

Christ's Church

Introduction

If I asked each one of us to fill in this sentence, **I want our church to be all about _____**. Think about it – what would you place in the blank? I hope you will be able to know what to fill in by the end of the message this morning.

In these verses we get a glimpse of the life and spirit of the early church. I think Luke gives us a good deal from these last verses in chapter 2 that can be applied to our church. Let me try to show you how I think Luke put this text together and what he wants us to get from it. Here in this passage, we are presented with a type of model church, even though it was not perfect. A few chapters further into Acts we will find that it was far from perfect. It had hypocrites in it, as do churches today. It had doctrinal errors, as many churches do today. However, we have the advantage today of having the written New Testament. Remember the Acts of the Apostles was written 30 to 35 years after Peter's sermon on Pentecost. So, the early church's source was the apostles teaching and letters that were beginning to circulate. For us today following the Word of God, as it is written, will keep a church from doctrinal errors. This Acts early church certainly had sinful people, of all types, just as churches do today. In spite of these shortcomings, I believe these basic disciplines put forth by Luke are why the early church exploded and grew rapidly, and these verses and disciplines will benefit us in our day as we live as the church of the Living God.

The goal of Canyon Bible Church should be to live out the scripture passage of Acts 2:42-47 and in addition the instructions of Paul, ¹⁶“that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in

your inner being,¹⁷ so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,**¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,²¹ **to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**” (Ephesians 3:16-21) My beloved, may this be said of us, Canyon Bible Church, as we live the Word of God and bring glory to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Once we are finished with exploring the end of Acts chapter 2 this morning, I wonder if the way you filled in the blank of the sentence will change. **I want our church to be all about _____.** Well, our time this morning will tell if your focus changes.

Pray

Passage Structure

Our passage begins in verse 41 and ends in verse 47 with a statement about the Lord adding people to the church. So, verse 41 begins, **“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”**

Notice the passive structure - it was not the apostles adding, but the Lord did the adding souls to the church. As Peter preached, he was used by God for God’s glory!

Verse 41, “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” Now jump with me to the end, to verse 47b, **“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

According to Luke it is the Lord Himself that is building the church by adding people **“day by day”**. It is the Lord who calls and the apostles were obedient to share the truth of God concerning Jesus the Christ and His Gospel of Good News. As Jesus

said to Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build my church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:17-18) The Lord Jesus is the one calling His people to Himself, He is building the church, as we read in verse 39 of Acts 2, “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, **everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.**” God calls and we come together to live as His Church, for His glory and He blesses us greatly as we live in obedience.

Now between these two statements of verses 41 and 47 is a description of how the church lived after they had been “added” to or “called” by the Lord through Peter’s sermon on Pentecost and then daily by the Lord afterward. Verse 42 is a summary statement, which Luke unpacks in more detail in verses 43 to 47. Verse 42 says that the believers were devoted, meaning they were serious and earnestly persisted in four disciplines given in verse 42; “**they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**” Each of these four disciplines turns up one way or another in the following verses. So, let’s explore how Luke unpacks these four disciplines God teaches that His Church should live out.

The Apostles’ Teaching

First, “**they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching**”, what does this mean? To put it context we need to add verse 43, “**And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.**” Luke mentions the apostles in both verses 42 and 43 but he does not expound on their teaching. Instead, Luke mentions the apostle’s miracles and that fear and awe filled the believers. We need to understand this sense of fear is tied to verse 37, where the listeners of Peter’s sermon cried out. “**What shall we do?**” Peter’s preaching and

teaching of God's truth about His Son Jesus Christ had cut these people to the heart with the truth of God and it was not just about physical miracles God did through Jesus and then Peter and the apostles. So, when verse 43 says, **“And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”** The first wonderful sign done by Peter was the preaching of the Word of God, the Good News, the Gospel of Christ. I do not believe it was just miracles like healing someone or raising them from the dead, but the Gospel of Christ cut them to the heart and they were in awe of God's truth and the hearing of God's truth in many languages and people who were enemies of God confessed and repented of their sin and turned to God by believing in Jesus. My beloved this was a miracle of God, for by God's power they came to believe. God moved **“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”** (v. 41) This is the fulfillment of prophecy for God's New Testament Church, ¹⁸ **“when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. ¹⁹ And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them.”** (Ezekiel 11:18-20) In other words, when the early church devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles, they had in mind the many wonders and signs done through the apostles, which included the teaching of God's Word as a sign and wonder and was a sign and wonder done through the power of the Holy Spirit. I am not saying the apostles did not do miraculous signs and wonders beyond the preaching of God's truth and the messiahship of Jesus. I am saying, it was all of these that caused these new converts to come together in awe and be God's Church, to be a community of believers. Working overseas in areas with no church or Bible everything was based on God's Word being taught and preached. In the beginning we did see new converts coming to Christ through visions and miracles. However, as the church was planted and the Bible was translated into their language the miraculous signs went away, they were not needed any more, for the

power of God's Word and the Holy Spirit moved and God's Church was being birthed and spreading.

