40) and “receive his word” are two ways of describing the same thing.

There are numerous ways of describing what goes on in salvation. But as Christians, we need to make sure that we explain our words and phrases carefully. We can't tell people they need to receive Jesus and let them think they can treat Him like a piece of junk mail, tossed onto the corner of a desk to be looked through at some future date. We can't tell people they need to be saved but then fail to tell them that they can't save themselves. If everyone in the crowd listening to Peter was in danger of going to Hell, why would we think that people today aren't? Therefore, we must be clear that people need to understand and believe who Jesus is: the Messiah and Lord promised by the Old Testament, who was crucified and rose again.

Peter's warning and message were not in vain. The one hundred twenty people in Acts 1 who had gathered in the upper room to wait and pray saw their numbers explode. God added about three thousand people to those who already believed. This was nothing short of miraculous. This should remind us who really does the work in evangelism. Peter didn't use marketing hype or gimmicks. He preached Christ, crucified and risen, and called people to repent. *God* worked in all those lives and added them to His church.

They didn't simply get baptized and then go on their merry way, not thinking about these truths again. But they also were added to a group of people who were united together by the power of the Spirit. We must not forget that before there was any mention of unity, these people were convicted, repented of their sin, exercised their faith, and were baptized as a testimony to their new understanding and acceptance of Jesus. True Christian unity starts with salvation. For all our differences, Jesus gives us something around which to unite: Himself.

II. CHRISTIAN UNITY INVOLVES ALL OF LIFE (2:42–47)

A. Unity requires our devotion (v. 42)

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

But what does unity look like? Is it simply wearing the same clothes, saying the same words, or voting for the same political candidates? No. Luke tells us that in the early church the people devoted themselves to the same activities. Unity was a conscious decision to do certain activities, and these new disciples persevered in these activities. They weren't a passing fad; they became a regular part of the new believers' lives.

The first thing people were devoted to was the apostles' teaching. No doubt this included continued instruction about who Jesus was (the promised Old Testament Messiah and Lord) and what He did for the people (died and rose again for the forgiveness of sins). It must have included more as well. Jesus told His disciples in the upper room that when the Spirit came He would lead them into all truth. Without any books of the New Testament yet, the apostles were giving instruction about how to live this new life of faith. Surely they were sharing and explaining Jesus' teachings with the crowds: What does it mean to die to self? Why does the kingdom of God belong to the poor in spirit? What does it mean to persevere in prayer? The apostles encouraged new believers with truth, and the new believers were anxious to hear it. No doubt they were teaching and explaining the same things that we find in the New Testament today.

Next, the members of the early church devoted themselves to fellowship. They made relationships with other believers a priority. In public and private, new believers spent time together. It is easy in our technologically advanced world to believe that the spiritual life can be maintained through mere acquisition of knowledge and personal devotion. If we listen to the right preachers online, read the right

blogs, listen to the right podcasts, and maintain a personal quiet time with God, we can grow to spiritual maturity. But there is no complete spiritual maturity without Christian unity, and there is no Christian unity without actually spending time with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Believers need to learn to love, care for, and sacrifice for others, especially when we don't want to. Loving care among God's children is attractive to the world. Individual piety is not.

The third activity they were devoted to was breaking bread together. This could refer to either regular meals eaten together or the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but it probably referred to both. Later, when Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper, there is an implication that they regularly combined a meal with the remembrance of Christ's sacrificial death. The early church regularly ate together and regularly reminded themselves of the cross. They were devoted to this kind of togetherness regardless of how inconvenient or dangerous it might have been to continue to gather together.

Finally, they were devoted to prayer. In Acts, prayer was most often a shared, public event. That doesn't mean people didn't pray by themselves (see Peter in Acts 10). But the early church gathered at regular times to pray together (Acts 3).

What about you? What are you devoted to? If a stranger could follow you around for a month and then give a report, what would he say you were devoted to? Sports? Work? Social media? Shopping? What about God's Word? What about spending time with your church family over meals? Could he say you were devoted to prayer?

B. Unity requires our possessions (vv. 43–45)

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

What was the result of this demonstration of unity? Awe. For a brief moment, Luke zooms out and lets us see a bigger picture beyond the church. The people of Jerusalem were amazed at what was taking place. This awe was not just a reaction from believers. In Acts 3, the crowd (made up of unbelievers) was "filled with wonder and amazement" at the healing of the blind man.

