

Essentials Of A True Church

Acts 2:42-47

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Luke is also the author of the book of Acts. He records, in Acts 2:42-47, "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, and had all things in common..." the word is "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."

As Christians, we are to be committed to Christ. We're followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). And we are to be equally committed to the church. Jesus gave His life on the Cross for the church. Some Christians say, "Well, I like Jesus but I don't like the church."

Back in the '70s there was a slogan, "Jesus, yes; the church, no." And when Covid came on the scene and we were not allowed to gather in the church, many people lost their commitment to the church. I've been asked by people, "Can you be a Christian and not go to church?" Yes; but you cannot be a good Christian, you cannot be a healthy Christian, you cannot be a strong Christian without the church. There is no way to separate a Christian from the church. We are to be committed to the church. Jesus bought the church with His own blood, and we are to love the church and be committed to it.

When we speak of "the church," I want you to understand that the Greek word for "church" is "ekklésia." It means "called-out assembly." The church is not a building, it's not a particular denomination, it's not an affiliation; it's every believer born again by the Spirit of God, who is placed in Christ, the living Head. The metaphors for the church are bountiful, but the Bible talks about the church as "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27), which means that He is the Head, and we are the body, which is knit to the Head. The Head dictates to and leads the church.

The church is also a building. We are the habitation of God, where God inhabits the church, it says in Peter. We're also the bride of Christ, and one day we'll be "caught up" to meet our heavenly Bridegroom in the rapture.

Acts 2 tells us of the birthday of the church. Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit arrived, the church was born and Peter preached the Gospel. In Acts 2:41, it says, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." So there were 120 in the upper room waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit came and they were all baptized, all filled with the Spirit, spoke in tongues (Acts 2:3-4) and had the whole Pentecostal experience. Thus

the church was born. And from that day onward, whoever believes in Jesus Christ and is born again is placed in the church and connected to Jesus Christ, the living Head.

The church has two categories. The first category is the universal church. Anyone who is a Christian is part of the universal church, a member of the body of Christ. The second category is the local church. That's what we at Revival Christian Fellowship are; we are a local church.

The pattern or elements of an essential church are that they should be a Biblical church, a Spirit-filled church and a church based on the Word of God. There are four, essential elements of a Spirit-filled church in this text. Number one, it is a learning church. Verse 42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

The word "doctrine" has gotten a bad rap today. When people hear the word "doctrine," they think of theology and technical doctrine. This divides people and people argue over it, so they just want practical, Christian living. But everything we believe and do is based on doctrine. The word "doctrine" in the Greek is "didaché," which means "teaching."

When Paul wrote to Timothy, a pastor, he said, "Preach the word....For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2-3). The word "sound" is a medical term. It means "healthy" or "life-giving."

So when you pick a church to become a part of, you want that church to have sound doctrine. Sound doctrine is the apostles' teaching and preaching found in the New Testament. That is the foundation of all faith and practice. There is nothing more important for the health and growth of a church than the learning and living out of the Word of God.

It's interesting that the disciples weren't all focused on the experience of Pentecost—the cloven tongues of fire, the wind, the speaking in tongues. Rather they were continuing in the apostles' doctrine steadfastly.

The Spirit of God and the Word of God are not incompatible. But what you find often in churches today is that they are big on the Holy Spirit and light on the Scriptures, or they are big on the Scriptures and light on the Holy Spirit. We need both. They are not in competition. The Spirit of God working through the Word of God transforms the children of God into the image of the Son of God.

Also notice, in verse 42, that they "continued steadfastly." Jesus said, "If you abide..." or "continue" "...in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31). So we are to continue in the apostles' doctrine or teaching found in the New Testament. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians in Ephesians 4:11-15, he said that God had given to the church "pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Some Christians are always under the influence of the last person they talked to. They don't have any roots or a foundation; they don't know the Word of God.

Go to our website and look at our doctrinal statement. What does Revival Christian Fellowship believe about the Bible, about God, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, about salvation, about future events like the rapture, the Second Coming, the millennium? Look up what we believe as a church.

It's so important that we hold a high view of Scripture, which actually forms the foundation or motivation for preaching. Biblical preaching is expository preaching, which is preaching the meaning of a text in its historical, grammatical, theological context. But some preachers read a text and then impose on the text what they want it to say and what they want it to mean. Or they will read a text and then go on a wild rabbit chase talking about things that have nothing to do with the verse they just read.

It drives me spiritually bananas! I've been in church services where I thought, What happened to the text?! The preacher announces the text, the preacher reads the text and then he departs from the text and never comes back to the text. He just springboards off the text into his subject, which is not the subject of the text. His subject was not the subject of the author of the text.

You want to know what the Bible says, what the Bible means and how the Bible applies to your life. That's called "expositional preaching." Expository preaching is taking out of the text the original author's meaning, in its historical, grammatical, theological context. It's so important that churches do this! I wish that more churches did expositional preaching.

The Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." This means that the Scriptures are God-breathed. The view of the Bible should be that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and we believe in plenary, verbal inspiration. That means that all the words in the Bible were given by God's inspiration. And I believe in inerrancy; the Bible does not err. I believe in the Bible's infallibility; the Bible is the authority. I believe in the Bible's sufficiency. That's why we preach the Bible and teach the Bible and explain the Bible.

Everything we do in this church is based on Scripture. This is a Bible-believing, a Bible-preaching, a Bible-teaching, and hopefully, a living church. I pray that we always stay committed to the Bible, the Word of God. Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word!" He used the word "kérussó" for the word "preach." It means to "herald" or "proclaim." Paul said, "Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" or "doctrine." Why? "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, 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" (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

Someone said it like this: "To give the Bible its rightful place is to bring glory to God, health to the church and light to the world." A Spirit-filled church is a Bible-preaching church.

Number two, a true church is a loving church. Verse 42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship.” “Fellowship,” which is “koinónia” in the Greek, is a very important word. Interestingly, the word appears for the first time in this verse. It’s not in any of the Gospels. “Koinónia” means “to hold in common.”

John Stott says that this word was “born” on the day of Pentecost. The church was born on the day of Pentecost, and it will end on earth at the rapture. The church starts in Acts 2 and will end for us when the church is raptured and “caught up...to meet the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Every time the word “fellowship” is used in the New Testament, it denotes some kind of sharing. True Christian fellowship has two aspects: number one, we share in a common salvation; and number two, we share out in a common service. Bible fellowship, or koinónia, is sharing in the things of the Lord.

I used to think that fellowship meant coffee and donuts. “This can’t be fellowship; where’s the coffee and donuts?!” That’s not what it means, because they didn’t have coffee and donuts in the New Testament. “How did they have church?” I don’t know.

Number one, koinónia is sharing in a common salvation. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Some say that the Bible doesn’t use the word “alone.” But it teaches that. We’re not saved by good deeds or good works, we’re not saved by rites or rituals, we’re not saved by being from a particular race—none of that saves you. We are saved by faith in Christ. So salvation is a common thing we share together.

In 1 John 1:3, a verse on this subject, John says, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship...” or “koinónia” “...with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” So our common sharing, in our common salvation, is with the Father, His Son and with the Holy Spirit.

Unless you are saved, you cannot have this kind of fellowship. You can come to church, to take up a spot in a pew, but you’re really not having fellowship, because you’re not part of the church.

Number two, we also share out in common service. In our text in verses 44-45, it says, “Now all who believed...” the Christians “...were together, and had all things in common...” or “koinónia” in the Greek “...and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” So this is a picture of them sharing out in service to one another. It’s not saying that every Christian has to sell everything they have to be a part of the church. It’s means that you should be giving and generous toward others in need.

Acts 4:32 is another picture of the early church in their fellowship or koinónia. “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own but they had all things in common.” So they had the Word of God and the fellowship of believers one with another.

The following verses direct us in our service. In Galatians 5:13, it says, "Serve one another." That's *koinónia*. And Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens." James 5:16 also says, "Pray for one another." And Ephesians 4:32 says, "...forgiving one another." This has been an abbreviated list, but if we're going to have fellowship as a church, we need to serve one another, bear their burdens, pray for them and learn to forgive them.

Are you connected by giving out of your blessings to other believers? Become a part of the church by doing so. This is essential for your spiritual growth and is evidence of true salvation. In 1 John 3:14, John says, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren."

From the time I got saved in 1971 to this day, even as a pastor, I have been a part of a local church. You say, "Yeah, because you're a pastor!" Not only am I a pastor; I'm also a sheep, and I have need of fellowship with my brothers and sisters. We need each other. So you need the support of a local church; you need the prayers and the ministry of a loving, local church. Love is the mark of a true believer. A loveless church is not a true church or a Spirit-filled church.

Number three, a true church is a worshipping church. Verse 42 of our text says that they had "the breaking of bread, and...prayers." So they were learning the Word of God—it was a Bible church—they were loving the family of God—it was a loving church—and they were worshipping the true, living God—it was a worshipping church.

In verse 42 in the Greek, the definite article "the" is used three times: "the breaking of the bread and the prayers." That indicates that this is a reference to the Lord's Supper, which we call communion. So they gathered together and prayed and broke bread.

It's so important that we observe communion as often as the Lord leads. The Bible doesn't tell us how often to have communion; it just tells us that whenever we do, to do it in remembrance of Jesus. So communion is part of a true church.

The two aspects of balanced, true worship as they worship together were that it was formal and informal. Verse 46 says, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple..." which is formal worship "...and breaking bread from house to house..." which is informal worship.

