

June 16, 2014

What The Church Is Supposed To Look Like

Acts 2:42 (NASB), ***“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”***

Our conception of church in our modern world is very different than how the early church practiced worship and fellowship. Most American churches have little resemblance to the church in the New Testament. Many American “Christians” view church as something to do on the occasional Sunday morning when you have nothing else to do. Some even view church attendance and involvement as not all that important to their lives as believers. I am always a bit skeptical about the veracity of one’s commitment to Christ when they tell me they see no need to be in church.

In the New Testament church things were much different than they are today. This is very interesting in light of the fact that there was no such thing as religious freedom and that many Christians were openly persecuted for their belief in Jesus Christ. In Acts 2 at the end of the first sermon that Peter preached we see the result of that message and a glimpse of what the early church looked like.

In verse 37 after Peter has finished preaching the people ask: ***“Brethren, what shall we do?”*** Peter answers in verse 38 with, ***“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*** Then in verse 41 we see the astounding result of this: ***“So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”***

After this massive baptism, these new believers then immediately enter the church. Verse 42 begins with the words, ***“They were continually...”*** That word ***“continually”*** is translated to mean “adhere to or persist in.” They stuck together and that togetherness revolved around a few things that are vital to the Christians life.

The first thing they persisted in was ***“devoting themselves to the apostles teaching...”*** The ***“teaching”*** or instruction was the instruction that the apostles had been given by the Lord and it is the foundational content for the believer’s spiritual growth and maturity; it is the Scriptures. This is one reason that belonging to and attending a Bible believing church is so very important. While a weekly Sunday school lesson and Biblically based message are certainly not enough they are a very solid foundation for a believer to continue to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Lord.

The second area that they persisted in was ***“to fellowship...”*** The word ***“fellowship”*** is variously translated to mean “association or partnership.” Much of the time we in the church in America assume that ***“fellowship”*** involves a meal and some sort of fun activity. Actually the word ***“fellowship”*** denoted being in association with each other or partnership for the advancement of the Gospel. While meals and activities are not unimportant they are not to be the primary function of fellowship or partnership. There are far too many churches today that function as little more than a social or dinner club.

As Christ followers we are to spiritually stimulate one another to righteousness and obedience.

Romans 12:10 tells us to **“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; giving preference to one another in honor.”** Hebrews 10:24-25 expands on this **“and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, nor forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”** Fellowship or partnering together with other believers is a vital part of being a Christian. I am always skeptical of someone’s salvation when they refuse to partner with other Christians for progress of the gospel.

The next area in which these early Christians persisted was in **“the breaking of the bread.”** In other words part of their worship together was the commemoration of the Lord’s Supper and they took this seriously enough to commemorate this fairly often. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 it says, **“Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread, which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?”** This denotes to us the importance of corporate worship or worshipping together. The “Christian” who has no desire to be with other believers and worship with them should seriously examine their salvation.

The last area in which these Christians persisted was **“and to prayer.”** Back in chapter 1 of Acts in verse 14 it says, **“These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”** Prayer is the foundation of any church that is truly effective for the Gospel. The Christian who refuses to pray with other believers, who refuses to humble themselves together with other believers must **“examine”** themselves.

The Christ follower in the early church was drawn to other believers like a magnet. They were virtually always together and they took seriously the importance of sound doctrinal teaching and preaching, partnering with other believers for the Gospel, they share in the remembrance of what Christ has done for them, and finally to prayer. We in the church today have largely ignored this pattern and tend to get upset with our churches when we feel they “demand” too much from us. The Scriptural truth though is that we the church have departed dramatically from the pattern of the early church.