

6. Obedient Believers Added Together in the Church: Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47 chronicles the establishment of the church, including details of worship and fellowship. Prior to this point, the scriptures speak of the kingdom and the church in the future tense. After this point in the scriptures, the New Testament always refers to the church and kingdom in the past tense. For example, Christ used both the church and the kingdom in the future sense in Matt 16:18: "18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I **will** build my **church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I **will** give you the keys of the **kingdom** of heaven." Although the Lord spoke of his kingdom and church coming in the future, he made clear that it was imminent in Matt 16:28: "28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

All passages, from this point in Acts 2 forward, will speak of the church and the kingdom in the present or past tense. For example, in Eph 5:25-27, Paul taught:

Christ **loved** the **church** and gave himself up for her 26 **to make** her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and **to present** her to himself as a radiant **church**, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Paul also speaks of the kingdom in the past tense in Col 1:12-14:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who **has qualified** you **to share** in the inheritance of the saints in the **kingdom** of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Rev 1:4-6 confirms that the church and the kingdom are present beginning in Acts and not some future date:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from **Jesus Christ**, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the **ruler of the kings** of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made **us** to be a **kingdom** and **priests** to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

The kingdom and church began in Acts 2, when the Lord added the baptized believers to his church and made them to be a kingdom for ever and ever. It is in this context, that Luke describes the early church in Acts 2: 42-47. [Emphasis in the above scriptures, added].

The Devotion of the Early Church

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The early church devoted themselves to specific and certain acts of worship. To follow the New Testament pattern, the church today must emulate this worship. Any addition to this scripture must have specific scripture authorizing the item of worship. Both the KJV and the ASV translate *they devoted themselves* as *they continued stedfastly*. That disciples are to stand fast is an affirmation that the Lord set the attitudes and doctrines in the church. These include "the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

These acts of worship remain unchanged throughout the New Testament, save for the inclusion of singing. Paul wrote in Eph 5:19-20:

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 3:16 voices the same teaching:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Churches of the 21st century must continue steadfast in these practices, neither adding to them nor taking away from them. The church must be devoted to them.

The Apostles' Teaching

To be devoted to the apostles' teaching prescribes the domain of what the worship and character of the church must be. There are no provisions here or elsewhere to innovate by adding to or taking away from the apostles' teaching. Jesus laid the foundation that limited the teaching of the church to the apostles' teaching in Matt 28:18-20

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The Lord limited the apostles to teaching what he had commanded them. Now, we must be especially careful to maintain only the teaching commanded by the Lord to the apostles and prophets. To teach anything but the commanded teaching is to be eternally condemned, according to Paul in Gal 1:6-9:

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

The church today should be just as dedicated to keeping the apostles' teaching as the early church was. This dedication to the New Testament teaching is the only path to having the true church of Christ today and to securing the true church of Christ for the future.

To the Fellowship

Someone has said, when speaking of church fellowship in this generation, that when you say the word *fellowship*, you can smell the coffee perking. In the New Testament, the word *fellowship* denoted some of the most serious of church activities. The meaning of the word *fellowship* is mutual participation. The NIV uses the word *participation* for *fellowship* in 1 Cor 10:14-17:

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

In verse 16, the ASV uses the word *communion* for *fellowship*: "16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a

communion of the body of Christ?" We have participation or communion or fellowship with the blood of Christ. Therefore, we can see that fellowship is mutual, and it is participatory. How better to express the relationship of Christians to one another, to Christ, to the Holy Spirit, and to God the father?

According to 1 John 1:3-4, the Christian fellowship is with one another, and at the same time it is with the Father and with Jesus Christ:

3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

4 We write this to make our joy complete.

All of Christian fellowship requires us to walk in the light, not the darkness. This is the true fellowship from which all else flows: 1 John 1:6-7 teaches:

6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

True fellowship includes sharing in the sufferings of Christ in Phil 3:10-11:

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

The fellowship of Christians denies participation in the evils of the world. Christians must be careful not to participate in the evil affairs of the world where they have nothing in common. Paul warned against this hazardous fellowship in 2 Cor 6:14-16:

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?

