

# Conformed Or Transformed

Acts 2: 42-47/ 4:32-35 with Romans 12:1-2 NIV

In Acts 2:42-47, Luke gives the reader a summary of what was happening in the community of believers. In this summary, he mentions wonders and signs preformed by the apostles, and then gives a specific example of the wonders and signs with the healing of the crippled beggar. This same pattern is followed in 4:32-35; a summary followed by an example. Moving from signs and wonders, Luke now illustrates how the community of believers takes care of one another.

I'm going to read 2:42-47, then 4:32-35. Note the similarities...

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.<sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.<sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common.<sup>45</sup> Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.<sup>46</sup> 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,<sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

Now 4:32-35...

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his

possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.<sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.<sup>34</sup> There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales<sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

Luke's choice of events that follow these passages highlight the devotion the community of believers had to one another and to the Lord. People were healed and needs met.

I'm going to speculate and say that these were not the only stories that Luke could have included. Like John said about Jesus:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.<sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

Directed by the Holy Spirit, Luke chose these particular events. What if someone found Luke's notes that he used to write his gospel account and Acts? All the interviews, places and events; I bet it would be an interesting read.

Now I want to direct your attention to part of Jesus' prayer just before his arrest. Notice how what Luke is reporting coincides with Jesus' request...

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,<sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

The unity the Lord had prayed for was being enjoyed by the church and witnesses by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Soon, due to persecution, the church would spread into Judea and the rest of the world.

How many believers do we have at this point? Acts begins with about 120. We don't know how much time has passed, but according to Luke, the number of believers has grown to about 5,000. That's a lot of people to keep pointed in the same direction.

How many of you have ever worked with a group of people outside the church? How hard is it to stay focused; to keep everyone moving toward the same goal?

For example: In my younger days, I played in several bands. There is a very simple reason why there were *several* bands: staying focused on a common goal. Some of us took the music seriously. Others were just not committed to the common goal of delivering a good product to an audience. That was my experience with a group. I don't recall having any more than 6 people in a band at one time.

5,000!?! Luke is telling us that 5,000 people are on board with the same goal and direction. How can this be? What kind of fairy tale is Luke trying to sell us? Does he really expect us to believe that 5,000 people can agree and work toward a common goal?

And this would be a fairy tale except for two reasons: the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The Apostle Paul, around 30 years following the events in our text, captures what I believe was happening from the very beginning in the hearts and minds of the believers.

Writing to the Roman believers:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual<sup>[a]</sup> act of worship.<sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

How else can you explain 5'000 people going in the same direction?

Transformation: no longer following the pattern of the world; but having one heart and one mind. I remind you that they devoted themselves to God's Word, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. And, they continued in public and private worship according to verse 46 of chapter 2.

After a crazy week, don't you look forward to meeting on Sunday morning with people having one heart and mind? We are all here to worship the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, aren't we?

One author writes: "True worship does not consist of elaborate and impressive prayers, intricate liturgy, stained-glass windows, lighted candles, flowing robes, incense, and classical sacred music. It does not require great talent, skill, or leadership ability. Many of those things can be a part of the outward forms of genuine worship, but they are acceptable to God only if the heart and mind of the worshiper is focused on Him. The only spiritual service of worship that honors and pleases God is the sincere, loving, thoughtful, and heartfelt devotion and praise of His children."

As a child, I remember Sunday school class in the big ol' Freewill Baptist Church on route 140. But, it wasn't until I was in my teens, invited to a revival by neighborhood friends, that God's Word touched my heart and mind. Unfortunately, the conviction was short lived. I wasn't baptized until I was almost 20. And then another 7 years rolled by before this living sacrifice truth hit home.

I could use the number one excuse used often in the construction trade: 'nobody told me...' but, I don't have an excuse that will hold up. I had a Bible; I married into a Christian family; but I was still conformed to the world – not transformed.

The believers' lifestyles Luke describes in the beginning chapters of Acts were apparently radically different from anything the residents of Jerusalem had seen before. And, for a while, at least, they found favor with the people (2:47).

If I had to choose one word to describe what caused this favor, the word would be 'genuine.'

This was a major change compared to what they normally experienced. Listen to Jesus describe the character and actions of the nation's leadership...

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:<sup>2</sup> "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.<sup>3</sup> So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.<sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

<sup>5</sup> "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries<sup>[a]</sup> wide and the tassels on their garments long;<sup>6</sup> they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;<sup>7</sup> they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'<sup>7</sup> (Matthew 23:1-7)

The people were used to seeing showboats; everything done for show. All the religious activity from the teachers of the law and Pharisees was a smoke screen; superficial.

There is an old story about a man who dreamed that an angel escorted him to church one Sunday. There he saw the keyboard musician playing vigorously, the praise team singing, the musicians playing their instruments with gusto. But the man heard no sound. The congregation was singing, but the sound was utterly muted. When the minister rose to speak, his lips moved, but there was no volume. In amazement, the man turned to his escort for an explanation.

“This is the way it sounds to us in heaven,” said the angel. “You hear nothing because there is nothing to hear. These people are engaged in the form of worship, but their thoughts are on other things and their hearts are far away.”

But the believers’ willingness to bear one another’s burdens was from the heart; real; not superficial.

Living sacrifice; not conformed to the pattern of the world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind...

How many times do you have to renew your mind? That’s a dumb question, isn’t it? We can answer that question with a question...how many times does evil attack your mind? You renew your mind one more time than evil attacks.

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)**

Is there anyone here not familiar with renovation? You take the old out and put the new in, don’t you? But, when God moves in, he does a total transformation. He morf’s you, like from worm to butterfly.

This is what I believe Luke is writing about the early church. The transformation could not be missed. This is what Jesus prayed for and what the Holy Spirit delivered. This is what God intended from the beginning.

Religion often presses people into a mold. You are subject to a bunch of rules that you may or may not agree with or even understand. You conform to the rules, or you look elsewhere. The rules come from the outside. They have no power to change you on the inside.

But, when you are transformed, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God work from the inside out; big difference.

I’m preaching to the choir here. By the past and present actions of the Medway Christian Church inside and outside the body, I believe we have a pretty good handle on what was happening in the early chapters of Acts.

So, I’m going to close with a ‘How not to do it’ example that unfortunately happens too often.

This letter was written by a High School girl to her friend and it shows us what we are not to be like. She wrote:

“I attended your church yesterday. Although you had invited me, you were not there. I looked for you, hoping to sit with you. I sat alone. A stranger, I wanted to sit near the back of the church but those rows were all packed with regular attendees. An usher took me to the front. I felt as though I was on parade.

During the singing of the hymns I was surprised to note that some of the church people weren’t singing. Between their sighs and yawns, they just stared into space. Three of the kids that I had respected on campus were whispering to one another throughout the whole service. Another girl was giggling. I really didn’t expect that in your church. The pastor’s sermon was very interesting, although some members of the choir didn’t seem to think so. They looked bored and restless. One kept smiling at someone in the congregation. There were several people who left and then came back during the sermon. I thought, “How rude!” I could hear the constant shuffling of feet and doors opening and closing.

The pastor spoke about the reality of faith. The message got to me and I made up my mind to speak to someone about it after the service. But utter chaos reigned after the benediction. I said good morning to one couple, but their response was less than cordial. I looked for some teens with whom I could discuss the sermon, but they were all huddled in a corner talking about the newest music group.

My parents don't go to church. I came alone yesterday hoping to find a place to truly worship and feel some love. I'm sorry, but I didn't find it in your church. I won't be back."

What this young lady experienced would never happen around a transformed group of believers.

<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:23)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. (Acts 4:32)