

**The Blueprint**  
**Part III**  
**Acts 2:36-47**  
**August 26, 2007**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

Anne came home from Cleveland this summer with a book she wanted me to read. Our son-in-law's mother is an avid reader and had shared the book with her. The book is the autobiography of a once devoutly Muslim and now openly atheistic humanist Ayan Hirsi Ali entitled *Infidel*. It is not a book to read when you are feeling down and depressed. But it is a book that at least should be read by Christian women. It will help you see the destitution, deprivation, and devastation experienced by Muslim women so that you can know how to pray for them. The Koran teaches that women exist for the pleasure of men and when they do not please men as they desire to be pleased they are to be punished. And you will read of the severities of these punishments.

But the book should be read for a second reason as well. It clearly convicts us as Christians that the current state of our witness to the world is at its very best a very weak witness. One page of this book left me stunned. I closed the book after I read this page and wept. I could not sleep. It was so distressing and disturbing. It is the account of the night that Ayaan Hirsi Ali abandoned the faith of her childhood and youth and walked away into atheism. Listen to what she says: "One night in that Greek hotel I looked in the mirror and said out loud, 'I don't believe in God.' I said it slowly, enunciating it carefully in Somali. And I felt relief."

"It felt right. There was no pain, but a real clarity. The long process of seeing the flaws in my belief structure and carefully tiptoeing around the frayed edges as parts of it were torn out, piece by piece—that was all over. The angels, watching from my shoulders; the mental tension about having sex before marriage, and drinking alcohol, and not observing religious obligations---they were gone. The ever present prospect of hellfire lifted, and my horizon seemed broader. God, Satan, angels: these were all figments of human imagination. From now on I could step firmly on the ground that was under my feet and navigate based on my own reason and self-respect. My moral compass was within myself, not in the pages of a sacred book." And then she tells of her journey to shape her life in the way that would enhance the good that was within her by nature so that she could

bring her very best to the world in which she lived as she now navigated her life without God.

Read these words and there is a question that begs to be asked? Why did she not consider Christianity? And you read the book you will receive at least her answer: growing up muslim meant taking seriously what you believed and shaping your life by it; the Christians she had met did not take seriously at all what they said they believed and certainly did not live their lives by those beliefs. In her own words, becoming a Christian was no alternative for her because she had met and knew some Christians. The reason I wept and could not sleep was a deep sense that she was more right about what she saw and said that I wanted to see and to say. Let me say it again: the world will not take us seriously as a church, as believers in the body of Christ; and should not until we take seriously being the church as a body of believers who are bound in our commitment to Christ as the one commitment that supersedes and shapes all other commitments.

We have spent two weeks now in this passage in Acts to see what God has shown us about the characteristics of a New Testament Church. There are four characteristics here that lead to one inevitable outcome. We have examined two and today want to look at the other two and the inevitable outcome. Each characteristic leads to the next and all intersect to form the core essentials of a New Testament Church. What we have seen so far is that a New Testament Church as Gospel Leadership that produces a regenerate Church Membership. A Gospel preacher preaching the gospel that leads people to repentance and a real/radical/revolutionary change of life so that commitment to Christ is expressed in commitment to active involvement with other believers in the body of Christ. And this leads to an emphasis on INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP which is the third characteristic of a New Testament Church, 42-43

So much in these two verses is so important. The phrase “devoted themselves” is a translation of one word that is a very critical word. Everything else flows from this one word. It is found again in verse 46 is the phrase, “they continued to meet together.” Same word and here it is throwing us back to verse 42. The word points to that upon which we focus and fasten our lives without which our lives would be driven and tossed by every wind of doctrine. It points to what is our anchor in the storm, what is our compass in the wilderness, what holds us up and together when everything around us is falling apart. It is a very important word. What

follows is what forms for us that fundamental, foundational focus. Four terms are used here to describe two realities. The chart on the outline I hope will help you to see the picture. Apostle's Teaching and Fellowship belong together; breaking of bread and prayer belong together. The first has to do with the work of the church as a school; the second has to do with the worship of the church as a sanctuary both of which are the root of the fruit of the witness of the church in the world.

Look with me at the two realities found in these four terms. The apostle's teaching consists of that which Jesus taught them during His earthly ministry and during that forty day period from His resurrection to His Ascension and is found today in the writings of the New Testament. Here is the Apostolic Teaching. And the purpose of this teaching is to produce, to promote and to provide that which is needed for a genuine New Testament Fellowship. The word here describes a people who hold common communion because they have a common course for a common cause and that cause is to be the holy people of God that God has created them and called them to be. The purpose of the teaching is to promote purity among the people. The substance of what is said by those who teach is to call the people of God to be the people of God in the praise of God in worship, walking in the path of God in our living as we seek to fulfill the purpose of God. Follow the flow of the early church and what you find is Satan seeking to get them to compromise and the leadership refusing to do so. We see it in Acts 5 with Annanias and Sapphira. We see it in Acts 6 is the dispute between the Hebrew and Greek speaking widows. We see it in Acts 7 when Stephen was killed. We see it in Acts 10 when God calls Peter to go the Gentiles. And we could go on. The New Testament Church is a school in which we come together to learn the Word of God so that we can live it in our relationships to one another and in our responsibilities in the world as we recognize that we are different from and distanced from the world because of our devotion to Jesus. What if Ayan Hirsi Ali had met someone like that?

