

## Mission 7

*Acts 2:40-47 ESV*

*(40) And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."*

*(41) So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

*(42) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

*(43) And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.*

*(44) And all who believed were together and had all things in common.*

*(45) And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

*(46) And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,*

*(47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

## Introduction

Again we come to our dealings of Acts 2.

We have been looking at the nature and character of the early church and the Christians who built it.

A church is not a building.  
A church is not a program.

The definition I use for church is as follows:

A church is:

*"A Christ-centered fellowship that meets regularly with a focus on discipleship and outreach to the community within which God has placed them."*

The role of the church is to build a community of Faith, Hope and Love centered on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You and I in all reality are the church.

But with this definition in mind – there are consequences

If we look at this thing we call the church and say:

It is ineffective,

It is of no consequence,

It has no impact or power,

Then in reality we are saying that we as Christians are ineffective, of no consequence and we have allowed ourselves to fall to a place of no impact or power.

If we are unsatisfied with the state of the modern church what should we do?

What is our answer?

Outreach programs? No

Outreach isn't a program,

Outreach is a passion and belief that the lost souls in your work place, neighborhood, in your world are worth you telling them about the Son of God.

That isn't a program that is an entire worldview.

What about a marketing campaign? No

Marketing builds a crowd; only the Holy Ghost can build his church.

So what is our answer?

Well - we are

Because the state of the church is nothing more or less that a reflection of the state of the Christians.

If the church is:  
Anemic,  
Powerless,  
Is without integrity in the earth  
Does not move in the supernatural, ,  
It is because we the Christians that make up the Church are that way.

*“Well I find that insulting....” That’s Ok, I was speaking to everybody else in the room – you’re special!*

It is all my fault. And it am ok with that. If it is my fault and I change, then we all benefit.

What can we do about it?

We must clearly define what a Christian is according to the bible, then we must give ourselves whole-heartedly to that endeavor.

To becoming who we are called to be in Christ.

Only as we become who we are meant to become can we build what we are meant to build.

And the book of Acts gives us the perfect first hand account of the life and impact of these early Christians and the church they built.

## The Church

Next to reading the bible, the reading of biographies and church history are amongst the most instructive and informative things I do.

I look at the history of the church and I see that at times she has been very wealthy and influential.

She has been the dominant force in cultures and government

Then at other times she has been very poor and persecuted.  
Times when she was impoverished,  
When she seemed to have lost her way.

At these times an amazing thing always seems to happen -  
God breathes on her,  
God moves on her and the church is revived.  
The Christians rally again

The church is brought back to life.  
That's what revival truly means.  
To bring back to life something that was dead.

I used to have churches ring me and say come do a revival – they were really wanting me to bring the circus to town so they could advertise and bring in the locals.

But what they were really dealing with was the fact that people were lethargic, apathetic and had lost their passion for Christ and the lost –  
**THEY NEEDED REVIVING!**

That is a true reformation.

A reformation means to reform to the original.

The old reformers use to say of themselves that:

Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda:  
The church reformed and always to be reformed

And also

*'Reformed, but always reforming according to the word of God,'*

They were not saying that newer is better; they were always hungry to go back the way things were first stated in the bible.

They wanted to go back to the message that Christ preached and the Apostles lived.

Never confuse the packaging with the package

The package is always the same; the packaging can always be different.

## **Recap**

We have been looking at this verse in Acts 2

Acts 2:42

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

We note 4 things about these early Christians.

They:

- a. Devoted themselves
- b. To the Apostles teaching
- c. And to the fellowship and
- d. The breaking of bread and prayers

In other words they were:

- a. Passionate
- b. Teachable
- c. Accountable
- d. Spiritual

Last week we look at the fact that they were teachable.

How they were hungry for teaching because they realized they needed it.

How they understood they needed to 'grow up into salvation.' (1 Peter 2:2)

How they never wanted to miss an occasion to gather and sit under this teaching that had changed their lives.

And finally how they had a teachable spirit.

They were open for instruction and input.  
Not just when they were new babes in Christ but as seasonal ministries.

## **The Hope of the World**

So now we come to the role of fellowship in the life of the early church.

This word 'fellowship', this concept of 'Christian community' has become very much abused and twisted out of context.

People say today that it really doesn't matter what you believe, we just all need to get together and get on with one another.

some people think that fellowship is purely a social event, that it has nothing to do with faith and common belief.

They believe that you can have a cup of tea and a biscuit and there you have it. Fellowship. That's it.

You have met your spiritual and social requirements for the week. Make it an unsaved person and we have also done outreach!

Then there are other people who think that fellowship is what happens at the end of church or at the restaurant down the road.

They all get up, split the bill and say that was 'great fellowship!'

Then there are ministries and denominations – they are the worst offenders sometimes.

They say ‘we need unity.’

We need to get all the churches together.

It doesn’t matter what they believe.

We just need to all fellowship and everything will be ok!!

They go on and insist, ‘let’s just be nice to each other, let’s just get on – that is good fellowship.’

