

2/18/24 Christ Fellowship

What Is the Church Good For? – Acts 2:42-47

Ben, you've been out at Lockheed Martin for how many years? A bunch. In all your time out there, how many weddings have you seen performed there? I know it's a big place with lots of rooms. Surely they have weddings out there. None? Really. Huh.

Joe, you've been out at the steel plant for some time now. And I know you've told me about folks almost being killed out there but have you ever had a funeral at your place of business? No funerals at all. Huh.

Why do you think that is? Oh sure, every now and then somebody will get married at Walmart or something because that's where the couple met or whatever but that's rare. Why do you think people usually have their weddings and funerals at the church? I believe it is because they want the most important times of their lives to be in a place that is close to God. They want to be blessed by God at their wedding and at their funeral. And people rightfully associate church with God. No, God doesn't live in this building any more than He lives in any other building but the church is a representative of God in some ways.

We are called to be holy as He is holy. We are called to look like Him and act like Him. We will never be God but we should strive to act more like Him since the world is watching us and expects us to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. I bought a push mower at a garage sale last year. Took it home and pulled the starter rope. Pulled it pulled it. Nothing. Couldn't get it to start for nothing. I took it back to the garage sale and the man said, *"Well, did you cuss at it? You gotta cuss at it to get it started."* I said, *"Sir, I'm a preacher. I don't cuss. I don't even know if I remember how to cuss."* The guy said, ***"You keep pulling on that rope and you'll remember."***

Since the world is watching us Christians and since we are called to be church-goers and representatives of Christ, I want to know what we, as the church, are supposed to do. What are we supposed to look like? What would God want our church to be and what are we good for? Well, let's look at the model for the church. It is found in **Acts chapter 2**. Think of this passage like we think of the Constitution for our United States. Our Founding Fathers agreed by God-given genius that this is what our country should look like. They wrote it down and gave us the model for what our government should be. A woman asked Ben Franklin what kind of government it was and he famously replied, ***"A republic if you can keep it."***

Well, we have seen what happens when our government strays away from the ideal model. We are dealing with those problems right now. And this passage in **Acts chapter 2** gives us the model for the Christian church. Yes, there are cultural and social issues that will keep us from

looking exactly like this church did that was started two thousand years ago on the other side of the globe but there is still a powerful model shown here that we don't want to stray from. Let's look closer at **Acts 2:42-47**.

The occasion is just after Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on those first believers like a fire and you remember that Peter stood up to preach and this time, instead of saying something typically Peter-ish and dumb, he preaches a powerful and eloquent message and 3,000 people are saved. That's some revival, huh? Now, what is going to happen to all those new converts? What is this first church going to be good for? Let's see it. **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.

They devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and to prayer. But what does it mean to be devoted? Well, I'll tell you what. Why don't you ask your spouse that question? "Honey, you know I love you but just how devoted is your definition of devoted?" Then see what happens. See, I'm afraid that most people ask that question the wrong way. They want to ask God what His definition of devoted is, as in, what's the least I can do and still be considered devoted? But if that wouldn't work for your spouse, why would it work for God?

We are called the Bride of Christ in several places in scripture. **Ephesians 5**, **2 Corinthians 11** and **Revelation 19** all talk about the church as the Bride of Christ and we know that the world is watching us to see how we live when we call ourselves Christians so what does it mean to be devoted? The word Luke uses here for devoted means to continue strongly, as in to continue and continue and continue.

So, what does that look like? Well, I'll tell you one thing about devotion. It's contagious. In whatever you are doing, devotion is contagious. Devotion is contagious in your marriage, in your job, your hobbies, your interests, everything. If you are devoted to a cause, it encourages others to be devoted as well. Especially if they look up to you, they will see you continuing in it and be encouraged to do the same.

I have a pastor friend who I see on Facebook taking long vacations several times a year. I know a guy needs a break every now and then but I'm afraid that sends the wrong message to his

church. To me it says that church is real important, you know, unless I have something better to do. I don't think the first church was devoted like that.

Now, let's see what exactly they were devoted to. It says they were devoted to the apostles' teaching. Why were they devoted to the apostles' teaching? Because they had been with Jesus! How exciting that must have been! Peter, tell us what else happened! James, what was it like? That must have been great! They were there. They heard Him speak and were able to tell the church what they heard. You know, the words we now have written in this book. How great is that?

