

A Learning Church

Acts 2:42-47

Pastor John Miller

I'm going to read Acts 2:42-47.

Luke says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together..."—notice that—"...and had all things in common..."—or "koinónia"—"...and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

We are now back together in the sanctuary, and there is no substitute for the church of Jesus Christ. There is no substitute for us gathering together as the family or the body of Christ. The importance of the church can scarcely be overstated. Let me give you some reasons. The church was bought with the blood of God's own Son. The price that was paid for our redemption, for the formation of the church, was the blood of God's only Son.

Secondly, the church is important, because the church is loved, nourished and cherished by Christ, Ephesians 5:25-29. Jesus loves the church. Jesus cherishes the church. The church is "the apple of His eye."

Thirdly, one day Christ will present "to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing," Ephesians 5:27.

Fourthly, the building of the church is Christ's principal work in the world today. This is something a lot of people don't think about. When you think of the big picture of what God is doing in the world today, it's building His church. The number one issue on God's agenda is saving souls, which is the same as building His church. People who are saved are brought into the church. We should be identified with a local church or a local fellowship. Jesus said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." No coronavirus, no government, no one can hinder God building His church. It's the work of God, and it's the bride of Christ. It's the fellowship, the family, the body of Christ.

Therefore, when we use our spiritual gifts to build up the church, we are aligning ourselves with what Christ is doing in the world today. So when you take your gift and use it to build up the church, for the glory of God, you are aligning yourself with what God is doing in the world today. We need to give ourselves to serving the church and building up the church, so we can do God's work, in God's way and for God's glory.

What I want to do as a pastor-teacher is to do God's work, in God's way and for God's glory.

That means building the church and the family of God.

What do we mean by the word “church”? The word “church” is used in the New Testament as the Greek word “ekklesia.” It means “called-out people” or “called out.” Literally, it means “the called out,” and we have the idea of the assembly or the people of God. So the church consists of people who are called out of the world, called unto one another and called to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel.” And one day, we will be called up “to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” So we are the called of Jesus Christ.

The church, the ekklesia, is understood in two categories. Number one, the universal church, or everyone born again in any denomination, affiliation or persuasion, is part of the universal church, the body of Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” That’s a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit when we are taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. Every Christian has been baptized by the Spirit, placing them into the body of Christ. It’s our identification with Christ, as Christ is the head of the body, the church.

But everyone who is a member of the universal church, by being born again, should be a member of the local church. Revival Christian Fellowship is the local church, and you are a part of the local body or assembly of believers.

Notice, in verse 46, that they met in the temple and in their houses. So it doesn’t matter where we meet; it matters that we meet. It doesn’t matter if we meet on the grass, in our homes or in a building. Our building is not the church; it’s the church of the people. We meet in formal, corporate groups and in informal, small, home fellowships. That is the local church.

Then notice that the church is “added to” when people get saved, verse 41. “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” They “received his word,” so they were saved, and they “were added to them,” or they joined the local church. Notice also in verse 47, “...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to...”—there is the phrase again—“...the church daily those who were being saved.” So no one was added to the church who wasn’t saved, and no one was saved who wasn’t added to the church.

You can come to Revival Christian Fellowship and not be saved. I don’t take it for granted that everyone who attends this church is saved. But what’s more important than coming to a local church is being a part of the universal church, or being born again. You should understand that once you have been born again, you should find a local church of believers to be a part of.

It’s interesting today that there are people who say they love Christ, but they don’t love the church. They love God, but they don’t love the people of God. Vance Havner put it this way: “We are hearing today about those who like Christ but do not like the church. But Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. How can we like the Head but not the body? The groom but

not the bride?" I like that. If we love Christ, we should also love His church, His body, His people.

What are the essentials of a living, vibrant church? We get them in our text, Acts 2:42-47. But in this session, we're only going to focus on one essential: that the church is to be a learning church.

The context of this passage is that it is the day of Pentecost, when the church was born. The church started in the upper room, and it grew to 120 believers. The Holy Spirit came and baptized them all into Christ, forming the body of Christ. The birthday of the church is the day of Pentecost. Then Peter stood up, full of the Holy Spirit, and preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Three thousand people repented of their sins, turned and believed in Jesus, so they were added to that local assembly. So one sermon, one invitation to trust Christ, resulted in the church numbers going from 120 to 3,120. What an amazing thing! And the church hasn't stopped growing since that day!

But what were they doing? What were they gathering to do? Verse 42 says, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Then notice verse 47: "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

Now let me give you the four subjects we will look at in the next four weeks. First of all, today we see that they were a learning church, verse 42; "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Secondly, we will see that they were a loving church, verse 42; "They continued...in...fellowship" or they had "koinónia" with one another. Thirdly, they were a worshipping church, verse 42; "in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." And fourthly, they were an evangelistic church, verse 47; "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

In verse 42, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." They devoted themselves to the teachings—that's what the word "doctrine" means—of the apostles. It is no accident that at the top of the list of characteristics of the living church is its devotion to the truth of God's Word. It's not a real church, it's not a living church, it's not the body of Christ if it isn't a Bible-centered, Bible-focused, Bible-believing, Bible-preaching, Bible-living church. That's what a church is all about.

