

We began the book of Acts with the account of Jesus ascension, and His instructions for the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit came with visual and audible signs, so that it was unmistakable to the disciples, and to the crowd, that something supernatural had occurred. Full of the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up to preach the first gospel sermon. He explained to the Jews, who were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, that what they saw and heard was in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. He shared the gospel message concerning Jesus' sacrificial death, and resurrection. Peter spoke words of conviction, telling the people that they were guilty of killing their Messiah. In response to the call to repentance and faith, 3,000 were added to their number that day, and the New Testament church was born.

Having established a new faith relationship with Christ, tonight's passage deals with how knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord effected relationships between brothers and sisters in Christ. To see how the love of Christ expresses itself through loving others, please read along with me, Acts 2:42-47.

In the fellowship of believers, Luke tells us that the people in the church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. We can surmise that the content of their teaching came from a contextual understanding of the Old Testament scriptures, as well as the direct teachings of Jesus Christ. Because this is the first item in Luke's list, we can see that Biblical Doctrine had a primary place of importance in the life of the newly founded church. Once the people surrendered their lives in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, they needed to be disciplined in order to have a deeper understanding of God, what He had done for them, and the practical application of their new relationship with the Lord.

The issue of doctrine should be of primary importance in the church today, especially in light of the fact that some churches preach, and teach, watered down doctrine, or no biblical doctrine at all. As Paul said elsewhere, we preach Christ and Him crucified. At Hickory Hammock Baptist Church, our doctrines arise out of our sincere belief that the bible is the inspired word of God. When interpreted in its context, the bible reveals the absolute truth, without any mixture of error. It is the standard by which we measure all proclaimed truth.

We come from a biblical worldview, so that we filter everything through the principles of God's word. We take our stand upon those principles without regard to political correctness or the teachings of this unbelieving and sinful world. This is how we can say with confidence that abortion is wrong. It is how we know that marriage is between a man and a woman. It's how we know that the entitlement mindset of our society is godless. God speaks to us through His word so that we know His will and can discern, with the help of the Holy Spirit, right from wrong. The fruits of our study of God's word are the doctrines it produces. The application of those doctrines is what brings the Lord's victory in our lives.

The second item Luke mentions is the fellowship that the believers had together. Even in secular life, we tend to hang out with family, and other people that we like, or because we have common interests, and life experiences. We spend time with them. If we are close, we'll do anything we can to help them out. We spend time together because we enjoy being with each other, and doing things together.

In terms of the church, members have many things in common. First and foremost is that we have all been saved through the shed blood of Jesus. Our faith binds us together as brothers and sisters in Christ, making us members of the family of God. We enjoy church activities. We study the word of God together. We encourage and uplift one another.

I often marvel at how in our church we are united in Christ, even though we come from diverse backgrounds and life experience. You enrich my life, but I would not have ever gotten to know many of you had it not been for our mutual faith, and association, in this church family. I can honestly say that I love you in the Lord. Even if a person is a member of another church, we share a mutual bond, if they can honestly profess that Jesus Christ is the Lord of their life.

The practice of breaking bread together is mentioned twice in this passage. If we go to one another's homes, or go out to a restaurant to eat together, we enjoy one another's company. We talk about all kinds of things that have been going on in our lives. We cut up and have some fun while we enjoy a meal. It's a great time of fellowship that helps us to stay connected, and to grow closer.

The context here is that these are believers. They know one another and are bound together by their faith in Jesus Christ. The bible seems to indicate that the people in the early church ate together, pretty much, every time they met.

Bread and wine were staples in the Jewish diet. Jesus instructed His disciples that every time they ate bread or drank wine, that they were to remember Him, and His sacrifice for their sins. In other words He said, "Every time you eat, remember me." That is why Christians ask for the Lord's blessings on the food at each meal. We remember Him, and thank Him for His provision.

Of course, it became impractical for large groups of believers to eat a full meal together every time they met. Still the church recognized the importance of honoring the Lord, as a church family, through enjoying a meal together for the expressed purpose of corporately remembering Christ, and His sacrifice. This is how the tradition of taking the Lord's Supper together, the way we practice it today, came to be. In our homes, and in our hearts, we remember the Lord every time we eat, but in our church we honor our Lord from our hearts as we take the Lord's Supper together.

We celebrate the Lord's Supper here four or five times a year. We will take the Lord's Supper together this Sunday. It is a special, Holy time, when we can reflect upon our relationship with the Lord, draw near to Him, and say thank you Jesus for all you mean to me.

The final activity Luke mentions in verse 42 is prayer. Prayer was central to the early church, and it is equally important for us today. We pray privately all the time, and we pray corporately whenever we meet. In simplest terms, prayer is talking to God. We should approach God with all due reverence, and with thankful hearts. We have to be honest with Him, because He knows us better than we know ourselves. We approach God willing to submit to anything He might tell us. We can ask for anything in faith, and He will hear and answer our prayers, not always exactly the way we might want, but always according to His divine will.