In addition to unified behaviors of the early church, there continued to be miracles at the hands of the apostles. These miracles were clear signs set up to attract a crowd so that teaching could take place. The miracles were not the focus; the teaching was. This, too, is clear from Acts 3. The healing of the lame man and the initial reaction of the crowd are described in the first ten verses. Then Luke spends the next sixteen verses relating the message Peter gives to the crowd that gathered.

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

Luke returns his focus to the church and to the theme of Christian unity. It is the foremost result of new life in Christ.

Luke gives us both an outward sign and an inward mindset to describe the church's unity. First, they were together. It is clear that all three thousand weren't *all* together *all* the time. They certainly could have all gathered at certain times, as the temple complex was big enough to hold a crowd of this size. But it is more likely that they spent time together in smaller groups. And this togetherness led to the early church learning about one another's needs. And so a mindset developed among Christians that made the needs of others a high priority.

That said, there is no indication that everyone was selling everything and then having the proceeds distributed. The early church was not practicing political socialism. What they were doing was being willing to give up something they had for the good of those who “might have need.” Not everyone had a need. The church then, like today, was made up of the rich and the poor. There were people who had property to sell and those in need of daily necessities. There was a diversity of locals and foreigners, and it may have been these foreigners—those who had come to Jerusalem for the feast and had remained after trusting in Christ—who were most in need. So when a need arose, someone in the church stepped up and met the need.

These new believers were willing to view people as more important than possessions. It wasn't a hypothetical theory but a regular practice. We know they believed people were more important than things because they were willing to follow through and sell their own possessions.

This crowd now took the warnings of Jesus about the dangers of wealth seriously. Do we? Are you willing to sell something you own for the sake of a brother or sister in Christ? Are you willing to give up your savings for the sake of someone else in the body of Christ who has a need? Or maybe it's not money; maybe it's time. Could you give up a vacation for the sake of helping a believer in need? Could you give up sleep, TV time, or a hobby for the sake of ministering to the body of Christ in need? Is there anything of which you would say, “No, this is more important than a brother or sister in need”?

The mindset of the early church was that caring for God's people was more important than the things they had.

C. Unity requires our life (vv. 46–47)

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple,

The church continued on this path of togetherness both in body and in spirit. They didn't tire of spending time together. In listening to the apostles' teaching, they grew in the unity of their thoughts about how to live life. In fact, Christianity became their life. They were “with one mind.” This means they were united in purpose and thought. They believed the same things about Jesus, were empowered by the same Holy Spirit, and were united in their desire to glorify God. True Christian unity influenced every aspect of these believers' lives. Does it influence every aspect of your life?

Do you seek unity with other believers not just in how you spend your time but also in how you think? Do you desire to grow in your understanding of and in your ability to explain what you believe so that you speak with one voice to the world about God, the gospel, and how Christians should respond to life? Are you devoted, as Paul would say in Ephesians 4:3, “to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.

Finally, notice that this togetherness was a joyful togetherness. The people were not coerced or forced to spend time together. They did it with gladness and sincerity. They genuinely enjoyed spending time with other believers. The word “gladness” is used several times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to mean “joyful shouting.” I don't know if the believers' gatherings were always noisy affairs, but the word implies that the Christians were really excited about spending time together in each others' homes.

And this joyfulness, this devotion to one another, had an effect on everyone else. They gained the favor of the others in Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem looked upon them positively—at least for the time being. Christian unity was attractive.

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Christian unity had an effect. God used it to grow His church. God continued to bring people to repentance. He continued to add more and more people with whom His church could spend time with and love and care for. He continued to give grace where none was deserved, all because of the sacrifice of His Son, our Savior.

CONCLUSION

Individualism is the hallmark of our day. Each of us is encouraged by our culture to seek what is best for ourselves. Yet people long to be a part of something: some movement, some group, some cause. An individual can seek fellowship with hundreds of “friends” through social media yet remain alone in his room with no flesh and blood friends to relate to. Through instant, worldwide news, we can be connected to people anywhere on the planet and feel good about our “connection” with them.

Christianity is far different. Biblical unity revolves around belief in Jesus. Unity is not manufactured by feeling or current event; it is created by the power of the Spirit working in the lives of repentant people. Salvation is the true source of unity. That doesn’t mean Christians just sit back and do nothing.

