

The Visible Patterns of the Invisible Church

Chapter Three

Audio lesson: New Testament 33



Objective: To understand the patterns of the early church as it faced many opportunities and confronted many challenges



After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. 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. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

—Acts 4:31-33

In Acts we see the history of the first century church unfolded with its purpose, promise, power, performance, and preaching. The church faced persecution from outside, and deception and temptation from within. As God's Spirit worked among them, we can see patterns to follow and problems to avoid in our churches today.

Some of the patterns of the church include selfless and generous giving, civil disobedience when human authorities contradict God's instructions, church discipline against impurity, the use of spiritual gifts, martyrdom, refusing to use the Spirit for personal gain, and healing. God used all of these patterns to teach His people and to further His purposes in fulfilling the Great Commission. He continues to do so through people and churches that allow His Spirit to work in them freely.



1. True or false? The Bible teaches that Christians should not own anything.
2. True or false? God urges His people to disobey the government at all times.
3. True or false? Peter and John disobeyed the civil authorities only when those authorities contradicted God's will.
4. True or false? There is no difference between pastoral and practical spiritual gifts.

Unless otherwise noted, choose one answer for each question.

5. Why were the believers in Acts so generous?
 - a. The Spirit filled them with a desire to give and help each other.
 - b. They wanted to earn God's favor.
 - c. They were extremely wealthy.
 - d. Giving was a requirement for church membership.
6. Why did God discipline Ananias and Sapphira?
 - a. They lied to God and to the apostles.
 - b. They tried to deceive the apostles and the church.
 - c. They were greedy.
 - d. All of the above
7. What does it mean to be "holy"?
 - a. You will no longer sin.
 - b. You no longer associate with common people.
 - c. You are set apart for God.
 - d. You are supernaturally enlightened.
8. Which of the following spiritual gifts are pastoral? (choose all that apply)
 - a. Counseling
 - b. Teaching
 - c. Administration
 - d. Serving food
9. What should a pastor's normal responsibilities include?
 - a. Managing the church's finances
 - b. Organizing the church's administration
 - c. Cleaning the church's meeting place
 - d. Spending time in God's Word and praying
10. What effect does persecution have on the church?
 - a. It threatens the church's survival.
 - b. It prunes the church and helps it grow.
 - c. It causes the church to disbelieve God.
 - d. It has no effect.

11. Why did Peter rebuke Simon the sorcerer?
 - a. Peter felt threatened because Simon had so much power.
 - b. Simon tried to cast a spell on Peter.
 - c. Simon thought he could buy the Spirit's power and use it to make money.
 - d. Simon openly opposed God.

12. How do miracles of healing in Acts compare to Jesus' ministry in the gospels?
 - a. Just as Jesus did many healings, so did His followers in the book of Acts.
 - b. Jesus healed many, but His followers did not have that gift.
 - c. Jesus did not do many healings, but the Holy Spirit empowered His followers to do them.
 - d. Neither Jesus nor His followers did many healings.

13. When Peter and John healed the lame man at the temple, what did that miracle accomplish for them?
 - a. It made them famous.
 - b. It began a great persecution in the church.
 - c. It became a greater opportunity for them to preach the gospel.
 - d. No one really noticed the miracle.

14. Which of the following are patterns of the church in Acts?
 - a. Giving
 - b. Establishing isolated communities
 - c. Healing
 - d. Spiritual gifts
 - e. Casual attitude toward sin
 - f. Civil disobedience
 - g. Using the Holy Spirit selfishly
 - h. Refusing to profit from the Spirit's power
 - i. Church discipline
 - j. Martyrdom
 - k. Hostility toward outsiders



Which of the New Testament patterns of the church do you see in churches today? How do you see God using those patterns for His glory? In what ways do these patterns challenge or encourage you to know Him better?



Thank God for working powerfully through His people to establish His purposes in the earth. Ask Him to use you powerfully in His plans, to teach you His ways, to give you opportunities to use your spiritual gifts, and to help you live completely for Him.



Going Deeper

1. How does the fact that, immediately after Pentecost the believers did not want to own anything, relate to holiness? _____

2. What is the difference between a pastoral spiritual gift pattern and a practical spiritual gift pattern? _____

3. With what specific responsibility were the first deacons commissioned by the apostles, which greatly blessed the power and effectiveness of the church? Should we implement and apply that principle in our churches today? _____

4. Relate the way persecution scattered the church to the Great Commission, with which the book begins. _____

5. When and only when should a devout follower of Jesus disobey the civil government? _____

6. To what degree and in what ways should the church today practice church discipline, as taught in principle by the case of Ananias and Sapphira? _____

7. How can you take your own personal spiritual gift inventory and then use your spiritual gift pattern in the church of which you are a part? _____

