

Text: Acts 2:40-47

Title: What's a Church to Do?

Truth: Eleven indispensable actions needed in every church.

Date/Location: Wednesday July 19, 2023 (previously Sunday Evening 2/5/2012) at FBC

Introduction

The newly born church did a number of key things that, by way of example, a church today should be careful to include in its life. Not everything that “did happen” in the early church “must happen” today. I am thinking of tongues and miracles. Those were operational back in the day, but not today. However, I believe that all of the following things that happened in the early church and must continue to happen today.

I. Preach the Gospel, v. 40

- A. Verses 40-41 are the conclusion to the sermon that Peter preached in 2:14-39. Verse 40 indicates that the preceding was a portion of what Peter preached, not necessarily word for word everything that he said, for “with many other words he testified and exhorted them.” His point was that the people needed to be saved. The time in which they were living, as measured by the culture / generation that was present at that time, was wicked. If you want to be associated with God, you cannot be associated with the evil culture in a kind of partnership. Of course we have to have “touch points” with the culture but we do not become partners with it in its evil deeds.
- B. Peter’s sermon boiled down to the fact that Jesus is Lord and Messiah (v. 36). What he said before that was the build-up to that truth. No matter how much you try to deny it, facts are not on your side—there is a mountain of evidence that demonstrates the man Jesus is in fact the Christ. Peter added that this Messiah was the one that the Jewish people wanted to be crucified. The crowd replied with “What shall we do?” That’s how we should reply as well—what should I do given that Jesus is in fact Lord of all? Peter told them to “be saved.”

II. Baptize New Christians, v. 41

- A. Once people receive the word of God, these new Christians are baptized.
- B. We could explain a brief theology of baptism at this point in the message. We do that regularly in our baptism class. Baptism is a symbolically rich ritual that Christ commanded his church in order to picture the saving truth that Christians “die” with Jesus and rise again to a new life, that they are washed from sin, and that they with Him will be resurrected. After hearing and receiving the gospel, water baptism by immersion is the next step in one’s Christian life.

III. Welcome in New Converts, v. 41, 47

- A. “Three thousand souls were added.” We also need a way to “add” people to the church in the sense of **increasing the population** of the people of God. Not just move them, swap them, recycle them, trade them, steal them, etc.
- B. Ultimately this “addition” is done by the Lord—according to verse 47. If the Lord adds, then we need to do two things: ask the Lord to do some extra addition here; and ask Him to help us do what He has assigned to us to make that happen.
- C. Also, we need to “add” people to the church in the sense of **integrating** them into the church. This is somewhat easier, I believe, in a smaller church with people who are diligent to meet others. But I am surprised that someone can come to our church for many weeks and others do not know who that person is. Perhaps they have seen the new person, but they have not extended a hand of fellowship or shared their names. This must improve.
- D. We can add a third sense of “add” and that is to **join membership** with the church. Some kind of formal recognition is assumed and helpful to all involved to know who has put their “stake in the ground” to say where they stand and with whom.

IV. Continue in Apostles' Doctrine, v. 42

- A. Teaching of the word and—make sure to note this—belief of that word—are necessities in a proper church. “We the teachers teach X” is fine, but that must become “we the Christians believe X.”
- B. In other words, first the teachers of the church must teach correct doctrine, the same teaching that the apostles taught the early church in Acts and as recorded in the remainder of the New Testament.
- C. But it cannot stop there. The people of the church must *embrace* that teaching and live it.
- D. To “continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” does not only mean teaching, it means believing and doing.

V. Continue in Fellowship and Regularly Meeting Together, v. 42, 46

- A. Fellowship is sharing. Sharing time with each other, sharing life with each other, work, ministries, activities, prayer, etc.
- B. This also includes gathering for worship. I could easily be convinced to separate this into an 12th critical element for church life—that is, gathering for worship regularly as one, and a separate one as fellowship in the normal daily activities of life.

VI. Continue in Breaking of Bread and Eating Food, v. 42, 46

- A. Christians eat meals together. But there is some disagreement among commentators about whether this has to do with daily meals, or more specifically with the Lord’s Table.
- B. Some say it is a **reference exclusively to the Lord’s Table**, as in Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor. 10:16. Others respond that “breaking bread” was not a technical term for the Lord’s Table until some time later in church history. Therefore, it could refer to **eating normal meals** together because “breaking bread” means “sharing food.” See Luke 24:30, 35, which breaking of bread was not the Lord’s supper since Jesus said in 22:18 he would not partake of it (at least the

fruit of the vine portion) until the kingdom. Also, the phrase is in Jer. 16:7 regarding a mourning meal.

