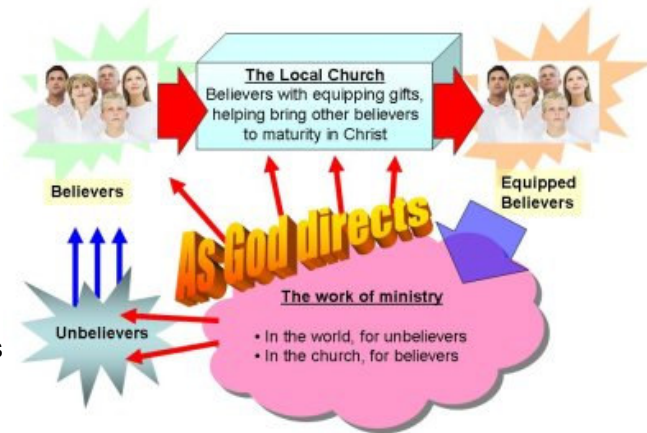


High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Activities for Edification in the Church

Introduction

- In our last session we saw that the local gathering of the members of the body of Christ on Sunday morning should edify or build up believers and equip them to do the work of ministry. We saw that Christ gave gifted believers to the church for this purpose, and the body of Christ was to continue building itself up in love, week after week, until all of the members of the church are brought to spiritual maturity.
- All believers should be growing toward this goal, and we should see clear progress toward maturity as a result of our involvement in the equipping times at church on Sunday mornings.



Organization in the Early Church

- The church is not something man-made. Only Christ can build the church and baptize believers by the Holy Spirit to unite them with the Body of Christ (Matt 16:18; Acts 2:47; Mark 1:8; 1 Cor 12:13).
- In the beginning there was only one local church, the church at Jerusalem, and it appears that the meetings were held in homes and publicly available gathering places.
- Early in the history of the church there were already some indications of simple organization in the local gatherings of members of the body of Christ. In fact, the very idea of a group meeting requires some kind of organization and coordination.

Early Examples

- The believers established regularly scheduled meeting times and places (John 20:19; Acts 20:7; Heb 10:25)
- They practiced public baptisms and celebrated the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42)
- They collaborated on providing assistance for needy members (Acts 2:44-45)
- They met for public worship and prayer (Acts 2:42, 46)

Later Examples

- The local gatherings of believers had designated leaders, and the qualifications for leadership required a long-term association in a close personal relationship (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5)
- They evaluated the behavior of members and exercised church discipline (Romans 16:17; 1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2)
- They kept a registry of the elderly widows under the church's care (1 Tim 5:9-11)
- They raised money for the Lord's work in conjunction with other local churches in their regions (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8 - 9)



- They sent letters of recommendation to other churches on behalf of traveling Christian workers (Acts 18:24-28; Rom 16:1-2; 2 Cor 3:1)

The Pattern of the Early Church

"They were continually"

- In the original language, the phrase "*they were continually*" is contained in a single Greek verb in the imperfect tense. The idea of the imperfect tense is one of continuous action in past time. It was the on-going habit or practice of the early church to do all of the activities in following list on a regular basis.
- The subject of this verse ("they") refers to the new believers who had been added to the body of Christ. Today many churches focus on bringing unbelievers into the Sunday morning meetings, preaching the gospel, and hopefully seeing some become believers. But as we saw last session in Eph 4:11-16 and we see now from Acts 2:42, even the first gatherings of the church were focused on believers.
- The presence of an unbeliever was incidental or secondary (1 Cor 14:23-26). The purpose of the church gathering is to edify and equip the saints for the work of ministry.

"Continually devoting themselves"

- As soon as the church was born in Acts chapter two, the believers immediately began the practice of regularly meeting together for specific purposes.
- The word "*devoting*" is a Greek participle, and it is a compound word consisting of the verb "*kartereo*" which means to be strong, steadfast, or enduring. The term "*proskartereo*" is a directed form of the word which means to be strong toward something, to be steadfast to something, to persevere in something, or to be busily engaged in something.