Christians are devoted to the things that God uses to bring unity. We must devote ourselves to spending time in the Scriptures to learn how to love others well. We must devote ourselves to spending time with other believers in prayer and fellowship and remembering what Christ has done for us.

Christians must view the things that they have—from their possessions to their time to their gifts—as blessings to be used for others who have need and not things to be hoarded or saved. Christians must see that all of life belongs to God. When we view life this way, God uses that unity to draw others to Himself and grow His church. This unity is attractive to the world and brings God glory.

Prayer

Father, remind us of our salvation in Christ alone. Convict us where we fail to recognize You as our rightful king. Help us to repent and turn to believe in Your Son alone, and unite us as Your children around this common salvation. Give us joy in our unity. Give us a sacrificial love for one another. Help us see one another as more important than the things we have. Allow our unity to be a light to all the nations, that You might be glorified in us so that Your kingdom would expand to the ends of the earth. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

SERMON EXAMPLES

Begg, Alistair. “Four Marks of the Healthy Church (Acts 2:42).” *Truth for Life*.
www.truthforlife.org.

Drawing from both his experience and the text in Acts 2, the well-known pastor of Parkside Church examines the vital signs of a healthy church. His sermon shows that a healthy church is learning, sharing, worshipping, and growing.

Ferguson, Sinclair. “The Church’s Birth Marks (Acts 2).” *The Gospel Coalition*.
www.thegospelcoalition.org.

In this sermon, this Reformed Presbyterian pastor offers a prescription for a church’s spiritual health. Ferguson also examines the side effects a church experiences when it is unhealthy. He concludes by offering a plan for a church to regain its health.

Hughes, Kent. “The Church Where the Spirit Reigned (Acts 2:37–47).” *The Gospel Coalition*.
www.thegospelcoalition.org.

In this sermon, the former pastor of College Church in Wheaton describes the church where the Holy Spirit reigns. The Spirit-ruled church responds to faithful teaching and hungers for God’s Word, relates to each other in fellowship, reverently and lovingly worships God, and seeks to make God known by evangelizing the world.

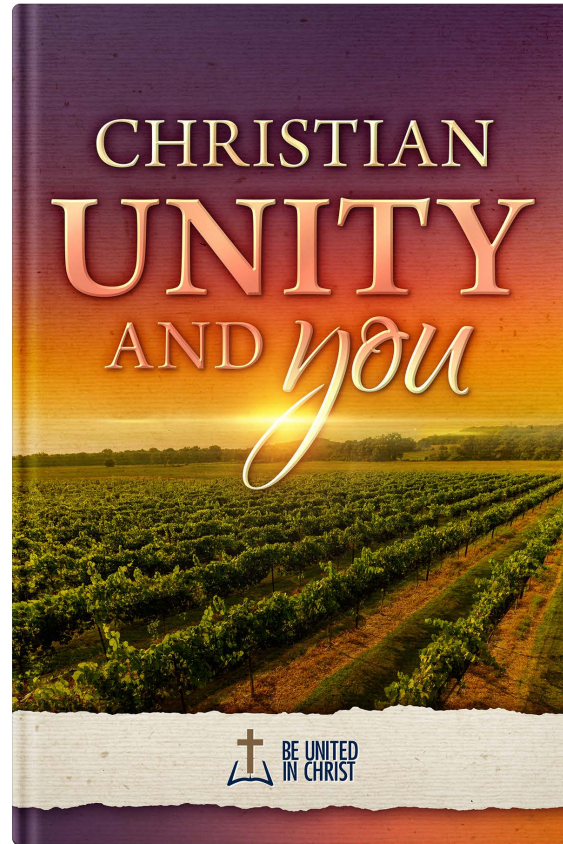
Keller, Tim J. “Blueprint for Revival; Introduction 2 (Acts 2:37–47).” *Gospel in Life*.
www.gospelinlife.com.

The former senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church and co-founder of the Gospel Coalition highlights five things that are true of a revived church according to Acts 2. A revitalized church demonstrates theological depth, vibrant worship, intimate fellowship, aggressive evangelism, and compassionate social concern.