- C. In reply, we might say that the most important breaking of bread was that which celebrated the remembrance of Jesus (what we call The Lord's Table), and that it was probably practiced more frequently in the early church than our once-monthly practice.
- D. A **mediating view** is that the believers shared meals together regularly, and at the conclusion of at least some of those meals they had a bread and cup that were set aside as the memorial elements of the Table.
- E. I can live with either of the second or the third views. The phrase does not seem to refer exclusively to a religious ritual because Acts 2:46 talks about "eating their food."
- E. What is the Lord's Supper?
 - 1. It is not just any meal. That event is far too common, and far too often done by unbelievers. Rather, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance, that is, a command of Jesus establishing an outward rite of the church which visibly symbolizes a saving truth of the gospel and centered around the death of Jesus. Eating a meal per se does not do that. Baptism and the Lord's Table are the only two rites commanded by Jesus that reach this level:
 - 1) Sovereign authorization by the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 2) Symbolism of saving truth.
 - 3) Specific command for perpetuation in the Gospels and/or the Epistles.
 - 4) Biblical evidence of historical fulfillment or practice; confirmation in the Book of Acts basically.
 - 2. It is not an entire meal that is simply "declared" to be the Lord's Supper by the participants. In fact, there was a love feast meal associated with the Lord's Table in the early church. The function of the meal was to share Christian fellowship and nourish the body's hunger (1 Cor. 11:34). This shows that the early church knew that there was a distinction between the full meal and the ritual that capped off the meal which we call Communion.

Even in the institution of the Supper itself, it unfolded as they were eating another entire meal (Matt. 26:26-30).

3. It is a special “religious ritual” regarding a bread and cup of wine that symbolize the sacrificed body and blood of Jesus Christ.
4. The symbols of bread and wine are just that—symbols—but they are significant symbols in that we do not permit any carbohydrate to take the place of the wafer we share, nor any beverage to serve as the symbol for the wine we drink.
 - 1) Since we know the Lord’s Supper was a re-working, if you will, of the Passover meal, the bread we break should be unleavened to be the best symbol of Jesus’ body (sinless). It should not be potato chips (they are not sinless). I’m not going to charge those who use fluffy bread with heresy, but we believe it is wisest to be as close to the “original” as we can.
 - 2) Neither should the drink be a Coke. Jesus drank with the disciples the fruit of the vine, which is why we use grape juice—new wine. He said he would drink it again in the kingdom.
5. We do not call the meal the Eucharist, because that is the Catholic ritual where a priest consecrates the bread and when it is eaten, it is (incorrectly) understood to convey grace to the participants. We understand Communion to be symbolic, not sacramental.
6. Because the Table originated with the Passover meal, it does not seem possible that these people of Jewish descent would have counted it as a common thing. It would have been special to them. They may have shared it daily or weekly. Passover was once a year, but it seems that the saving truth of the gospel deserves more attention than that.
7. The bottom line is that we *should* be sharing meals together, AND we should be frequently having the Lord’s Table. About once per month is the least frequently it should be in my view. Christians are supposed to do things together, and since eating is a common thing, we should be doing that together. And since celebrating the gospel through the ordinances is a good thing, we should be doing that as well.
8. Read Matthew 26:26-30

VII. Continue in Prayers, v. 42

- A. “They” indicates corporate prayer, not just individual prayer.
- B. Again, they continued steadfastly in prayers plural. This means that were devoted to it.

VIII. Interacting with Outsiders, v. 43, 47

- A. In part because of the wonders and signs done by the apostolic band, fear and favor began to surround the fledgling church.
- B. This is what happened to the outsiders, but it appears to me that the church had some kind of regular interaction with the people. The outsiders heard the preaching; saw changed lives; sensed the work of God; and experienced holiness in the lives of people like they had not before. This did not pass to the people outside the church by miraculous osmosis. There had to be a significant level of interaction.

IX. Meeting Each Other’s Needs, v. 44-45

- A. In a context where there was physical need, the believers worked to meet it. As a church, we have largely not been challenged in that department. From time to time we have helped one another through difficult times. More usually it is smaller needs like clothing hand-me-downs, baby things, and other “stuff” of that nature.
- B. They would sell their own things—God’s things which He entrusted to them as stewards—in order to meet needs.

X. A Shared Joyful Mindset, v. 46

- A. One accord. This means one mind, one purpose. They had a shared outlook, goal, mindset, basic philosophy. No, they were not mind-numbed robots. But they had a shared mindset since they had a shared faith, a shared Lord, a shared forgiveness. There is only *one* of each of those, and Christians have them.
- B. Gladness. They were “very” glad. They had a lot to be happy about.

C. Simplicity of Heart. This is a word which our standard Greek dictionary (BDAG) does not define very well. Louw-Nida helps: it is a humility or simpleness of life. They were humble people. They were not high-minded or haughty but rather simple. They were appreciative of small things, not tied up in materialism but rather in fellowship with one another.

XI. Praising God, v. 47

- A. Worship—in song, in particular—is a centerpiece of the church. It is not something we do at the start of the service to give latecomers more time to get there “before the real action begins.”
- B. This specific mention of worship probably also included testifying of God’s grace and giving thanks, not only singing, as in “praise and worship” with a song leader.

Conclusion

We have seen eleven indispensable actions and attitudes that every church should have. Let’s work on them in our own church family.

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