

6/12/22 Christ Fellowship

### What We Believe about the Church – Acts 2:42-47

Okay, I have a question for you. If you are driving through town and you see a store or some kind of business that has one of those giant inflatable gorillas on top, are you more or less inclined to stop into that business? You know what I'm talking about. Maybe it's an inflatable cowboy or even one of those wavy tube man things. I'm asking because I'm thinking about getting one of those inflatable Elvises with the microphone to put on top of the church building. I think that will really draw people in. What do you think? No?

I read somewhere a while back that those stupid blow-up statue things actually work. They evidently draw your attention and pay for themselves with increased traffic to your business. I'm not sure it is what we want to do for our church but maybe your plumbing business or your CPA firm could use one.

People are always looking for ways to make their business stand out. They have half price sales and going out of business sales even though they never go out of business. There's a little appliance store in Bridgeport that has had a going out of business sale every other year for ten years now.

People in charge of selling certain products tell you their product is new and improved. It's earth-friendly. It's fun and easy to use. Everybody is talking about it. You can't afford not to buy one! Be the first one on your block to buy a Mr. Microphone. "But wait! There's more!" Right? It gets pretty obnoxious after a while, doesn't it?

The problem is that marketing mindset has seeped into the Christian church today and I see commercials and billboards advertising the latest and greatest preachers with Bible sounding titles and musicians with all the appropriate tattoos and ripped jeans and programs that solve all your worldly problems if you just come be part of our "growth group." And not all of that is bad by any means but it is way different than the first church.

We are going to be looking at the first church this morning as we continue our look at what all we believe. Today, we get the truth about what the church is supposed to look like by reading **Acts chapter 2, verses 42-47**. As you turn to the book of Acts, which is between the Gospel of John and the book Romans, let me just tell you that they did not have a giant inflatable Elvis on their church building. Do you know why? They didn't have Elvis. They didn't have inflatables and they didn't have church buildings.

But what they did have was amazing and I want it for our church as well. In fact, as I have said many times, Christ Fellowship reminds me a lot of the first church and we will see why as we go. But I'll tell you right off before we even read the passage that what this church had was devotion. Watch for the word "devoted" in here and then watch for what they were devoted to. Let's read it in **Acts 2:42-47**.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

I want you to see first that they were devoted to the right things. I saw an article this past week about a Mexican megachurch pastor who was sentenced Wednesday to more than 16 years in a California prison for sexually abusing young female followers who said he made them his sex slaves. (Mexican megachurch leader gets more than 16 years for abuse (yahoo.com)) Stuff like that is so harmful to the reputation, not only of the church worldwide, but the reputation of Jesus Himself. And it happened because the church members were devoted to the wrong thing.

**Verse 42** doesn't say they were devoted to the apostles. It says they were devoted to the apostles teaching. And what is an apostle? The word apostle literally means "one who is sent out." Today we have missionaries and pastors that fill the role and it is debatable whether men should be called apostles today but for our study, just think of them as preachers. And what were these preachers preaching in the first church? They were preaching the Gospel or the Good News of Jesus. And how did they know this Good News? Because they had been with Jesus and had heard it for themselves from Him.

Now, most of you know that the Good News or the Gospel of Jesus is found, not just in the first four books of the New Testament that we call the Gospels, but the Good News of Jesus is found, alluded to, pointed toward or clearly seen in every book of the Bible, even the Old Testament.

In fact, the apostles would not have had any of the New Testament written at this time. They were going by what Jesus had told them and what they had heard Him teach and preach when He was with them which included how passages in the Old Testament pertained to Him. **Charles Spurgeon** once said, "I take my text and make a beeline for the Gospel."

We do the same thing here. Every sermon, no matter the text, ends with an invitation to accept the Gospel, the Good News, the truth about Jesus Christ. You will have that opportunity again today. This church has devoted itself to the Gospel in every class or Bible study or message; even the songs we sing. Everything revolves around Him. And contrary to what my buddy Dewey thinks we ought to do (😊), I will never ask you to turn in your Joel Osteen books to study one of those chapters. We are devoted to the Good News of Jesus that is found in the Bible.