In the verses that are to follow, Luke will describe how Christians have fellowship when they give of their income to aid and to assist those less fortunate. This fellowship through giving is also the way that we participate in the preaching of the gospel. Two passages, which translate the word *fellowship* with the word *sharing* in the NIV, illuminate the relationship of our contribution of money (1 Cor 16:1-2) to Christian fellowship. 2 Cor 8:3-4 shows by example how we must have fellowship with needy saints wherever they may be:

3 For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their power, (they gave) of their own accord, 4 beseeching us with much entreaty in regard of this grace and the fellowship in the ministering to the saints. ASV.

Phil 4:15-16 shows by example that we must have fellowship with those preaching the gospel:

15 And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only; 16 for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my need. ASV.

In our worship service, the contribution becomes one of the principle avenues of fellowship as an act of sacrifice to God and a way to participate with the poor and the preachers of the gospel.

To the Breaking of Bread

Above, fellowship, with the table of the Lord (1 Cor 10:14-17), is a participation with the body and blood of the Lord. In the New Testament worship, breaking of bread in the religious sense

signifies the Lord's Supper. Now that the kingdom has come, the Lord's prophecy concerning his supper fulfills itself in the church. Jesus said in Matt 26:26-29,

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

This earliest of churches, composed of those in the kingdom, participated with Lord in the Lord's suppers. Paul spoke of Christians in Col 1:12-13, placing them firmly in the kingdom upon their conversion:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued [*translated* ASV] us from the dominion of darkness and brought [*delivered* ASV] us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. (editor's notes added).

The members of the church here are *the saints*—those set apart—in the kingdom of light; they are also in the kingdom of the son. This is exactly where Christ said that he would eat and drink of the table of the Lord.

These Christians devoted [*continued steadfast* ASV] themselves to the breaking of bread. Acts 20:7 establishes the frequency of communion or, as designated by Paul, the Lord's Supper: "7 On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. The primary purpose of coming together on the first day of the week was to break bread. The early church met every first day of the week, and on every first day of the week, they broke bread—they communed with the Lord in his supper.

In 1 Cor 11:17-22, Paul spoke of the meetings of the church: "For your meetings do more harm than good." Paul identified these meetings: "When you come together as a church." In this context, Paul taught the purpose of the meeting by condemning their negative example: "When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat." Later in 1 Cor 16:2, Paul specifically set the time of the meetings: "2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."

The early church met on the first day of the week giving attention to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship in giving, and to communion by breaking bread. The true church of Christ will follow this same pattern today.

To Prayer

This early church gave steadfast attention to prayer. In Acts 4:24 ff, at the release of the apostles from prison the entire church prayed: "When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God." When elders were appointed the church prayed in Acts 14:23: "23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." Time and again, the apostles charged the churches to pray:

Rom 12:12-13--12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Phil 4:6--The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Col 4:2-3--Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

1 Tim 2:1-2--2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

1 Tim 2:8--8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

James 5:16--16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Summary of Scriptural Worship

In this text, Luke presents a summary of scriptural worship: “42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” The true church of Christ will follow this pattern which is repeated throughout the New Testament. The Lord expressly stated that true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth in John 4:23-24:

“3 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

Music is not included in these statements because music like speech is a means to worship and not an act of worship. Instrumental music and babbling speech cannot be worship; for they neither teach nor pray, which is what true worshipers do with speech and vocal music. The New Testament could not be clearer in defining musical worship. Eph 5:19-20 teaches:

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 3:16-17 reiterated this teaching:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The early church did not worship with instruments, handclapping, arm waving, dancing, play acting, and solo or choir singing. Throughout the New Testament all worship follows the pattern set in Acts 2:42. The church since the New Testament time followed one of two paths in worship: On the one path, Christians follow the form (pattern) given in the apostles' teaching as taught in Rom 6:17: “17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.” On the other path, false teachers and their followers pervert the worship taught in the apostles' teaching according to Phil 3:17-18: “17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.”

