

Examining the early churches strengths and weaknesses religion essay



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The purpose of this essay is to see how the church began 2, 000years ago, with a small group of disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit, who preached, and taught, healed in synagogue, and everywhere they went, lives and society was changed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Strengths of Early Church

The early church did not just start to grow after Jesus' ascension by its own enthusiasm. The disciples on the day of Pentecost were all together in one place. One of the strength of the early church is their ability to wait on God. Jesus instructed his disciples to wait (Matt 28: 19-20, Luke 24: 49) first for the Holy Spirit in order to do the work he commissioned them for. The disciples waited until when the Spirit descended on them on the day of Pentecost. The power received at the out pouring of the Holy Spirit enabled them to fulfil their mission. Waiting is sometimes part of God's plan in order to be truly effective.

Descent of the Spirit

The apostles and disciples were the first recipients of the outpouring of the spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues (Act 2: 6). They received
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power to function like Jesus Christ; to preach the gospel with boldness, with signs and wonders following. The disciples spoke in prophetic speech that people of diverse nationalities represented at Jerusalem recognised their languages, which drew their attention unto God. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost led to revival that caused salvation of over three thousand people. Followed by diverse forms of miracles, and healings enhancing the spread of the gospel.

The Church was Bold

Initially the disciples were very timid. But after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit they were filled with boldness to do mighty works and witnessing effectively. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit inspired evangelism and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. From the day of Pentecost when Peter spoke to community of believers the gospel has spread from Jerusalem to Syria, Asia, Europe and Africa. Despite persecutions, oppositions, imprisonments, plots they never relent, they kept on moving never dare to go to a new place to preach the word of God.

The Early Church was very Prayerful

Another characteristic of the early church was that they are very prayerful, committed to God's will through prayer (Act 1: 14). As it faces challenges the churches always came together to pray so that healings, miraculous signs and wonders will take place (Acts3: 1-3, 4: 1-10).

The Church was in one accord

One of the strengths of the early church is unity. The church was one, and there was no proliferation in the body of Christ. There were house fellowships where believers met for teachings and breaking of bread. None of the early Christians felt that what they had was their own; they never allowed any of the brethren to suffer when others had plenty. The unity brought by the Holy Spirit increased loyalty, commitment and love for God. Without unity, the church could not have survived; therefore they had everything in common.

Perform miraculous signs and wonders

Signs and wonders followed the apostles everywhere they went. The healing of the man at the Beautiful gate by Peter and John created a stir in Jerusalem that saved five thousand people (Act 3: 1-3). The early Church did much miraculous work through the help of the Holy Spirit as the Lord had done. They confirmed the gospel with great power, miracles and abundant grace as they spread the good news. A lot of people were attracted to the early church by expressions of God's power at work.

People of Prayer

The early Christians devoted themselves to prayer. They understood that Gods kingdom could only be manifested in its full power through fervent prayer. (Act 1: 14, 2: 42, 3: 1, 6: 4, Eph 6: 18). In those days devote Jews pray 2 or 3 times a day and it was the custom of the disciples to follow this devotion. Peter and John went to pray at the temple (Acts 3: 1), while Luke and Paul did the same (Acts 16: 16). God rewarded Cornelius for keeping to hours of prayer (Act10).

Weakness of the early church

External Opposition: The early church was not without its own problem. The church experience both miracles and opposition the same time. There is external opposition from Jewish leaders who became uncomfortable with message of Christian liberty preached by the early believers, which undermined Jewish legalism. Besides the opposition from religious circle believers found themselves in conflict with social patterns of the day, because they no longer participate in emperor worship, refused to take part in bloody roman sport and pagan shrines. As a result persecution arose, many were exiled, killed, mocked and imprisoned.

Jewish and Gentile Conflicts: God has no favourite nation or race, he only favours and accepts anyone who turns from sin and believed him. The Apostles initially want all people to be saved but did not understand that salvation was no longer restricted to Israel alone, but for everybody. The Jewish-Gentile conflict is the greatest barrier to the spread of Gospel in the 1st century. Until the issue was resolved, in council at Jerusalem, it was a barrier.

Administration: as the early church increased in size, so did her needs and challenges. The new believers were moved by the Holy Spirit to share their possession (Acts 4: 32-37). But as the numbers increased, it became difficult for equal distribution of goods to meet the needs of everyone. The Hellenist believing widow felt neglected. To rectify this, the Apostles created the office of deacon to oversee the physical needs of the people. Later we see the Pastoral epistle written by Paul to Timothy and Titus, about the spiritual and

character qualification expected for church leadership; in order to keep the church from false teachings (1Tim 3: 1-13, Tit 1: 5-9).

Dishonesty and Greed: In order to gain recognition Ananias and Saphira lied about their giving to the church. (Moreover any unrighteousness move in the church prevents the working and movement of the Holy Spirit). God dealt harshly with the couple in order to reveal his hatred to all greed, deceit and dishonesty in the kingdom.

The Peril of Heresies: The early church was not immune against false teachers and heresies. Already Jesus had warned his disciples several times in the Gospels to watch out for leaders who would introduce destructive heresies among God's people (Matt. 24: 11, 24: 24-25). For example the book of Jude was written against false teachers who are distorting the gospel of God's rejecting traditional Jewish and Christian teaching about morality, advocating sexual licence. In their teachings they denied original apostolic revelation about the person and nature of Jesus Christ (Jude 8, 16, 2pet 2: 1-3: 4).

Comparism between the early church and the church today

The early church relied much on the leading of the Holy Spirit to get the gospel to the whole world, which I believe today's church need to learn from. Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the Antioch church through the leading of the Holy Spirit, were directed by the spirit of God to specific areas to be a witness on their missionary journey. Our evangelistic or missionary moves should be according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. (Act 13: 1-5).

Churches today do so many things in the name of the Lord with ulterior motives. Many at times we tend to do what we want in the name of the lord rather than what Gods want. The early church's motives were pure. Their aim was to spread Christianity as far as they could.

Some churches today are being run under the idea of men not of God. The Spirit of God had being relegated or given a minor role in the church. Making many worship centres to lack power thus dry and lukewarm. During the apostolic age the early church was established on apostolic pattern. But tragically the church today have departed from apostolic faith and doctrine but patterned itself according to human ideas and modern thought that now proliferate our churches today.

Conclusion

The gospel cannot be confined to one corner of the world. Therefore what the early church did is possible in our generation. The church was bold, filled with power because the early disciples were committed to the task of evangelising the world. Churches need to be committed to the work of soul winning and world mission, for example in the west secular humanism has become the dominant philosophy for many and the church is not immune to all this. We need to be more involved in world issues by ministering to the social ills of our environment, by our evangelistic move.