Now, also in **verse 42**, it talks about how the first church was devoted to fellowship. That word is not just in our name, it is something we do every time we meet. That's a part of our worship. That original Greek word is "koinonia" which means to have things in common or a partnership. We have common experiences and interests in and out of the church but when we come together, we fellowship and celebrate those commonalities.

We have special times of fellowship where that's all we do and we might meet together on a Friday or Saturday night and I usually teach everybody how to play and win at "Spoons" (: but fellowship is more than just playing games. We have a partnership in this church; all of us do and we see it every time we meet. If someone in the community comes to Christ through this church, then we all have done what we are called to do. We are all blessed.

Now, notice that the term, "breaking bread" is used twice in this passage. Once in **verse 42** where it says they "broke bread together" in **verse 46**. Scholars tell us that the first time it is used is probably to denote what we call the "Lord's Supper" or "communion" and the second time is meant that they had a regular meal together. This church does both regularly. We don't have any problem when it comes to eating together, do we?

In a 1st grade class room, it was Show and Tell day. The teacher picked 3 boys to stand up and present their religious objects to the class.

The first boy stood up and said "Hi, My name is Abram, I'm Jewish and this is a Matzaball!"

The second boy got up and said "Hi, my name is Johnny and I'm Catholic, this is a Crucifix!"

Finally the third boy got up and said "Hi, My name is Billy and I am Baptist, and **this is a casserole!**"

Most of us have been taught since we were little that going to church often meant eating together and we should. It is biblical. It's part of true worship to come together and "break bread" either in a regular meal or commemorating the Lord's Supper.

Ministry is also a part of what the church should be about and we see that included in **verse 45**. It says they gave to anyone who had need. I just wish y'all could be here sometime during the week when somebody comes here needing food from the food pantry. It is such a blessing to me to be able to help people in a real, physical way. I always tell them that our church is not big and not rich and we can't usually pay their bills but we can help them with some food and

while this is a great outreach tool, I hope you know that our food pantry is also very much for church members. If you need some help, please ask. That's part of our ministry just like it was for the first church.

So far, we have seen how the first church included discipleship as they devoted themselves to the Gospel. They had fellowship as they broke bread together. They had ministry as they gave to those in need and we see their evangelism come out in **verse 47** where it says they enjoyed the favor of all the people.

I am so proud of this church for that same reason. Everybody in this community knows where to come when they need help. Every week somebody shows up for food but they also come by or call often just to be prayed for. Sometimes they need help moving or they need advice or they need a ride and I know that somebody in this church will be able to help them and they know that too. They know that the little church down the street with the green sign is where to go to for help physically or spiritually. I've told you the story about introducing myself to some guys in Wise County Jail and one of them said, *"I know Christ Fellowship. That's the church that helps people!"*

Let me tell you. You know what works better than even an inflatable Elvis to draw people to your church? Having a reputation as a church that helps people. That's what. I wish I had time to tell you the stories of the guy who comes over so often to play the piano and clear his head or the lady who needs a place to pray before she goes home or how we didn't have such a good reputation when we were at Runaway Bay. But, just like the first church, all of this is included in worship. That's the fifth thing. They were praising God, meeting together, eating together and loving on each other as they gave God all the glory. Doesn't that sound like Christ Fellowship?

But look at the very last sentence. *"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."* So...what's wrong with our church? How come we don't see that happen to us today? What are we doing wrong? Don't tell me you haven't thought about it. I think about it all the time and I've done a lot of thinking about it just this week.

First off, I don't think we are doing anything wrong. We are a church made up of humans and we will make mistakes and maybe there are things that we could do better but I don't see any pervasive sin that is being overlooked or justified or anything like that. We have great unity. We teach and preach truth. We try to be biblical in every way. I don't see it as sin that is keeping us from growing.

Another thing, while we should be concerned about church growth, it's not our responsibility to grow it. That's Jesus's job. He said so when He told Peter in **Matthew 16**, *"Upon this rock I will build my church"* and so I don't worry about numbers or money. I do worry about those people in our community and around the world that don't know Jesus and don't have peace and joy in this life and have no hope for the next life. So, we try our best to tell everybody about Him, inside the church and outside the church just like we do at the RV park.