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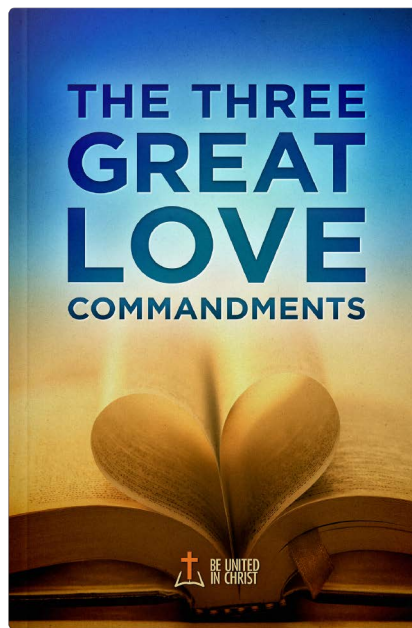
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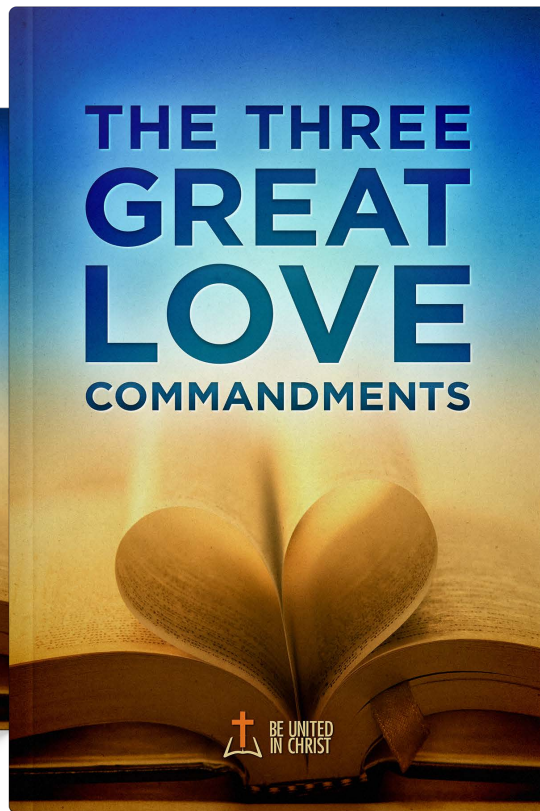
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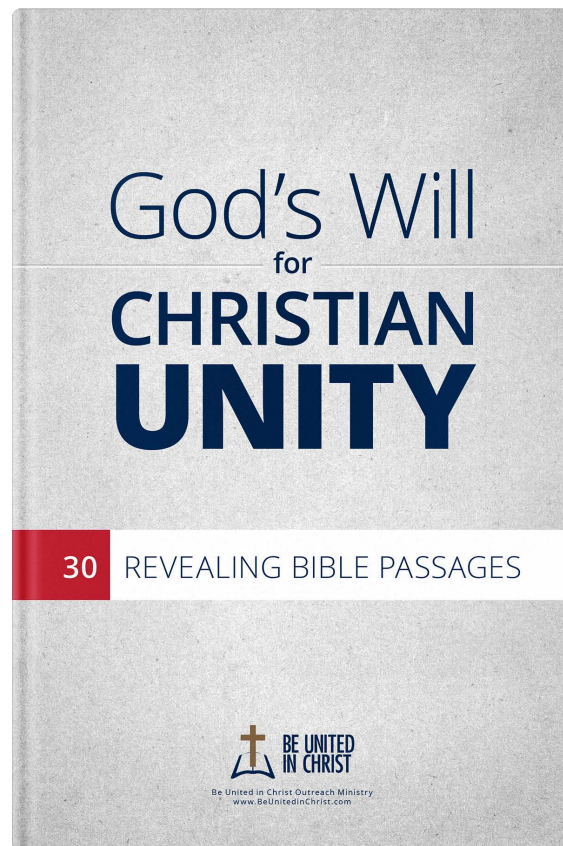