The bible says, in verse 43, that everyone was filled with awe. They were in awe at the movement of God through the Holy Spirit. They were in awe at the reality that they had been born again. The believers were in awe that they witnessed the wonders, and miraculous signs, which God did through the apostles. Today we stand in awe of God for who He is, and what He does in our lives and circumstances when we turn everything over to Him in prayer. God is constantly answering our prayers, and we stand in awe of His power, glory, majesty, and holiness.

In verses 44 and 45, Luke speaks of the generosity of the believers. They shared everything, and took from the surplus of God's blessings upon their lives, and gave the proceeds to others who had needs. This shows that the people in the early church really cared about one another. They were willing to make personal sacrifices, in order to meet the needs of others.

Some people think that these verses suggest communal living. I don't think they lived in a commune the way we might think of communes today, because the text indicates that they maintained, and ate in each other's homes. They just gave generously to the ministry and the work of the kingdom of God. We do the same thing through giving, and administering, our tithes and offerings. Sometimes people have a hard time with the idea of tithing and it can become an obstacle for them to come to church. A tithe means 10% of the total of what God gives you. It is spelled out specifically in the Old Testament, and the principle is affirmed in the New Testament. Tithing is an indication of Christian maturity. It is one indication of the depth of a person's faith, and whether or not they are living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Beyond our tithes we bring offerings for specific needs, and to support ministries. Mature Christians give with joyful hearts, not because we have to, but because we want to. Giving is a tangible way that we participate in what God is doing in our church, and our world.

Verse 46 says that they went to church every day. The early believers understood that they needed to be in God's house as often as they could come. Some professing Christians today find it hard to drag themselves out of bed, or to tear away from other activities, in order to come to church at all. Others come only for Sunday morning worship, out of a sense of duty, but they never get more involved. Some people in our church are here every time the doors are open, and they invest themselves in people's lives, and the ministries of the church.

I have been a pastor for a long time, and this is what I have observed. People who say that you don't need to go to church in order to be a Christian fail to mature in their faith. When people only come on Sunday Morning, to get their batteries charged, their batteries run out of juice by the middle of the week, and they fail to grow. People who attend bible studies, and develop a passion for the word of God, become leaders in the church. People who long to be in God's house every time the doors open, grow much faster than those who do not have that passion.

I am not putting a guilt trip on anyone. We all have busy lives, but as your pastor I encourage you to be in God's house as much as you reasonably can. If there are some activities that do not appeal to you, invest yourself in those ministries that do. Be here, get involved, get to know people, and you will be amazed at how much you will grow in your relationship with the Lord, over time.

In the remaining verses, I would like for you to see the general attitude of the people in that first church. They had glad and sincere hearts. They were praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. Attitude is key for a healthy and happy church. A big part of the reason why we come to church is to praise God. With praise in our hearts, we are much less likely to have a bad attitude in church. If we are happy, thankful, and overflowing with joy in the Lord, our attitude becomes infectious to others who may be having a tuff day. If we are angry, unappreciative, bitter, and resentful, that attitude can also become infectious.

When I am preaching and I see someone with their arms folded and a big frown on their face, and they are shaking their head no while I am preaching the truth of God's word, I can't help but wonder why they are so miserable. When I see people who week after week get up numerous times during the worship service, I wonder why they are so disinterested. But when I see my brothers and sisters in Christ shaking hands and embracing one another, when I see their smiles and enjoy their laughter, when the amens and the sound of clapping of hands fill the sanctuary, I see a healthy body of Christ, and that gives me joy.

When I hear the praises on people's lips, and the songs coming from their hearts, when I see excitement about being in God's house, it warms my heart. When we encourage one another,

pray for one another, minister to one another, and give each other the benefit of the doubt, because we love one another, we are the body of Christ.

Just like in that first church in Jerusalem, if we will be the body of Christ, the Lord will add to our number, those who are being saved. There is something that is very attractive about a church whose members act like Christians who really love one another. I have been in churches where hardly anybody showed the love of Christ at all. They were dark and miserable. But, we can be the light, if we can show the world that our faith, our love, and our testimonies are real, and that Jesus makes all the difference in the world, as to how we live, and enjoy life.

Jesus was God in the flesh, who died for our sins. He arose from the grave to give us victory over sin and death. He is coming again, and it could be soon. Let's live for Him, in whatever time we have left. If you have not surrendered your life in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, tonight can be the time of your salvation. Confess, and repent of your sins, to God. Ask Jesus to come into your heart as Savior, and Lord, and you will be saved. You will become a member of the body of Christ, and a part of the family of God.