It's not church membership that gets people to Heaven but how are they going to hear if the church doesn't tell them either inside these walls or outside? Why is it that people are no longer drawn to the church like they used to be? Yes, part of that is the declining morals of the country we live in and that is to be expected but even folks who claim to be believers put less value on the church than they used to.

So, when I ask, *"What's wrong with our church?"* it's not just Christ Fellowship. Church attendance all over the place is down. I did some research – and you know what that means, right? I googled, *"How to get people to church"* just to see what came up and there were some helpful hints about how we should try to convince people to get here on Sundays.

It suggested meeting at different times and in different places. Maybe we should have a theme church like bikers or cowboys. Did you know there is even a nudist church? Oh yes. Maybe we should have a good, old-fashioned tent revival or serve food when we worship. Maybe we should knock on doors and beg and plead.

All of those are fine and good ideas. Okay, the nudist thing is just ridiculous and that ain't happening but all the others are good ideas. By the way, don't google nudist church. Nobody wants to see any of that. But the problem with the

basic concept of trying to convince Christians that they should value church attendance more is also not our jobs. Hear me out on this.

We all know; all Christians know that going to church regularly is a command. It's for our benefit and God said to do it. **Romans 12:5** says, "... so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." **Ephesians 4:2** says we are to bear with one another. How can we bear if we're not together?

**1 Peter 4:10** says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. **1 Thessalonians 5:11** - Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. **James 5:16** - Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

You can't do any of that at the house or on the lake or in the field or at the track. So, obviously, the Bible makes it plain that church attendance is mandatory and so not to do it is sin. Now, is it my job to convict you of sin or to convince you not to sin? I can play a part by pointing it out if needed but God convicts us of sin.

Jesus told His disciples in **John 16:13** that when he left, the Holy Spirit would come to guide them in all truth. **Isaiah 30:21** says, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, This is the way; walk in it." God uses His word to convict you and the Spirit to convince you that something is sin and how do you feel when you know you have sinned? You should feel ashamed. You should be grieved that you have grieved the Holy Spirit. It should bother you that your sin is what Jesus died for so you could be forgiven and yet we still choose to do it. That should pain you to the core and if it doesn't; if sinning doesn't bother you; if missing church is no big deal or just another option amongst many then either the Holy Spirit is not doing the job He said He would do or...maybe He doesn't really live inside of you at all.

**2 Corinthians 1:22** says that God has put His Spirit in the hearts of believers and we know that the Holy Spirit guides us and gives us wisdom. If He is not guiding you to church, then maybe it's because you are not part of the body. I'm afraid that there is going to be a lot of people who die and expect to hear God say, "Welcome my good and faithful servant" because they said the right thing to the right person and walked the aisle and maybe even got baptized. **Matthew 7:16** says we will be known by our fruits and there are lots of people who have said they want Jesus to be Lord of their life and yet they are fruitless. Those people will hear God say, "Go away. I never knew you." Part of being fruitful is being an active member of a group of believers. It always has been and always will be.

I'm not saying this to get more bodies in the door so we can brag about how many people we have. What I'm concerned about are those people who think they are believers but aren't; those that are content to have fire insurance but don't see the need for church every Sunday. I understand that almost nobody can make it to church every time the doors are open. That's not the person I'm concerned about. You know that.

So, right now, my dear and very precious family, please hear me. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes like we do every Sunday at this time. But this time, I want every one of us, even me, to spend a few minutes, not just talking to God but really listening for that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, our Guide. Allow Him to reassure you of your salvation. Let Him bring to mind that day, that occasion that you accepted God's forgiveness and you repented of – turned away from - your sins and confessed Him to be your Lord and your Savior, believing in Him to be the Way, the Truth and the Life because no man gets to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). If you don't hear that voice or if you are not sure; if you can't remember a specific time when you made that decision, then I need to talk to you right now. It's too important to not be positive. Do it right now as the music plays.