

## **Are We Settling for Less Than Authentic Community?**

Acts 2:42-47

Jerry Davison

Sept. 17, 2017

*Read Acts 2:43-47*

Q: Does this sound like any church you have ever attended? Do you think this is the experience of the average churchgoer in this country?

BIG Q: WHY NOT?

Robert Lewis, *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, p.23

"As the church engages the third millennium, it looks across a terrifying -- and ever-widening -- chasm... At the bottom of the chasm rages the white water of popular sentiment, which increasingly views the church as inconsequential, a sideshow along the interstate of the world's *real* traffic. Today 'numerous studies confirm that the public, especially media and intellectual leaders, do not see Christianity as a dominant social force.' Instead, six out of ten Americans believe the church is irrelevant. And in the lives of 170 million non-Christians in America (making our country the third largest mission field in the world), that irrelevance provokes an ever-increasing cynicism and hostility."

\*\*MATT. 5:13-16

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven

*If the church is the body of Christ, why then, in the eyes of much of the world, can they not see the resemblance?*

A few reasons:

### **The gospel is offensive.**

Dr. Al Mohler, pres. of S. Bapt. Theo. Sem, "... there is no way for a faithful Christian to avoid offending those who are offended by Jesus Christ and His cross. The truth claims of Christianity, by their very particularity and exclusivity, are inherently offensive to those who would demand some other gospel."

### **The Enemy is real.**

We have an adversary who actively seeks to destroy, diminish, and distract from the Truth.

### **People are just plain goofy.**

Historically the modern church has done a poor job of engaging our culture.

Dick Staub, *The Culturally Savvy Christian*

"While popular culture's influence has been rising, Christian influence has

been shrinking, marginalized through three equally counter-productive ways of reacting to culture..."

***Cocooning from culture*** - creating our own Christian sub-culture and living there (music, TV, movies, T-shirts, etc.)

***Combating the culture*** - Identifying ourselves to the world by what we are against, not what we are for.

***Conforming to the culture*** - in an effort to be more acceptable to mainstream culture, we become indistinguishable. Marketing Jesus, appeal to superficial self-interests. No more talk of sin, repentance, the blood or the cross.

2 Cor. 5:20

Therefore, we are **ambassadors** for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Ambassador = an authorized representative or messenger

What happened? How did we get so far from the church we just read about in Acts 2?

Occasionally, after something has been in use for a long time, it becomes necessary to recalibrate.

**Recalibrate** = resetting back to the original settings designed by the manufacturer for optimum performance.

*Examples: color bars on TV, scope on a rifle or bow, weights on a scale.*

*Calibrating to the established standard so that we can experience the true colors that the Designer & Maker intended.*

*Otherwise, we get an image that is less than what we were intended to see.*

*If we don't occasionally recalibrate, the image of Jesus we project can be distorted and the culture will never see the real Jesus as we were meant to show them through our lives.*

Characteristics of this earliest group of believers:

awe - took holiness of God seriously

signs & wonders - experienced the power of God first-hand; not so-called miracles of the name-it-claim-it crowd.

together - genuine love for each other; authentic community

met needs - generosity, "it all belongs to God."

together in the temple - understood value of corporate worship

meeting in homes - understood value of smaller groups;

discipleship

praising God - called attention to God, "His glory"

favor w/ the people - lived in such a way as to make Jesus

attractive

Lord was adding to their number – God used all this to draw people to Himself *through the authentic community of the believers corporately!*

NOTE: None of this would have been possible without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Basically, the church is born on day of Pentecost. *The church wasn't the church until the Holy Spirit came.*

Why? What changed? What did the Spirit bring that wasn't there before?

Think about this:

- The disciples saw Jesus raised from the dead and appearing to them.
- They spent 40 days with Him being instructed in the meaning of His atoning work on the cross, its fulfillment of scriptures, and how the Kingdom that had now invaded time and space changed everything.
- They saw Him ascend to the Father.
- They heard His promise to return at the end of the age.
- They received the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

All of this *before* the Holy Spirit came.

The modern American church operates almost solely off the stuff the disciples knew *before* the Spirit was given:

- We know the gospel.
- We know to evangelize.
- We know how to defend the resurrection of Jesus historically and rationally.
- We believe He's coming again and eagerly await it.