We are to be a people of the Book. And only one book is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God.

"It's the B-i-b-l-e.

Yes, that's the book for me.

I stand alone on the Word of God,

The B-i-b-l-e."

At Revival Christian Fellowship, that is our commitment. You bring your Bible, you read your Bible, we preach from the Bible, you study the Bible, you walk out the Word of God in your daily lives. It's all about God's Word. Nothing is more important for the church's health than learning and living out the truth of God's Word.

Dr. Luke, in writing Acts, could have made a big thing about hearing the Holy Spirit, that He came as "cloven tongues of fire," it was awesome and people were saved. But no; he said that the first thing they did after Pentecost was to study "the apostles' doctrine." The first thing they did was to open the Scriptures. When he said they studied "the apostles' doctrine," it would have been the Old Testament. The New Testament had not been put together yet. So they didn't say, "Let's turn to the book of Romans!" There was no Romans. "Open your Bible to Ephesians!" "Oh, I love Ephesians! I hope it's chapter 6 on the armor of God! That's a great chapter!" No; they would go to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers or Deuteronomy or Isaiah. But they would preach Christ from all those Old Testament Scriptures. And they also had the oral teachings of the Apostles. So they focused on God's Word.

An aside to this is that I don't believe there are any living Apostles today. I don't think there has been a succession of Apostles handed down to the church. I believe that when the last of the Apostles died, they died. There is a secondary sense in which you can think of the term "apostle," and that is as missionaries or "one sent out on an errand." But there is no one with apostolic authority in the church today. That authority lies in the Bible, in the teachings of the Apostles. So we must "contend earnestly for the faith which was once and for all delivered to the saints," Jude 1:3.

So if someone comes along and says, "I'm an apostle. I've got a new revelation, and Jesus is not the only way to God," run. That's not right. Jesus is the only way! When anything contrary to God's Word comes along, we know the truth; we can detect the error, because we've saturated our minds in the truth of God's Holy Word.

I want to point out something that is so important. The Spirit-filled church is a learning church, a Bible-centered church, because the Spirit of God and the Word of God are not incompatible with the Holy Spirit and the work of God in the world today. In other words, you can't separate the Spirit of God from the Word of God.

Today people say, "What's a Spirit-filled church? We're not really into the Bible. We don't preach from the Bible. We're just full of the Holy Ghost and jump around, roll around and swing around, dance around and have a good time." That's okay if you want to dance. It's great to be excited and fired up and full of the Holy Ghost. But it's not how high you jump when the Spirit touches you; it's how straight you walk when you hit the ground. That's what matters. The only way you're going to walk straight and strong and faithful is if you are grounded and growing in God's Word. So you cannot separate the Spirit of God from the Word of God.

What a blessed man Dr. J. Vernon McGee was. Thank God for him! He said that the Spirit of God has a track that it runs on, like a train. The track is the Bible, the Word of God. If a train

goes off its track, it's in bad shape. How about in Ephesians 6, where Paul says taking "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"? Paul joins the two together. The Spirit of God and the Word of God work together. It brings health, life and growth to the church of God. What an important thing that is.

As I said, "the apostles' doctrine" also involved their oral teaching about Jesus. But for us today, it involves the Bible, the New Testament—the Gospels, Acts, Corinthians and all the Pauline epistles and the general epistles. They are the apostolic writings, the truth of God's Word. So our commitment today to continue in "the apostles' doctrine" is to study the Word of God. It is absolutely essential that the church and God's people hold a high view of the Scriptures.

The most important thing about a church is its view of the Bible. And its view of the Bible should be that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable," 2 Timothy 3:16. So we believe in the divine inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, reliability and clarity of God's Word. God's Word is the absolute authority.

It's also essential that God's Word be preached in the church, from the pulpit and that the pastor be a Bible-preaching pastor. Pastors should "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." That is my commitment as the pastor of Revival Christian Fellowship.

And pastors should preach what I call "expositional sermons." In 2 Timothy 4:2-5, Paul told Timothy, his young protégé or pastor, to do this: "Preach the word!" The word "preach" is "kérussó," which means "proclaim" or "herald." It's not your ideas, your views, your feelings, politics, psychology or philosophy. Just preach the Word. And you are to do it "in season and out of season," or when it's fashionable to do and when it isn't fashionable to do. "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." Why? "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." He had to give an account to God, who had called Timothy to be a shepherd of God's flock.

I believe pastors in every local church—with no exceptions—should do expositional preaching. I believe pastors have no right to do anything but that. People come to church to expect to hear what God says. So you read the text, you explain the text and you apply the text, rather than just giving a little pep talk of your own ideas or positive thinking and then throw in a few verses out of context to justify it as being "Biblical preaching." If this is not your church, then find a church that is Biblically focused. Find a church that is preaching and teaching the Word of God, because the mark of a living church, a true church, is that the Word of God is central, and the Word of God is preached.

It's also important, in continuing in "the apostles' doctrine," that we learn the Scriptures in our own private lives; we learn the Bible by reading it, by meditating on it and living it out in our daily lives.