Yes, our church is also devoted to the apostles' teaching because we teach what they wrote down. The day you hear me stand up and announce we are going to start a series based on any other book other than the Bible is the day I need several of you to pick me up and chunk me out the door. We are Bible-based. Period. When people ask me what kind of church we are I usually say we are a church that reads the Bible and does what it says. We are that kind of church because we are devoted to the apostles' teachings.

We are also devoted to koinonia. Did you know that? Koinonia is the Greek word for fellowship. It's even in our name and it's the next word here in our passage, still in **verse 42**. Fellowship means to have everything in common. It means to share; share your lives, share your problems, your victories, your talents and your struggles. They were devoted to fellowship.

Okay, I've told a few of you about this and I'm hesitant to say it to too many people because I'm afraid somebody will steal my idea. I have a plan for my retirement. Okay, it's not really for my retirement because I don't plan to retire but when y'all fire me, don't worry about me because I have a plan. I'll be a millionaire pretty quickly too.

My plan is to start a business just listening to people. The longer I live and the longer I do this job, the more I realize this is a much-needed service. People just need to be heard! So, I plan to start off charging a dollar a minute and I'll go to your house or your business or to Paw Paw's old folks' home and just listen to whatever you want to say. The business will be called "Ears To You" and I will sit there and say, "Really?" "Then what happened?" "No! Tell me more!" for as long as you want to pay. You laugh but how many of you know somebody that would be a great customer? Huh?

You know what that is? Koinonia. It's fellowship. It's somebody spending time with you, listening to you, praying for you, crying with you and laughing with you and what kind of psychopath doesn't want that? Seriously, everybody needs that. We crave that. We crave

having somebody pay just a little bit of attention to us and when they pay attention to us, it too is contagious. We start to pay attention to them. Bingo! Everybody gets fed. Everybody is content. Everybody...is family. That's what family does. Family fellowships and we are devoted to that. And you can't fellowship if you aren't with your family.

They were devoted to the teaching, the fellowship and it says to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Now, that phrase "breaking of bread" is also used in **verse 46** and it could mean either the Lord's Supper or to just eating a regular meal together. I think, from the context, that **verse 42** means the Lord's Supper and **verse 46** means a regular meal. And we do both around here.

I bet the meals they served together were a lot like what we do. Whatever their cultural foods were, I'm sure there was plenty to go around just like there is around here. I'm sure some of the saintly sisters would bring their usual casserole and most of the single men were just encouraged to, I don't know, bring some plates or some chips or something.

The other use of the word means to celebrate the Lord's Supper. I believe, in context, the first usage means this. They devoted themselves to the Lord's Supper or Communion. Can you imagine taking the Lord's Supper from Peter or one of the others that was there with Jesus in the upper room and heard Jesus say, *"This is my body that was broken for you"*? How powerful that must have been. But there is something powerful about taking the Lord's Supper anytime because Jesus said to do it and He blesses it when it is done. So, Christ Fellowship does it often.

The last thing in this verse says they were devoted to is prayer. They devoted themselves to prayer. They continued strongly in prayer. They believed in the power of prayer. Now, as I was thinking about what all this means to us as members of Christ Fellowship, I came across a couple of quotes on prayer that I would like to share. The first is from **E.M. Bounds** who said, *"What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use--men of prayer, men mighty in prayer."* I thought that was so appropriate for what we are living through today even though Bounds died over a hundred years ago.

The other quote I found was from **Martin Luther** who died nearly 500 years ago. He said, *"Pray as if everything depends on God, then work as if everything depends on you."* I believe those two quotes sum up perfectly where we are today. If we are going to be the church that God has called us to be and continue strongly in all the things that the first church was devoted to and continue to minister to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated as God has called us specifically to do then we have to start with prayer.

That's what they were devoted to. That's the kind of church they were devoted to. Now read the rest of that passage. *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.*

Doesn't that sound like Christ Fellowship? Does that sound like you? But let's be real here. Look at the very last sentence. *"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."* Again, there are cultural and social differences that will never allow us to be just like that first church but of all the things they had, that's what I miss the most.

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' 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.

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.

Tell them that Jesus was our model for it (Luke 4:16) and that He commanded it. **Hebrews 10:25** says do not neglect meeting together. 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 *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. Who cares about that? 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.

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.