- We gather, we sing, we preach, we witness, we do "missions," we do "outreach," we care for orphans and widows... all good things..

BUT we quite often do it *without the power of the Holy Spirit!* Without the enabling power of the Spirit, we are little more than an altruistic religious non-profit with peculiar beliefs about an ancient Jewish rabbi.

Jesus said, "But you will receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." Until that power comes, Jesus said, WAIT. Don't try to do any of this stuff. It will come to nothing.

From my personal journal:

"What would it look like to have a church that practiced and believed everything the disciples knew before Pentecost WITHOUT THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT? The average church in America, that's what.

How many churches are attempting to bring the Kingdom of God without the God of the Kingdom? We have been operating more off of knowledge and information than His power. It would be like the disciples refusing to wait for Pentecost and rushing out to try to spread the Good News – but it isn't good news until the Spirit comes in power, because without Him we are powerless to live out the gospel and powerless to bring the Kingdom, and utterly hopeless to ever be like Jesus!"

But the disciples DID wait, they DID receive power, and Acts 2 tells us the difference it made in their corporate community of faith.

Q: How did they become like that?

I want to back up and read a few verses before that and see if we can discover what it was that produced that kind of corporate faith experience...

### **Read Acts 2:41-42**

Reverse engineering = in software, finding out how something works by breaking it down to its original source code for the purpose of reproducing it or assimilating it  
Statement: The life we live flows out of the desires we pursue. I.e., The things that matter most to us will determine how we live.

### **VALUES DRIVE OUR DECISIONS AND OUR DECISIONS DETERMINE THE DIRECTION OF OUR LIVES. -- VANCE PITMAN**

**4 Core Values** began to emerge that shaped the lives of these early Jesus Followers:

(devoted themselves -- To give or apply (one's time, attention, or self) entirely to a particular activity, pursuit, cause, or person.)

#### **1. The Apostles' Teaching: The Word of God is preeminent in my life.**

Who are the apostles? Acts 1:21-22

- were with Jesus "from the beginning"
- were personally taught by Jesus
- witness to the resurrection
- personally given authority by Jesus to lead the church

Matt. 28:18-20a:

**18** And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."**19** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,**20** teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..."

\*Paul was not one of the 12 but was hand-picked by Jesus Himself

Still have their teaching today, preserved in the writings of the NT. NT canonization is based on apostolic authorship; had to be written by an apostle or one of their close associates.

Taught publicly in synagogues, temple, public places, home churches. Wrote letters to various churches and church leaders. As the church grew it became necessary to have a written collection of authentic teaching to protect against false teaching that began to infiltrate the church.

This is HUGE! Why?

2 Tim. 3:16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

inspired = God-breathed. Because it is Divine rather than human in origin it is authoritative.

profitable = It is our plumb line for Truth. How we know God's voice, recognize His hand.

Are we devoted to the Word of God?

## 2. Fellowship: My relationship with God was designed for community.

The key word in this entire passage is THEY – the corporate life of Christians lived out in community. New Testament knows nothing of a Christian life lived out in isolation. May be personal but never private.

So many of the great epic adventures feature a group of people, banded together in a common quest or purpose despite drastically different backgrounds, experiences, abilities, genders, and ethnicities.

"Fellowship of the Rings"

Nine companions from different tribes, tongues, nations, and peoples coming together with a common passion, embarking on a common journey towards a common goal -- to rid the world of the Dark Forces that threaten to engulf it and usher in a new kingdom of peace and justice and light, as was prophesied from ancient times. Sound familiar?

The success of the Avengers and Marvel movies is precisely because they have tapped into the idea that everything is connected and they are all swept up together in a larger story that is unfolding before their eyes and in which everyone has a part to play!

These early believers understood they were part of a Larger Story that had been going on since eternity past, that they were being invited to play a part, and that if they were going to survive they would need allies!