If the teachings of the apostles were inspired by God, then these teachings were nothing to be toyed with, God's teaching through the apostles were nothing to be trifled with; both then, as the new church was formed or today as we live as God's Church, as a community of believers. God calls us and when He calls, we are to surrender our lives to Him and live in obedience. Any church that decides God was not smart enough and His Word needs to be corrected or changed or added to in order to meet the needs of our modern corrupt society - has crossed the line. My beloved we need to live in fear and awe of the apostle's teaching as God has given in His Bible. When the apostles spoke God worked and this caused a sense of wonder and awe and fear at the uttering of His truth, and the stark reality of what the apostles preached cut people to their sin-riddled hearts. The church devoted itself to the apostle's teaching in context of awe-inspiring preaching with its wonders and signs.

I believe Paul brings this into focus by admonishing the church to ¹² **“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”** (Colossians 3:12-17) My beloved if we, you and me, live in such a manner it will be so appealing to those God has called they will come and ask about Christ and hear the Word of God and then

they will call out “What shall we do?” and like Peter we will respond in love with, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

When we live as church, the Lord will call and add to His Church those who hear God’s truth in love. If our desire is to be a New Testament remnant church, we must hold fast to the Word of God without being legalistic and harsh. As Paul taught, ¹⁸ “For through *Christ* we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” (Ephesians 2:18-20) I pray this describes us here this morning; we are the household of God built on the apostles and prophets found in God Word, the Bible.

Fellowship

Second, what about fellowship? Verse 42, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the **fellowship** ...” We have a lot of images that come to our minds when we think of fellowship. Most of our views of fellowship are pretty tame. We think of simple togetherness and that is certainly part of it. But what is Luke’s idea of fellowship? Luke seems to focus on another more radical meaning of fellowship. The word “**fellowship**” or in the Greek “*koinonia*” is built on the root meaning of the word “common”, having in common or sharing. This is what I think Luke means in verses 44 to 45 and this will be my focus as we unpack Luke’s meaning of “**fellowship**” in verse 42. Because verse 44 speaks of having possessions “in common” and the word “common” or *koina* is the same root as “fellowship” or *koinonia* in verse 42.

So here is what part of what fellowship was like in the early church, beginning in verse 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.” So, *koinonia* or fellowship means having things *koina* or in common. In a moment Luke is going to talk about times of eating and praying together—what we usually call fellowship. But that is not his first illustration of fellowship. His first illustration is that the believers were so bond together through Christ that if one was in need, the others did not feel they had the right to live on in prosperity without giving up something to meet the need. So, they would sell possessions and use the money to meet the needs of the poor in the church.

In our modern way of thinking this can be a threatening text. Many have worked hard to gain the possessions they have and it is American to believe in private ownership. It is assumed in the 8th of the 10 Commandments, “Thou shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15) applies to and endorses private property. We read this verse in light of our modern thinking and add quickly that there was no coercion and that is why it was OK because they sold their property voluntarily.

This is made even more clear in chapter 5, verse 4 of Acts, where Peter speaks to Ananias and Sapphira about the sale of their property. Peter asks, “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?” The problem was not what they did with their property but their deceit. People like to point out that verses 44 and 45 do not contain a command that we, as the modern church, are to obey even if this was modeled by the early church. Some claim this was an experiment in communal life and there is no evidence that it worked. They refer to Romans chapter 15, where Paul had collected funds for the poor, ²⁶“For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.” Had communal sharing and life worked then why 20 years later are there still poor suffering in the church?

But we need to be very careful here. O, how easy it is to justify our lifestyles and our attachment to things by writing off threatening texts. There is no doubt in my mind that Luke recorded this fellowship because it was praiseworthy. Luke admired this sacrificial love for the sake of the needy. He was giving the well-to-do Theophilus and in principle, well-to-do Americans a lesson in the way Christians who stand in awe of God handle their possessions and live in community.

This was one of Luke's great passions; that Christians use their possessions for the needs of others and not just for their own comforts. Luke alone tells the story of the Good Samaritan in chapter 10, verses 30 to 37. Luke alone tells the parable of the rich fool who built bigger and bigger barns in chapter 12, verses 16 to 21, and the story of God's great banquet that people would not come to because they had fields and cattle to tend to in chapter 14, verses 16 to 24. Luke gives us the story of the dishonest manager in chapter 16, verses 1 to 8 and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus later in chapter 16, verses 19 to 31. More than any other New Testament writer, Luke stresses the danger of letting our life consist in the things we possess. I believe, Luke would argue that the radical fellowship of Acts 2, verses 44 and 45 was the antidote for the suicide of materialism committed by the man who built bigger and bigger barns and lost his soul.