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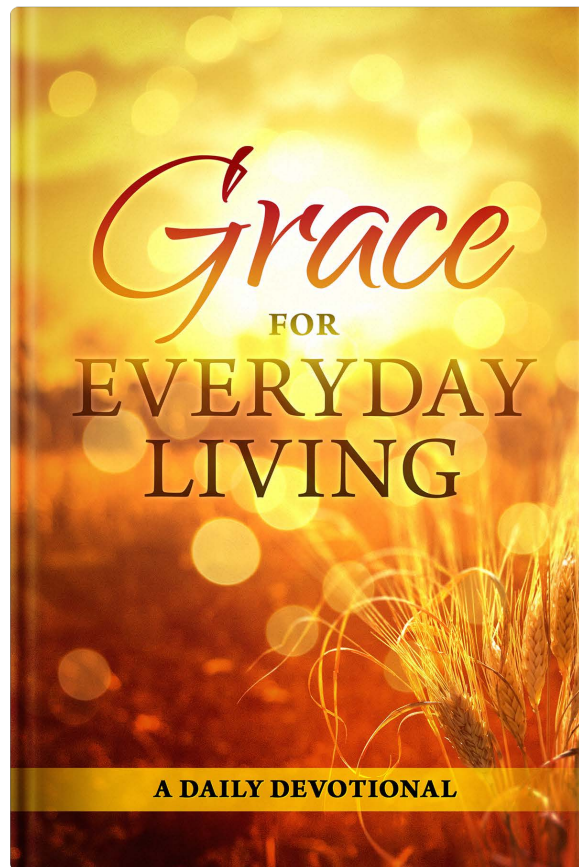
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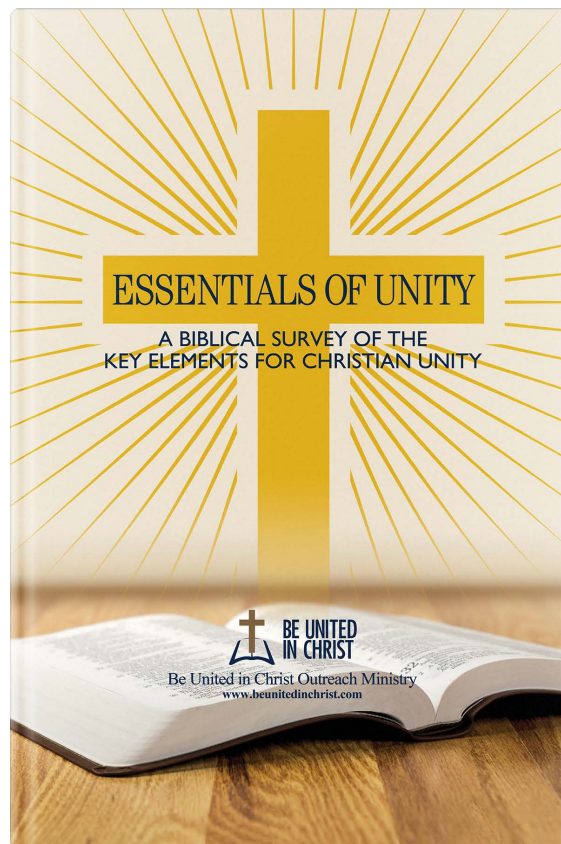
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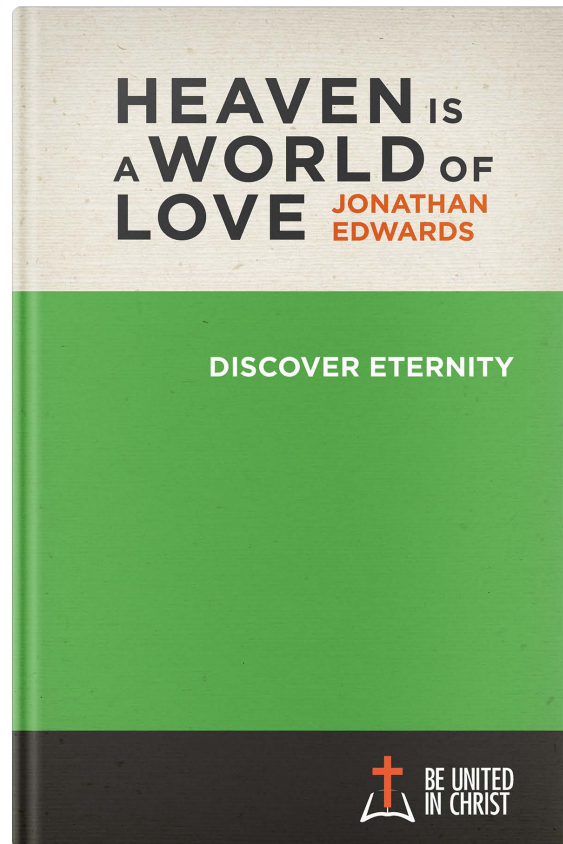
