

# The Pentecostians – Gladly Receiving God's Word

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Gathered in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus were Jews from all around the world. Acts 2:9-11 lists people from at least 15 different places. The number of Jews in Jerusalem on this day would number in the thousands. While they were here to observe one of the more important feasts of the Mosaic Law, they would soon hear the first gospel sermon preached. Their reaction to this sermon would affect the rest of their lives.

After seeing "*cloven tongues like as of fire*" and hearing the sound "*as of a rushing mighty wind*" (Acts 2:2,3), the people gathered there questioned the meaning of this event (Acts 2:12). Some would mockingly say that the men they had heard speaking in their various languages must be drunk (Acts 2:13). As is typical of about any event, some take it seriously and some will not.

When the apostles address the gathered crowd with the sermon recorded in Acts 2:14-36, there were some who wanted to know what they needed to do to be saved (Acts 2:37). The lesson presented to them had taught them that Jesus is the Son of God and reigns with God in Heaven. More importantly for those listening, the sermon had convicted them of having crucified Jesus, therefore they had murdered him. The interruption of the sermon is brought about because of this truth.

In reply to their question, Peter taught them to repent and be baptized in order to obtain the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). His answer continued by teaching them to "*Save yourselves from this untoward generation*" (Acts 2:40). The one thing we can learn from the question of the people on this day and the answer they received is they had a choice to make. Unlike those who teach that we are saved by grace alone, the Bible clearly teaches us that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). That is, while God has a part in our salvation, we also have a part. We must work out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12).

At this point on this Day of Pentecost, all of those listening to the apostles have to make a response to the lesson presented. Every lesson ever taught demands a reaction from the listeners. They can choose to obey it, reject it, or think about it. What people do with the message can have a life changing effect. What we do with a message from the word of God will have an eternal effect on our lives. If we make the wrong choice, we can be lost forever. If we make the right choice, we can be saved forever.

Understanding that the gospel is God's power to salvation (Romans 1:16) and that we are born again by the word of God (1 Peter 1:23) should cause us to more seriously think about the message that we hear. Realizing that our eternal happiness depends on how we respond to the gospel, let us consider how the people on the Day of Pentecost and in the New Testament reacted to the gospel.

Those who became Christians in response to the sermon preached in Acts 2 numbered about 3,000 souls (Acts 2:41). This would only be a small portion of those who were in Jerusalem on that day. All in the audience heard the same message, yet all did not respond the same. What was the difference between the majority of the crowd and these 3,000 souls?

The first part of Acts 2:41 reads, *"Then they that gladly received his word"*. This is a telling remark about the attitude of these people. Out of all those listening at this time, these are the only ones who readily accepted the message. The key part of this portion of the passage is the two words, *"gladly received"*.

Gladly is a word that means "with pleasure". It is used only two times in the New Testament. Here, in Acts 2:41, and again, in Acts 21:17: *"And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly"*. It is obvious from this usage that there is a great deal of joy involved in this word. The people on the Day of Pentecost had heard the message of salvation. They found out about being free from the burden of sin (John 8:31,32). They would no longer be under the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

When we study one other conversion in the New Testament, we see this same attitude expressed by the one who obeyed the gospel. In Acts 8, the Ethiopian eunuch has heard the message presented by Philip and has been baptized into Christ. After Philip is caught away from him, it is stated that the eunuch went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39). Certainly, the life of a Christian is one of rejoicing (Philippians 4:4). Sadly, for those outside of Christ, they are without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). No wonder they gladly received the word. They now had the opportunity to enjoy the greatest blessing on Earth.

Received means "to take fully". We welcome it and approve of it. People will often hear a message and know that the message is correct. But, they will not do anything about it. They do not take it into their lives. They do not heed its teachings. While they might be happy they heard the message, they do not receive the message.

Some try to take only the parts of the message they like. This is not receiving the message either, as to receive it means to take it fully. Taking part of the gospel message is like using only the part of the recipe that you are preparing. While you will get something from the efforts put forth, you will not get the result you need.

If we gladly receive the word of God, then we will be glad to hear the word, and we will apply it into our lives. We will not look for loopholes or try to "figure out what God really meant". We will accept as it is in truth, the word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

It is always interesting to watch people when they hear a message. Some will think it is the greatest thing they have ever heard. Some will think it is the stupidest thing they have ever heard. Some will want to argue with it. Some will just look at it like one of many other messages they have heard.

When Paul preached on Mars' Hill in Acts 17, he had three different reactions to his message (Acts 17:32-34). There were those who believed the message and followed it. There were others who mocked and rejected everything that was said. And, there was a third group that said they would hear him again on this matter. These individuals are a lot like Felix who was looking for a convenient season (Acts 24:25).