But the New Testament Church is also a sanctuary. The breaking of bread is a phrase pointing to communion. And prayer or prayers points to worship. In communion they understood the great price that was paid to purchase their redemption. They remembered and did not want to forget the great grandeur of God's grace so that in their worship they were giving themselves to God as they sought through their worship to be not only in worship but in witness all that God wanted them to be. **EVERYONE WAS FILLED WITH AWE.** The word is fear. And whom or what did they fear?

They feared God lest they fail Him by compromising their commitment to be His holy people and thus blaspheme His holy name. No wonder they experienced the power of God in signs and wonders and so will the church in this day when we get serious again about being the holy people of God. What would it take in our day for us to see that if you are a believer, here is your priority place in which you express what is the priority of the believer the praise of God in worship and through which you learn what is the priority of the believer, how to live in the world in such a way that you bear faithful witness to the truth of God? I think that even raising that question sounds strange to too many in our day who profess to be believers.

When a church has Gospel Leadership that produces a regenerate church membership who alone understands the urgency of intentional discipleship, it is then that the groundwork is laid for a CARING FELLOWSHIP, 44-45. The word together in verse 44 translates a phrase, “epi to avto.” It is found in 2:1. It simply means that were in the same place seeking the same person for the same purpose. They had a common commitment, a common cause, and were walking together on a common course. They were supporting one another in prayer and encouragement and providing for one another in meeting needs. And they had needs due to their commitment to the Gospel. These were Jewish people who as a result of their commitment to Jesus were being cut off from family, cast out of their jobs, and condemned by their community. To be a caring fellowship does not ever mean that we are meeting everybody’s needs; it means that we are aware that our commitment to Jesus is costly and we depend on one another for support and encouragement. Churches misread this text and misunderstand its message and become centers for charitable contributions to people who have whatever kind of need. And we think in helping people who have whatever kind of need, we are doing Gospel work. The church in Thessalonica got confused about this and were helping people who were not working with basic needs. Paul put a stop to it. He wrote, “if a person will not work, they will not eat.” The implication is that if they get hungry enough they will find something to do so as to be able to get the food they need. A caring fellowship simply means that as a community of Christians we care for and love one another and do provide for those who because of their commitment to Christ have fallen on hard times. But it does not mean that we are a distribution center for any and all who have whatever kinds of needs.

The final two verses give us the results, 46-47. We want results. God gives them to us right here. Four things that are set before us here and one final truth that must not be missed. First, they were growing spiritually. Remember that “continued to meet together” is the same word that we find at the beginning of verse 42, “devoted themselves.” Its use here is very important: it points us back to verse 42. They did not stop learning the truth of God so that they could live it in relationship to one another and they did not stop seeking God in worship so that the power of God could be seen in them and through them in the world. Second, they were sharing relationally. We are told that every day they were in the temple courts. Why there? Because that is where the most difficult people to reach with the Gospel would have been found. And it is where the Gospel and those who witnessed to it would have faced the greatest opposition. Today we would simply label these people as those with masochistic tendencies and haul them off to therapy. Third, they were rejoicing in unity. They were sharing together the Lord’s Supper and their supper but the key here is that they were together every day. And they were filled with joy, look at the verbs: glad, sincere, praising, enjoying! Isn’t it odd? They came together every evening because of the dangers that they had faced during the day, but their gatherings were jubilant celebrations because they were doing that which brought glory to God. Fourth, they were growing numerically. ENJOYING THE FAVOR leads to the inevitable impression that their community loved them and couldn’t wait to see them every day. The original text makes it very plain that their joy was that they could daily declare the grace of God to their world. And because they did God added to His church. He did what He always does: He grows His church. That is His promise. When a church isn’t growing it shouldn’t look at some new method of gospel witness or its circumstances or situation. God grows His church. Where there is Gospel Leadership, Regenerate Church Membership, Intentional Discipleship, and a Caring Fellowship, there you will find always people who are growing spiritually, sharing relationally, rejoicing in unity, and growing numerically.

AND YOU WILL FIND ONE OTHER THING: a body of faithful to God and hard-working people who do not care for the credit because they want all the glory to go to God alone. I have spent literally hours with this text pouring over and over it thinking that there was nothing else here that could be seen, and then I saw it this week. Not a single, solitary individual is named in this text. 3,120 people in this church and not one single mention of anybody by name. That is a church. That is a Gospel church. That is a New Testament Church. I am so grateful to God for so many of you who

give and do so very much. But I am most grateful for the pulse of this body which is simply that we want to be all that God wants us to be and we want to do all that God wants us to do and we want Him to receive all the glory alone. Oh, I know; that is not how the world operates. But is how we must operate if we want to be in this place the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.