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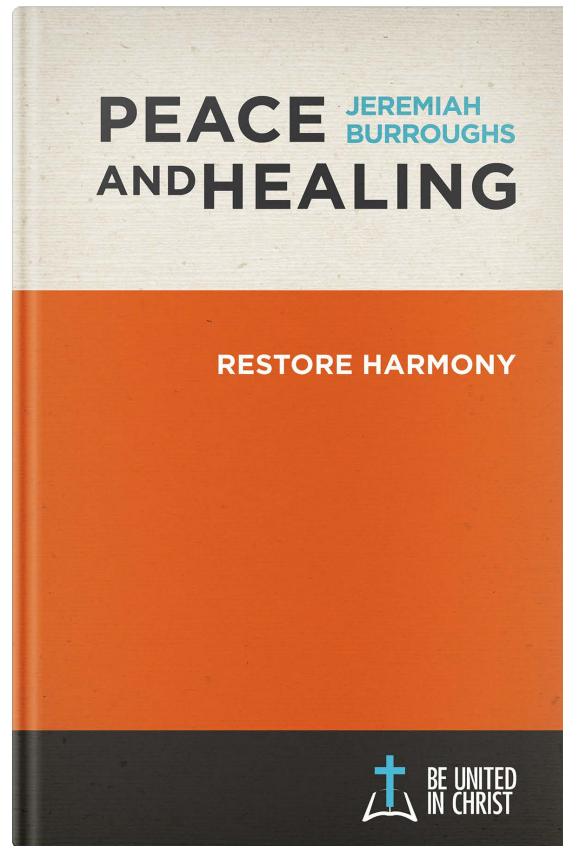
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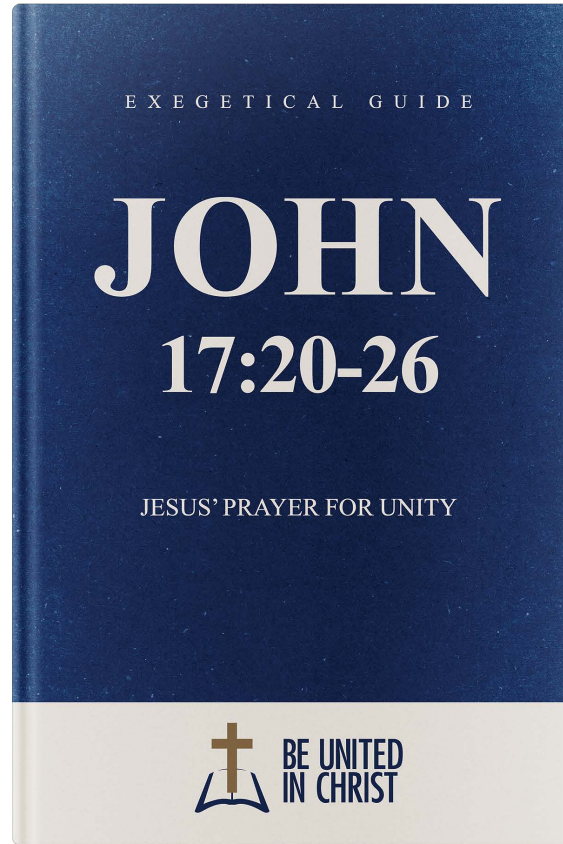
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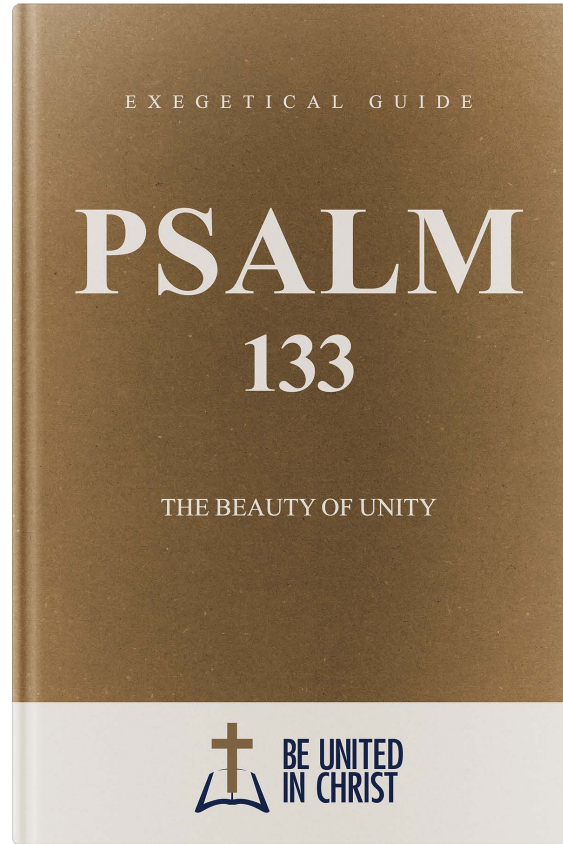