Their worship also was joyful and reverent, verse 46. "They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." There was joy when they gathered together. And we see in verse 43 that their worship was reverential. "Then fear came upon every soul." And the church's highest priority is to worship God.

Because we study the Bible, it leads us to know God. We discover God in His Word. And it leads us to worship Him. You ask, "Well, which comes first? The Bible or worship?" First we have to know God in the Bible. Knowing God in His Word leads us to worship Him "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). An unknown God can neither be worshipped nor served. In Ephesians 1:6,12 and 14, Paul said that the church is to be "to the praise of His glory."

My prayer for this church is that Jesus Christ is glorified here, that God gets praise. Praise not to a man, to the ministry but to Christ. To Him be honor and glory and praise.

So we congregate to worship God, we celebrate all that God has done and is doing, we commemorate with the Lord's Supper in looking back at the Cross in remembrance, looking forward to His Second Coming when we will drink with Him in His Father's kingdom and we look within and ask God to forgive us as we forgive others. We also communicate as we open the Bible and preach God's Word.

Any church that gathers together but does not preach and teach the Bible is not a true church. This is what the Bible says a church is to do. Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word." Paul told Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). Paul told Timothy to read the text, explain the text and apply the text (1 Timothy 4:13). So we are to be worshipping God as it is prescribed in the Bible. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22).

"The Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Don't think because you come to church that God is happy with you if your heart is far from God. You can come with a Bible, you can come and sing in the pew, but if your heart is not engaged—God looks at your heart.

Number four, a true church evangelizes. They were an evangelistic church, verse 47. This was a praising church. This was the beginning of the church. On the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, they went from 120 to 3,120. They were "having favor with all the people"; so they were getting along in fellowship. "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." They weren't so preoccupied with their inreach and upreach that they neglected their outreach. They weren't preoccupied with the experience of Pentecost to the point that they forgot the Word of God, the worship of God and the love of the brethren.

In Acts 1:8, before Jesus ascended back into heaven, He told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. He would send the Holy Spirit from heaven to fill them with power, "and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." They would be empowered by the Holy Spirit. So what God did was He sent the Spirit into the church. Then He sent the church into the world. As a church, we congregate to celebrate. But then we disperse to permeate the culture around us as salt and light. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

A true church is a missions-minded church, an evangelistic church. Notice several things about this early church's evangelism. First, the Lord was the one who was working, verse 47. "And the Lord added..." We don't build the church; the Lord builds the church. He uses mass evangelism, as He did in Peter's sermon in Acts 2. He uses personal evangelism, as He did when Philip went from Samaria to Gaza and shared the Gospel with the Ethiopian in Acts 8, who probably took it to Africa. He uses missionaries, as He did in Acts 13:2, when the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So a true church is a missions-minded church, an evangelistic church. They are not just

comfortable with themselves.

Some churches have the motto, "Us four, no more, shut the door." They don't want new people to come visit their church. Someone shows up on Sunday morning and they say, "Someone is sitting in my pew!" I got wind of people in this church who showed up on Sunday, approached people sitting in the pew and said to them, "Do you know that's my spot?" Excuse me! Your spot?! You should be glad God brought a new person to the church. You should be glad that God might have brought a heathen to the church. That's not your spot! If you like that spot, get here earlier. Nobody has their name on a pew. There's no designation of pews. We don't donate pews to people in their names. This is not your building; it's God's building, God's house.

We are to have a heart for the lost. "God, send us out as salt and light to permeate our culture." Everywhere you go in this Temecula Valley you should be letting your light shine for Jesus Christ.

A couple of years ago, I was at In-N-Out having lunch by myself. I was tired and had been preaching a lot. I was having one of those quiet, by-myself kind of lunches. All these businessmen were seated around me at the tables eating. One of them held up his cup and saw "John 3:16" written on the side of the cup. He said loudly right next to me, "John 3:16; I wonder what that is." I'm thinking, Oh, man! This is too good to be true! I can't pass this up. So I stood up and quoted the verse. They looked at me like, "Where did you come from?!" Then I started explaining God's love and sending Jesus and why He died on the Cross. And "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." They're like, "Yeah; can I just finish my meal right now?"

But it was so cool how God just opened that door! It's so natural—and so supernatural! So be prayerful, be open and ask God, "Give me an opportunity to share my faith and tell others about You." It's so important. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."

So it was the Lord who was building, and second, the Lord "added to the church" and added "those who were being saved," verse 47. The point is that He did not add them to the church without saving them, nor did He save them without adding them to the church. You cannot separate your Christianity from the church. That's so important.

And notice who did the adding—"the Lord...daily." That means that He kept adding to the church every day. Evangelism was a daily happening in the church.

Here's the summary. A Biblical church, a Spirit-filled church has these essentials: they are learning the Word of God, loving God's people, worshipping God and witnessing to a lost and dying world. Those are the marks of a true church.