*Koinonia* = partnership

- Had each others' backs
- fought for each other
- Risked for each other
- Rescued each other
- confronted each other when necessary
- Reminded each other of the Hope they shared
- Comforted and Encouraged one another

Heb. 10:24-25:

“And let **us** consider how to stir up **one another** to love and good works, not neglecting to meet **together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging **one another**, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

The kind of fellowship that scripture commands and we so desperately need takes time, sacrifice. YOU HAVE TO WANT IT! You have to be unwilling to settle for less. The closer we get to Jesus' return, the more we ought to be pursuing Him TOGETHER!

## 3. Breaking of Bread: I live my life expecting the return of Christ.

This is a curious expression that scholars debate the meaning of.

Lit. Greek = breaking of bread!

Some scholars believe it meant the taking of communion.

Others believe it simply meant enjoying a meal together.

Research:

In the earliest days of the Christian faith, before there was a formal Lord's Supper ordinance, the Lord's Supper was exactly that: a supper. Full meal deal.

Jesus Followers would gather in their homes for big "pot-lucks" they called "Love Feasts." During these meals, they would break the bread "in remembrance of Him."

We know this because Paul had to correct the Corinthian church because it became more about the Supper and less about the Lord! (1. Cor. 11)

What's the point?

For these early followers of Christ, EVERY SUPPER WAS THE LORD'S SUPPER.

#### **1 Cor. 11:26**

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

The principle we take from this is that they lived every day in expectancy. They took every opportunity to remind each other that one day they would eat of the bread and drink of the cup with Him in His Kingdom.

One other principle I want us to catch:

They saw even the common things of life as having spiritual significance. A meal became much more than food and drink. Their homes became more than just dwellings.

#### **Malachi 3:16-18**

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with **one another**. The Lord paid attention and heard **them**, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. "**They** shall be mine," says the Lord of hosts, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare **them** as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him."

The distinction between the righteous and wicked that everyone will see is predicated on the corporate community of believers coming together in worship!

Are we devoted to breaking of bread together in our homes? When was the last time you invited someone over for supper, not just for games and small talk, but to encourage them to stay close to God, remind them of His return?

#### **4. Prayer: It's all about intimacy with the Father.**

This is where we miss it in the 21st century. Why? We don't get prayer.

I used to think, "God is all-knowing and all-powerful; He doesn't need my advice."

We tend to see prayer as:

- a way to get God on our agenda, rather than to align ourselves with His
- a way to get things from God, rather than to get God Himself.

E. Stanley Jones: "The first thing in prayer is to get God. If you get Him, everything else follows."

How does this work? What does it look like?

Matt. 6:31-33

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.."

Larry Crabb, *The PAPA Prayer*, puts it like this: In prayer there are FIRST THINGS and SECOND THINGS. God is the FIRST THING (Seek ye first...). When we get that, it becomes clear that everything else is a SECOND THING.

"Everything I want besides God is a second thing, legitimate in its place, but an idol if it climbs into a higher place than God and His glory. -- Larry Crabb

We get it backwards: We go to God with our second things first, then leave without ever getting to the first thing.

John Eldredge, *Answers VS Intimacy*, podcast:

"So often come to God with a laundry list of needs, concerns, and questions, but don't take the time to just be with Him. It's like a son rushing into his father's presence. He's in panic mode, anxiously asking

question after question in rapid fire, desperate for answers. The dad stops the son, "Whoa, slow down. Have a seat. Let's talk." Then John said, "Many people come to God with a question. 'Lord, I need a job. Where do I go? Do we move? Do we sell the house?' They are trying to hear from God in a vacuum. There is no context of intimacy out of which a conversation with God would flow. Of course God wants to speak, he wants to guide us. But not at the expense of a relationship with Him."

Some of us never even come to God for the second things. We see prayer as a waste of time. "Why pray about it when we could be doing something?"

Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says *in his heart*, "There is no God."

Notice it didn't say "with his lips"; but "in his heart."

Every day that a follower of Jesus wakes up and doesn't go to God in prayer what we are saying *in our hearts* is "There is no God."

"I don't need God. I can handle this myself. I can make all my own decisions."

And then when it all falls apart we want to shake our fists at Him and demand to know why He is allowing this.

Are we devoted to intimacy with God? Do we value knowing Him above all else?

I believe God has great things planned for us. I don't want to miss them

because I was so busy looking for the second things that I missed the most important thing of all: Knowing Jesus.

Prayer & Response Time