"To THE Teaching of the apostles"

- In the English translation one could almost get the idea that they devoted themselves to the *apostles*, but the original language emphasizes that the object of their devotion was The Teaching. The very first thing in the list of what must happen when the church gathers is the teaching of the truths of the Word of God.
- They were devoting themselves to being involved in the teaching *process* -- being involved as a learner -- as well as devoting themselves to the *content* of the teaching. They were not to devote themselves to just any teaching -- it was a specific set of truths that they were to focus on -- "The Faith" which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3).

"To THE Fellowship"

- The word for fellowship is "*koinonia*", and this term primarily means "sharing in common." It implies a close personal relationship and an active participation with each other's lives.
- They had a common faith and a deep bond of commonality in being fellow-Christians. They shared common interests, common dangers, a common hope for the future, as well as sharing their possessions and resources as anyone had need of them.
- Fellowship is one of the ways that members of the body of Christ are to be built up or edified. The apostle Paul spoke of sharing one another's experiences (1 Cor 12:26). He also spoke of sharing one another's burdens (Gal 6:2).
- In order for this kind of fellowship to occur the gathering needs to be small enough for deep relationships to develop. This certainly speaks positively for the idea of small churches. We need to remain small enough so that we can actively participate in each other's lives.

"To THE Breaking of The Bread"

- The breaking of bread could be a reference to the Lord's Supper, or it could refer to the regular meals that the believers shared together. The context indicates that this refers primarily to the regular meals that the believers shared (Acts 2:46).
- We know that when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper it came at the end of a special meal together. For the early church, taking a meal together was an act of fellowship, and they often closed their meals with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, just as Jesus did when He instituted the practice.

"To THE Prayers"

- The Greek word for "prayer" in Acts 2:42 is "*proseuche*" and it is one of the most general words for prayer in the Greek language. It includes praise, adoration, giving God glory, thanksgiving, petition (asking), and confession. It is always used of prayer to God.
- The type of prayer mentioned in Acts 2:42 is the same kind as in Acts 1:14 when the disciples were devoting themselves to prayer in the upper room as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the church. They focused their collective attention and energy toward God. We could legitimately extend this concept to include our worship of God -- praising and glorifying our Creator and Redeemer.
- The Greek word that is normally translated "worship" in the NT is the word "*proskuneo*" which literally means "to kiss towards." It sometimes signified falling upon the knees and touching the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence, so the word meant to kneel in submission, to do homage, or to bow in obedience. That word certainly expresses the attitude of worship in our relationship to our Creator God, but the word "*proseuche*" (prayers) includes the practical activities of worship, such as praise, adoration, thanksgiving, petition, confession, and giving God glory.
- Even though worship concentrates on God, it also benefits the worshipers. However, the apostle Paul warned the Corinthian church against having prayers, songs, and thanksgivings that do not edify other believers (1 Cor 14:15-17). The activity of worship should edify believers, rather than providing an emotional high or satisfying the subjective experience of the individual.

Conclusion

- The early church established a regular practice of gathering together, first, to devote themselves to the teaching of the Word of God. As a result of that focus, their fellowship was very deep and meaningful. They shared meals together and celebrated the Lord's Supper. And they devoted themselves to times of group prayer, resulting in praises to God as well as confession and petition and thanksgiving.
- Many churches today focus on attracting unbelievers into the church meetings so that some may be won to Christ. Winning the lost is very important, but when we meet together as believers the focus needs to be on equipping the saints for the work of ministry.
- The early church did more than make *converts* -- they made disciples. A disciple is one who is becoming a fully mature and equipped follower of Jesus Christ. We need to commit to gathering together with believers under the teaching ministry of gifted equippers who will teach the Word of God and build up the body. The ultimate goal is to become a fully mature follower of Jesus Christ.