The writer of Hebrews supports Luke's approach although in a more general sense,²³ "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."²⁴ **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,**²⁵ **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." (Hebrews 10:23-25) As Christ's church we are to care for and take care of each other. Paul wrote,⁴ "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,⁵ so we, though many, **are one body in Christ,** and individually members one of another." (Romans 12:4-5) If we as a church "are one body in Christ" that

means we each care for the rest of the body. As with many things of our spiritual life, it is a heart issue. How is your heart towards God first and secondly, how is your heart towards your brothers and sisters in Christ?

The Breaking of Bread

Third, what about “the breaking of bread” as verse 42, continues, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to **the breaking of bread ...**”? Luke unpacks this in verse 46, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts ...” The “breaking bread” certainly could refer to the Lord’s Supper. ²³ “... the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “**This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.**” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.**” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) But “breaking bread” also refers to simple table of fellowship. Certainly, the partaking of food with “glad and generous hearts” is an important time of fellowship and shows togetherness was a precious thing to the believers in the early church, as it should be for us. They loved to be together at meals. It seems like they were together with each other in this way almost every day. That was the kind of love the early Christians had for each other when they stood in awe of God. The church is to be community in every sense of the word with people involved in each other’s lives. As Paul wrote to the believing community in Corinth, ¹² “**For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.**” ¹³ **For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.**” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) Paul uses words; “one

body”, “one Spirit” and all believers “drink of one Spirit”. Just as the Triune God is One, as a community of God, we are to be one.

Prayers

Finally, what about “prayers”? Finishing verse 42, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” I see prayers alluded to in verse 47, “praising God and having favor with all the people.” When they gathered as community in the temple and when they ate together in their homes, Luke says they focused on God, they spent time praising God. These were not the kind of churchy get-togethers where you can talk about politics or problems with the world and not spend time focused on Jesus. They did not get together and listen to a preacher tell stories and occasionally allude to God’s Word and Jesus. When they came together, they spent time with God, His Word and glorifying Jesus. They spent time in prayer. They spent calling out to God, listening to God, lifting each other up to God.

Church Life

So, let me sum up some the elements of early church life given to us by Luke.

- They focused a lot on the teaching of the apostles. We have an advantage by possessing the written Word of God, both the Old and New Testaments.
- They experienced wonders and signs, which, even though they are abused, are still valid. I find nowhere in the scriptures where it says they ended. However, the scriptures also say we are to test all gifts.
- The early Christians lived in a state of wonder and awe as they saw day in and day out the stark reality of God working and building His Church. They knew the cost of walking away from family and the Old Covenant to follow Jesus.

- They shared their possessions freely with the needy as though they did not even own them, but all their possessions really belonged to God and His Church.
- They spent time together as a community of believers in the temple, worshipping and praying
- They ate together in their homes almost every day, they loved being with each other.
- When they met with each other, by their worship they met God. They listened to God's Word, they prayed and they praised.

In closing let me ask, what makes all these disciplines work together? What is the glue of their faith, the driving force that made those believers free from their possessions and eager to meet needs of others within the church? How did they live with gladness and generosity and praise and prayer as they met and ate together day after day, even in the midst of persecution?

I think the key is found in verse 43 in the phrase, “awe came upon every soul”, God filled these believers, He gave them faith, these people, these believers had a joyful, trembling sense of awe, one does not trifle with the God of the apostles. That is not our society's experience. Today for most people, including many professing Christians, God is an idea to talk about or an inference used during an argument or a family tradition to be preserved. But for very few people - God is a stark, fearsome, stunning, awesome, shocking present reality and the reason for their very existence. For most people today God is either tame or impotent. Most people think of God as distant and as silent. Where are the churches of whom Luke could say today, “Fear, awe, wonder and trembling of God is upon every soul”? The absence of this fear has a direct effect on the way we accumulate possessions for ourselves, the way we

ignore the needy, the way we trivialize fellowship, and the way we play more than we pray.

This is another reason why my heart longs for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in extraordinary ways. If the awesome teaching of the apostles stands forth as God's truth the way it did in Peter's preaching on Pentecost and if the Lord confirmed His truth with wonders and signs, then this holy fear would come upon the church and material possessions would become as nothing, except to serve others. God's people, not things, would become precious beyond words and when we met each other, we would meet God and prayer and praise and His Spirit would be poured out of us everywhere we are. My beloved this is my prayer and dream for us as Canyon Bible Church. Now, as we come to the end of our passage and exploring the Word of God found in Acts chapter 2, how would you complete the sentence, "I want our church to be all about _____." How you fill in the blank will determine what kind of church Canyon Bible Church is. Amen!