

## The Devotion of the Early Church

Sermon delivered on September 13th, 2015

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Text: *Acts 2:36-47*

### Introduction

After the Holy Spirit came down with power upon the disciples, Peter preached a powerful sermon which shook Jerusalem. He preached Christ and Him crucified, to those who were involved in the crucifixion of Christ. But then proclaimed that this Jesus whom they have crucified, God hath raised from the dead.

Then Peter concluded his sermon with these words ...

36: Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Peter a remarkable sermon. It was a spontaneous sermon. He did not have time to prepare this sermon and not even time to prepare notes. And if you read the sermon that Peter preached here, you cannot say it was a great sermon, in the modern sense. It was not alliterated. There was no discernible outline. It was not a cleverly crafted sermon. But, as we will see, it was a powerful sermon. First of all, it was preached by the power of the Holy Spirit - the presence of the Holy Spirit was evident. It was Biblical - the main points were proved by the Bible. It was direct and practical, their guilt of the hearers was so pressed home that they were "pricked in their hearts." It was Christ-centered - Christ was at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end.

In *Acts 2:37-41* we see the response of the hearers ...

*Acts 2:37* Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, **Men and brethren, what shall we do?** *38:* Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. *39:* For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call. *40:* And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

*Acts 2:41* **Then they that gladly received his word were baptized:** and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

They believed and stepped forward and were boldly baptized and then added to the church.

What is happening here is that Jesus is doing what He said He would do. This is a manifestation of what Jesus promised He would do when He was with His disciples before His crucifixion and resurrection.

**Matthew 16:18** And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

### **What was that early church like?**

This morning I want us to consider the first century church and what it was like. What were the practices and activities of the church that Christ first built? If you and I were given the privilege to attend the gathering of the first century church, what would we see?

First of all, I am sure we would not see an elaborate or flashy church services. For sure there would be no fancy worship bands, no professional worship leaders and teams, probably no church choir (though I have nothing against choir), no strobe lights, no dim lights, no fog smoke machine, no organs, no pianos, no stained glass windows, no church buildings. There is nothing in their singing and worship services that is spectacular. There is nothing in there about entertainment. So, if you are looking for entertainment, the early church is not the place to go. But if you are seeking God and His presence the early church is the right place to go. For in spite of the lack of these things in the early church, they powerfully impacted their community and turn the world upside down.

I am praying that we at Grace & Truth would seek to emulate the early church's activities and that we would be living, breathing powerful church that we could impact our community and we could pass on to our next generation.

### **What were the Practices and Activities of the Early Church?**

So what are the activities of the church Christ is building, that they made the difference in this world?

**42:** And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

**43:** And fear (awe) came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. **44:** And all that believed were together, and had all things common; **45:** And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. **46:** And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, **47:** Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

They were devoted themselves to doctrine, fellowship, communion, and prayers. Dear friends, these are the means of grace. These are the things that first century church were engaged in. This is the life of the church. Though obviously there are differences in the church after 2000 years, the early church is a model for us. The activities of the church remain the same: doctrine, fellowship, communion, and prayers.

## 1. The Apostles' Doctrine

42: And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The early church continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, which refers to ...

### a) Word of God

They were committed to the Word of God. This is the life of the church and of the believer. They believe the words of Christ when he said ...

Matthew 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

We have to remember that this was before printing press which means not everyone has a copy of the Word of God. And yet in spite of this, the early Christians were devoted to the Word of God. They found ways to expose themselves to the word of God, by public reading and teaching of the word of God. The early church was devotedly committed to the renewing of their minds through the Word of God.

### b) Doctrine of Christ

42: And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The apostles' doctrine or teaching also refers to the doctrine of Christ. The subject of the apostles is Christ. Christ is the author and substance of their doctrine. Their doctrine was Christ-centered - Christ was at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end.

The first century church was committed to - the Word of God and the Doctrine of Christ.

I commend you for faithfully coming to our gathering Sunday after Sunday, you have voluntarily put yourselves under the ministry of the word.

## 2. Fellowship

42: And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The early church was steadfastly devoted to fellowship.

### What is fellowship?

Fellowship is not eating meal together, having coffee and donuts together, or playing basketball together, watching Padres or Chargers game together. True Christian fellowship is far deeper than simple socializing together.

The word fellowship in verse 42 comes from the Greek word **koinōnia**. We see this same word "koina" "koinania" but it is translated differently in verse 44. And verse 44 gives us a clue on what fellowship is.

44: And all that believed were together, and had all things **common**;

That's what fellowship is. It is sharing of something in common. Fellowship speaks of shared life. It is living out our lives together. It is getting involved in the lives of others. It is being there in time of sorrow, suffering, sickness, and separation.

This fellowship also include partnering in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Philippians 1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4: Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, 5: For your **fellowship in the gospel** from the first day until now;

Another thing included in the fellowship is suffering.

Philippians 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the **fellowship of his sufferings**, being made conformable unto his death;

This is what we are called as a church, as member of one another. Church is not an event for people to come and watch. Church is an assembly of people who shares life together and partners together to labor for God.

### **3. Breaking of Bread**

42: And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in **breaking of bread**, and in prayers.

Breaking of bread is commonly called the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, Communion, etc. In taking communion, we are proclaiming that Jesus's sacrifice is central to our mission and our life together as the church.

The Lord's Supper is remembering Christ and what He has done. The breaking of bread reminds us of His broken body and the fruit of the vine reminds us of His shed blood.

1 Corinthians 11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 24: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: **this is my body**, which is broken for you: **this do in remembrance of me**. 25 : After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, **This cup is the new testament in my blood**: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 26: **For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come**.

When we celebrate the Lord's Table we are proclaiming to the world the sacrifice of our Lord and His coming again.

What a way of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ! An overwhelming and powerful way, when a wholly committed group of believers steadfastly and persuasively and enthusiastically participate in the Lord's Supper.

#### **4. Prayer**

42: And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in **prayers**.

Prayers, not only in private. Prayer, not only in their closets, and in their families, but in the church; in the public prayers of the church.

Praying for each other. Praying for God's blessing. This is how Christ is building His church. This is how we are to grow in our walk with God.

Mentioning each name, every church member. Each day, a different family. Get to know your fellow member ...

#### **Continually Devoted**

They faithfully engaged in these activities. Those who genuinely were converted to Jesus Christ immediately devoted themselves to the Word of God, to fellowship, to the Lord's table, and prayer.

And what is the result?

43: And fear (awe) came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

Everyone had a sense of awe. There was a sense that something supernatural was present.

44: And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45: And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46: And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47: Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Let us pray that Grace & Truth will be a kind of church where people would sense the presence and the power God producing holy fear, love, unity, joy, to the praise and thanksgiving to our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ!

AMEN!