

Acts 2:42-47
4/12/15

The Church is Born

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

(Pastor Prays)

As we move into the life of the Church, it's fitting to pause long enough to take a look at what Luke describes for us. The Book of Acts is the sequel to Luke's Gospel and shows us the God-engineered blueprint for what a New Testament Church is to look like.

Some years ago it was not unusual for church planters to go into an unchurched city and survey the community and ask the unbelieving community, "What kind of church would you like to go to?" to gather the data and then try to create a church that met the expectations.

While you certainly should be aware of the social environment so that you might build a contextual church, that can't be *all* you do. We don't make fundamental decisions based on cultural expectations or public opinion. We make them out of what the Bible says. Because if you are not careful, you start forming the church into what *we* want it to be instead of allowing the church of Jesus Christ form us into who God *wills* us to be.

In the text before us, Luke has outlined what a New Testament church should look like. Here we have the God-given plan for a strong church and not a fly-by-night pseudo-church producing hollow people who believe in a mushy God.

We live in a dangerous, crumbling world that needs Gospel clarity from a thriving church. The hilarity of popularity has passed and we must face a hostile world with the saving love of Christ. And the Church is God's chosen instrument for the Glory of God and the God of society.

The Church of Christ Will Never Fail

How do we ensure it?

We Cling to the Word of God

Let's go back to v. 42. Notice the phrase "they devoted themselves." That phrase drives the entire paragraph and, as you read it, notice the first thing they devoted themselves to, that phrase "the apostles' teaching." It is where we get the word "didactic." It has to do with the learning of truth and information.

Notice the New Testament church didn't catch the Spirit and run off half-cocked. They consistently gave themselves to the apostles' teaching. What does this mean?

In Peter's sermon from Acts 2, he quotes Joel and the Psalms and uses them both as authoritative. Paul and the New Testament writers consistently quote the Old Testament and add to that the New Testament as the Gospel story of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. What you have is the Old Testament and the New Testament as the Revelation of *who* God is and *how* he works. We believe that the Bible is food for the believer's growth, power, endurance, joy, strength and direction!

There's something you need to grasp: *precepts* come before *proactive*. To *think* rightly and *live* rightly and *do* rightly, you must *know* rightly. Not only that, God's word shows us *His holiness* and *our sinfulness*. God's word shows us the undeserved forgiveness found in Jesus Christ, and we call it Grace. And here at Hickory Grove, it's why we do the things we do. It's why we focus on the Word. "God's word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Him." So we unapologetically cling to the Bible as this world around us mocks God and turns from truth. Regardless of the cost, we cling to the Bible.

Not only that...

We Cherish the Church

We see in V. 42 "*and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* That word, Fellowship = *κοινωνία*. It is such a strong word and it's unfortunate that we have sort of stripped it of its power. It's so much more than just getting together to eat.

The truth is that the Bible never envisions the Christian life as one lived apart from other believers, and for a Christian to fail to participate in the life of the church is tragic. In Acts 2, after the great outpouring, new links of strong Christian affection would be forged and that love, founded in Christ, holds the church together, creating a new family with all kinds of cultural differences.

There are three things that make up a strong fellowship (certainly more, but at least these):

Sacrificial giving – when you read v. 44-45, it sounds bizarre to our capitalistic, right-to-private-property ears. "*And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*" This is a real sense of taking what we have and giving it to our brothers and sisters in need. There are many of you who do that. Giving with a Christ-centered understanding of your possessions and time as you do that you receive a real sense of the Gospel blessing of fellowship. But it is more than property we give in Christian fellowship; we give ourselves in our love, our prayers and our very lives to one another. A key element of fellowship is *sacrificial giving*.

Humble receiving – Again v. 44-45, "*And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*" When you are hurt, mourning, struggling, you've got to be able to receive with humility, understanding that in a small micro way, it's the picture of the Gospel. When someone gives you something (in the context of Christian fellowship), that person is modeling Christ who gave us what we could not earn and did not deserve. Give sacrificially. Receive with humility...

Strong Accountability – I think this is most likely where people get the most uncomfortable, but let me tell you something, we are not converted and then left alone to make it on our own. You are not to do this on your own. Listen to the strong fellowship Paul calls the church at Galatia to: in Galatians 6:1-2, he says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness, keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."

In the fellowship of this church, part of our obligation is to bear each other's burdens, and that includes speaking truth when you would rather remain silent. We all need someone in our lives who will love us unconditionally and speak unvarnished truth to us. That's fellowship. The writer of Hebrews said it this way in Hebrews 10:24-25: "*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*"
Cling to the Bible. Cherish the Church...

We Center on the Cross

We read in v. 42, "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching the fellowship to the breaking of bread.*" Everybody doesn't agree. More than likely, the phrase harkens back to The Lord's Supper that is a tangible reminder of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and any church that hopes to be honoring to God and transformative for people must center its life and ministry around the cross.

Every sermon must take people to the cross. In a world that has felt needs and wants to be encouraged, preachers are tempted to deliver messages that are shallow and feeling-based. And we must press through that and take people to the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. We must remind people of the gore and shame of Golgotha. We must contemplate the separation from God that the Son of God experienced on our behalf. We must be cross-centered people, living cross-centered lives. We must perpetually return to the gravity and the weight of the cross. It must mark everything about our lives. There is a Cross on my wedding ring to remind me that ours is a Gospel driven marriage. A cross around your neck, earrings should be a reminder to live a Cross-centered sacrificial life. We must center on the cross. The church in America has forgotten the cross and turned to amusement.

We teach the truth, cling to the cross. Cherish the Church. Center on the Cross...

We Learn to Pray

Go back to verse 42: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching... fellowship... Breaking of bread...and to the prayers."

Now let's talk about what this means. It could refer to your own life of prayer, where you are seeking the Lord in all things, and certainly you should be doing that. But in the context, it seems to imply that this church was collectively seeking that Lord and praying that he would grip the hearts and lives of people; praying that He will build his church so that no man gets credit; praying that the Gospel of Jesus will permeate all that we are and all that we do; praying that we never forget that He has an eye that always sees and an ear that always hears, a recording hand that always writes.

I need to be praying that Christ is: the pulse of my heart, the spokesman of my lips, and the lamp unto my feet. Here is what I believe. When we do these things – build the foundation -- the Lord will move. All of these elements conspire together to create a church that has impact. That impact is described in v. 47: they were praising God. They walked away from the service not talking about how good the preacher is but how great God is. They were having a positive impact. In v. 47 we see them "having favor with all the people." They were able to be in a godless culture that did not believe like they believed and still speak truth in a winsome manor. Church, it is not enough for us to speak truth. We must speak in a winsome, humble way.

They were God-centered, personal, evangelizing apostles. The last phrase of v. 47 – "*And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*" We believe in God Centered Evangelism, Living the Gospel, Speaking the Gospel, Inviting People to Hear the Gospel, and Watching God Work. We believe in Jesus Christ, His perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection. This truth is applied to your life through faith.

(Pastor Prays)