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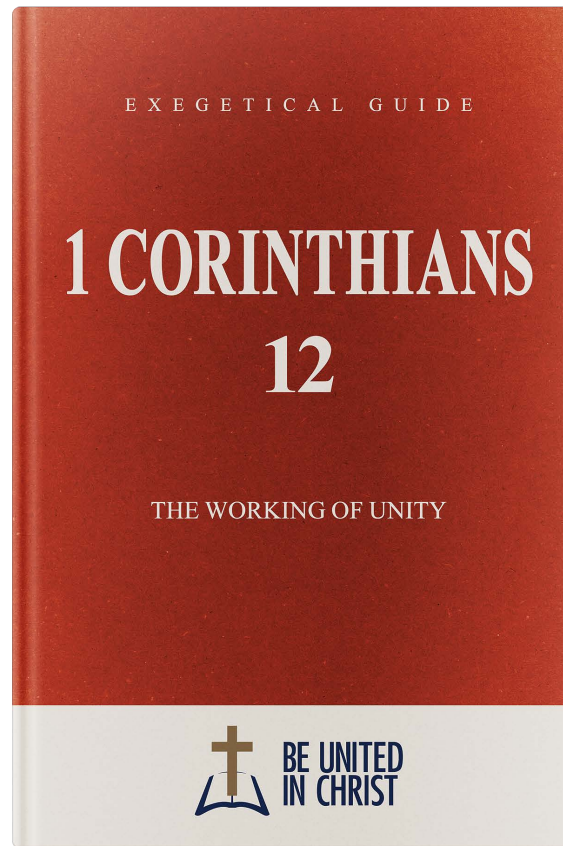
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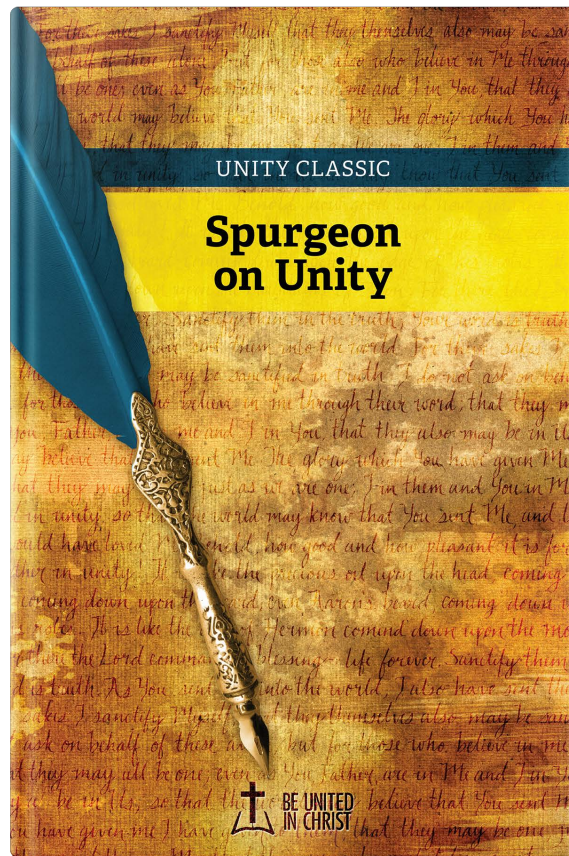
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