The true church of the Lord in the twenty-first century will follow the pattern of worship taught by and practiced in the New Testament. Paul's command to Timothy in 2 Tim 1:13-14 should be sufficient today:

13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

The Attitude and Fellowship of the Early Church

Acts 2:43

43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

These early Christians were filled with awe. Five times, the gospels speak of people, who observed the miracles performed by John the Baptist and Jesus, as being filled with awe. However, in this passage the connective *and* separates the awe of the Christians and the miracles of the apostles, giving them equal weight. The awe of these Christians resulted from the salvation that had come to them and the changes in their lives. They were as Paul described in Heb 12:28-29: “28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”

The apostles did many wonders and miraculous signs just as Mark had recorded in Mark 16:20: “20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.” The Hebrew writer wrote that the signs and miracles confirmed the word in Heb 2:3-4:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Certainly the most awesome of the accomplishments of that day were the forgiveness of sins and the salvation that came to these very first Christians.

Acts 2:44

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

The authenticity of the conversions of these early Christians showed in the manner of life that they lived.

Acts 2:46

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, 4a praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

The fellowship of the early church extended from the worship to the homes and to the community. The manner in which they had broad fellowship—in worship, in the temple courts, and in homes--instruct us today. Many narrowly define fellowship as a spiritual part of the worship only and restrict social fellowship to the homes only. Some of these believe a building owned by the church cannot be a place for common meals where members eat together. Indeed, prior to the invention of the auto, common sense would have dictated to eat where Christians gathered to worship. Two approved New Testament examples show Christians eating a common meal at the same place where they worshiped. In addition to Acts 2:46, Acts 20:7 shows the church coming together: “7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.” It was after Paul preached and Eutychus fell out of the window that the

church ate and talked until the next morning in Acts 20:11-12. A position that removes all social fellowship from the meeting of Christians cannot be sustained by the scriptures.

On the other hand, many carry social fellowship to the extreme where it overwhelms the true purpose of assembling together, occupying the center stage of what happens at the meeting place. Paul deals with just such an abuse in 1 Cor 11:17-22, where in verse 17, he said, "17 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good." In verse 18, Paul designated that the abuses were "when you come together as a church." These abuses were twofold: they were divided in verse 19. and in the rest of the passage (verses 20-22). they were abusing the purpose of coming together with their eating and drinking:

20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. 22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

The modern practice of using entertainment and social activities to capture and to keep people attending the meetings of the church is clearly unscriptural. The modern practice of forbidding any social fellowship or activities in the place where the church meets is also clearly unscriptural.

Paul puts eating and drinking in the proper relationship to the spirituality required by God in Rom 14:17-18:

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Verse 47a shows the relationship of the disciples with God and men: ". . . praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."

The Saved Added to the Church

Acts 2:47b

47b And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The momentous event of that day of Pentecost closed with the Lord adding to those who were being saved. To summarize, the message began with the salvation which God gave to all who obeyed him. The message of salvation included God's promise through prophets like Joel whom Peter quoted in Acts 2:21:

21 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Peter's sermon cut the people to the heart and provoked them to ask the question that all mankind should ask in Acts 2:37: "37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" Peter's answer to their question came in Acts 2:38:

38 Peter replied, "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. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The very next verse, Acts 2:40, demonstrates that Peter is speaking about salvation: "40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

In Acts 2:41, records that the ones who accepted the word were baptized, and those who were baptized were added to their number: "41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

Finally, in Acts 2:47b, those being saved were added to their number: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Those of Acts 2, who obeyed God by repenting and being baptized, were added to the church and saved by the same acts of obedience. There is special significance in the use of the past, progressive, passive verb form – *were being saved*. The saving of obedient people is by God, and it is a continuous act that repeats over and over each time a person obeys the gospel.