Some say, "Oh, the church is open; we can go back to church. Isn't that wonderful?" It is wonderful. I realize you've watched online for many weeks, and there is still a lot of people still watching online. We've had over 5,000 devices watching the Sunday sermon online every week. On Easter Sunday, we had well over 10,000 devices watching our service. We're getting emails from all over the country and all over the world. People are joining Revival Christian Fellowship.

But it doesn't do you any good to come to church on Sunday and listen to the sermon if you don't live it out in your daily life. It doesn't do any good if you say, "Let's watch Pastor Miller teach the Bible!" if during the rest of the week, you don't read your Bible, you don't study your Bible and you're not growing. It's one thing to be fed, but it's another thing to feed yourself.

So it's not enough to have expositional preaching; we must have expositional listening. You must be listeners, who hear the Word of God and then obey the Word of God and put it into practice in your own life. Read your Bible daily. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Study your Bible. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Come to church on a regular basis. Study, learn and grow, for God has given pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints. And be an expositional listener. Meditate on the sermon passage during the week. Go back and study it. Be a Berean; see whether these things are so, Acts 17:10-11. Talk and pray with friends about the sermon after church.

One thing that we're doing in our life groups and in our small-group gatherings is that we're using sermon-based discussions. The participants get together and talk about the sermon and how it applies in their lives. We listen and act upon the sermon, as we obey the Word and become "doers of the Word."

The last question I want to ask and seek to answer is, "What are the benefits of expositional preaching and listening?" When the Bible is preached expositionally—explaining the passage in its historical, grammatical context—and then it is listened to by the people of our church expositionally—hearing God's Word, submitting to God's Word and obeying God's Word—what are the benefits going to be?

In our conclusion, turn to Ephesians 4:11-14. This passage is so important about the church. These words were spoken by the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He said, "And He Himself gave some..."—he's talking about God giving gifted men to the church for its leadership—"...to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers...."

Now I don't believe that there are any apostles, or the office of prophets today, but God has given evangelists and pastors and teachers. The words "pastors" and "teachers" should be one word; it should be hyphenated. It's one word for one individual: pastor-teacher. So a pastor must be a teacher. You can be a teacher without being a pastor, but you can't be a pastor

without being a teacher. So if any man says he was called by God to be a pastor, he'd better be a teacher, because that's the only way to feed and lead God's people.

Now notice the purpose for which God has given them, verse 12: "...for the equipping..."—or the "perfectly" or "maturing"—"...of the saints for the work of ministry..." I believe it's to mature the saints, so they do "the work of the ministry." The pastor's job is to teach the Bible, so the saints are matured and can do "the work of the ministry." Every member of the local church should be a minister.

Then verse 12, it is "...for the edifying..."—or "the building up"—"...of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man..."—or "mature, spiritual" man or woman—"...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that..."—here's another reason God has given pastor-teachers—"...we should no longer be children..."—He doesn't want us to stay immature—"...tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine..."—that happens so often in the church—"...by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."

In closing, I want to give you four things that expositional preaching and listening will do for a church. Number one, it will help us grow spiritually into maturity, Ephesians 4:12, "the perfecting of the saints." Number two, it will help us to be equipped for ministry, verse 12, "for the work of ministry." Number three, it will produce unity in the church, verse 13, "till we all come to the unity of the faith." And number four, it will bring the church stability, verse 14, "no longer...tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine."

I grew up in a church that really wasn't doing expositional preaching. We went to church, got all excited, but we didn't know why we were excited about what, because we never learned anything. We could jump high, but we couldn't walk straight. It wasn't until I started getting taught the Word of God—verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book—that the Bible began to make sense and began to change my life. I had been a Christian for a few years, and when I came under Bible teaching, I felt like I had been born again, again. It was like, "Wow! God makes sense! It's amazing!" That's what God can do in a church where the pastor preaches the Bible and the people come and hear the Word of God.

The revival under Nehemiah occurred when Ezra and the priest brought back the Book, they opened the Book, they read the Book, they explained the Book and the people applied the Book. The people's cry was "Bring back the Book!"

I'm so glad that we've started to come back to church. Not all the congregation is in church; some are still watching online. But the church has been reopened. Yet it's not enough to bring back the people; it's to bring back the Book, to keep it central in our lives. It's so very, very important, because people will be following all kinds of false teachers and false preaching. People will be having their ears tickled, listening to this and that. Then there is no stability.

I liken them to tumbleweeds. We know what tumbleweeds are in California. When the wind

blows and they uproot, they just roll over the ground. If you want to be a holy roller, that's fine. But what a contrast with an oak tree, whose roots go down deep. The more the wind blows on an oak tree, the stronger it gets; its roots go deeper.

So yes, we've been tried and tempted and have gone through difficult times. There are more difficult times these last few days in America. Our hearts are broken with all the crazy, chaotic rioting and insane things going on. But God's Word doesn't change. God's Word is our bedrock and foundation.

Continue to pray for this church, for our nation and that the Word of God will become central in our lives, in our church and in our ministries. Someone said, "To give the Bible its rightful place is to bring health to the church, light to the world and glory to God." Amen.