Since we are not promised tomorrow, the third viewpoint above is a very dangerous view. Anything could happen to us. We could grow hard hearted and never respond to the gospel. We could lose our mental faculties and no longer have the ability to respond to the gospel. Or, we could die! Then, that convenient season will never come. This is why God teaches us that **now** is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

To reject the word of God is like a drowning man rejecting a life ring thrown to him. While his rejection of the life ring could easily cost him his life, a rejection of the saving message of God's word will definitely cost us our soul (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Like those at Pentecost, we need to readily and gladly accept the message that has been preached to us. We need to view it as the greatest message we will ever hear. Although talking to the church, the principle of Paul's statement in Galatians 4:18 applies here: *"But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing ...."*

The people on Pentecost were just like you and I. They had families, friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances. They lived in a world with politics, corruption, immorality, war, hatred, prejudice, and so forth. There were temptations all around, and influences to not obey the gospel. Yet, they ignored all of this so they could have their sins removed.

One of the things we need to understand about gladly receiving a message is that this means we will heed the message. In Acts 2:41, after it talks about their attitude towards the message, the text states they *"were baptized"*. They did not argue whether baptism was or was not essential to our salvation. They did not try to say that all we have to do is believe on Jesus. They heard the message and obeyed it. Whatever the message told them to do, they were willing to do.

These people had come to an understanding they were lost. They knew there was something they had to do in order to get out of this condition. They inquired as to what they needed to do. They accepted the answer they were given. They knew that they had to do it God's way or it would not work. What an attitude! To listen to what God has to say and just do it! Oh, that the world today would learn this great lesson.

Submitting to baptism was not all that these people did. The message of God does not end with becoming a Christian. It continues with being a Christian. A proper response to the message of God will cause us to live as God would have us live. This is why we find in Acts 2:42 four things the people who were baptized continued doing. They understood that they were not saved unless they fulfilled all of God's word.

They continued steadfastly ("to be constantly diligent") in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayer. They studied and walked in God's ways (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 John 1:7). They had fellowship with one another. They were of one accord (Acts 2:46). They observed the Lord's death in the communion service (1 Corinthians 11:26; Acts 20:7). And, they continued in prayer to God (Philippians 4:6). They were actively involved in obeying God.

Their having gladly received the word also led them to take care of one another. They were with one another and they pooled their resources to provide for those in need (Acts 2:44,45; 4:34,35).

As they had opportunity, they took care of the needs of others, especially those of the church (Galatians 6:10). One of the amazing things about serving God is serving others. The attitude of those who are truly converted is to place self last in line and seek the good of God first and others next.

As we look further into what those converted on the Day of Pentecost did, we note that they had favor with all the people. While the world may reject the word that is preached, they should never be able to find fault in our lives. We should always bring glory to God by the things we do (1 Corinthians 10:31). A Christian will not give an occasion of stumbling to those around, whether they are members of the church or not (1 Peter 2:11,12; Matthew 5:16). Those who gladly receive the word will be *"an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity"* (1 Timothy 4:12). Christians are kind, compassionate, and law abiding (Ephesians 4:32; Romans 13:1-4).

The ultimate result of those who gladly received the word was that other souls were saved. I think many times we underestimate the effect a decision we make can have on others, both now and in the future. These individuals who became Christians on the Day of Pentecost continued to live for Christ and as a result *"...the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"* (Acts 2:47). All of us can influence others for Jesus.

Our study through this portion of the book of Acts in examining the lives of those who gladly received the word of God should cause us to reflect on our own lives. There are many today who have never obeyed the message of Jesus. They have heard the word but have not accepted that word. In order for a person to be saved, he does need to hear the word (Romans 10:17; Acts 10:33), but he also needs to believe that word (Mark 16:16). This is what they did on the Day of Pentecost. But belief is not enough, they must change their lives (repent – Acts 2:39; 3:19). This change moves us from one serving sin to one serving Christ (Romans 6:16-18). We find also that we must confess Jesus Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10). Then, we need to have our sins washed away in baptism (Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Mark 16:16). The person who responds to the message in this way will then become a child of God (Romans 6:3-6) and a member of the Lord's family, his church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The journey has just begun.

Now as a Christian, he or she must be faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10). They must continue to walk that straight and narrow path that will lead them to Heaven. If they err from this path, they must confess their sins and pray one for another (James 5:16), knowing that when they do so God will forgive them (1 John 1:9). This will keep us right with God.

Those who gladly receive the word will not have a problem with any of this. Our question today for all of us is – "Have we gladly received the word of God?"