Now that may be social relationship,  
But it is not true biblical Christian fellowship.

### **What is Christian Fellowship?**

Christian fellowship is something far greater and something far deeper than a social gathering.

Fellowship means a very deep unity.

It is a sharing of all things on all levels of being one around common values and common beliefs.

The word most often used to describe this fellowship is communication.

A fellowship is not an institution. It is not a denomination or organization. It is the intimate sharing and communication and gathering around commonly held beliefs and values.

It is not just meeting occasionally in a church building.

It is not just lunch after service or a cup of coffee in the welcome lounge.

True fellowship is something far deeper and far greater than that.

It is not superficial.

It is something that goes beyond our concern for the temporal

It contains with it the sense of intimacy that is only found in marriage. It is an intertwining of ones self with another. A vulnerability, an openness, to both be hurt and to be healed

These other things that I mentioned they are activities or manifestations may make up fellowship.

But true fellowship, Christian fellowship is very real, very deep, and very personal.

When people become Christians they become one.

They enter into a community.

They enter into a family,

They are united by certain bonds that are indissoluble and often intangible.

*Acts 2:44-45 ESV*

*(44) And all who believed were together and had all things in common.*

*(45) And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

Some people think this is some sort of spiritual socialism.

It doesn't mean that they sold everything and put it in a common pool.

Public feast at this time in history and in Jerusalem were an open Jewish celebration

Because people travelled in from afar to the city for the main feast, no one hired beds or kitchenware – hospitality was a part of the culture and expected.

But these things were lent for a season and an event – nothing more.

Yet here is where something changed when these Jewish people became Christians

The believers so loved one another that no one was allowed to suffer.

If some one was in poverty and another in super abundance, someone was prepared to give something or sell something to help another as the need arose – if it was genuine.

There was a sense of oneness.

There was a sense of togetherness.

## **So lets look at True Christian Fellowship.**

True church is what we have here in the book of Acts.

These people gathered together around the Apostles teaching, they were united in fellowship, they had communion and they prayed.

And as a result of this they ‘turned their world upside down.’ (Acts 17:6)

Before we look at some of the aspects of biblical fellowship, let me just address what it is not.

### **a.) It is not a group of dissenters**

Today some people because of pride, hurt feelings or bad experience gather in what they call fellowship group so they can share in each others bitter experiences and justify why they don’t go to church.

That isn’t fellowship that is murmuring.

If you are getting together with a group of people who have all left a church regularly say on a Friday evening, and the only thing you all have in common is that you all got offended or choose to leave somewhere – you are not engaging in Fellowship, you are engaging in murmuring and dissention.

That’s not fellowship – it is sad and somewhat pathetic

The men that came to David at Adullam

1 Samuel 22:1-2 ESV

And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him.

But they didn’t stay that way

They would advance and grow beyond their past in order to enter into their future

## **b.) Fellowship is not a substitute for church**

Again there are people who gather in small groups and they say, we are ok. We don't need to be apart of the body. We are fine by ourselves.'

That is just selfish.

Church is not just a place where you get something, but you give something.

It is a place where you bring your strength and you let others lean on you.

It is a place where you give yourself to a body to help build a body

*"But I don't have anything to give."*

Yes you do, just keep turning up.

Give someone a smile

Help someone from the car with their children

Help with the kids tea set up and pull down

Sow what you have and reap that which you cannot buy

## **c). Fellowship is not a competition for church**

I hear things like:

*I went to the ball game with some Christian's friends – so I don't need church this weekend*

*Hey lets go away for the weekend instead of going to church*

Is there anything intrinsically wrong with either a ball game or camping with some mates?

No

Am I saying you should never miss church, you should never go on holidays...no, not at all

The issue is the attitude

The issue is the devaluing of what God has called valuable

The issue is we are not leading people to Church; we are dragging them away from Church

What you model to your children is that church, Christ and His people are important. My hobbies are a gift from God, not a competition to God

Get season tickets - Go to the ball game and leave early to come to church

Or Come to church and then race home to see the game

Orlando was telling me that a friend of his is a mad Cubs fan – he never missed a game. He was the administrator in a church, Every Sunday night he would come to church.

Do all he had to do

Connect with the people.

Serve faithful

And sit in the back row

The moment the final pray was said he would race to his car so no one could talk to him

He would take no phone calls and

Listen to no radio

Race home and watch the game he had recorded.

You want to go hunting?

Take Friday off work and walk in here smelly and covered with deer smell in camouflage with a trophy tied to your truck

You have modeled more to your children in one weekend than you could tell them in a hundred

**d.) Fellowship is not a gathering around a personality.**

So people say we don't need church because we are doing the Rick Meyers/Joyce Warren bible study once a month.

Or here is one of my favorite....I can't go to church, I am going to the Big Name Christian Speakers Convention.

The early church gathered around a body of work called the Apostles Doctrine.

Not a Christian Pulp Fiction mass-marketed paper back.

**e.) "I don't need 'a church'"**

Statements like 'I don't need church' or 'I don't need other Christians, all I need is my bible and Jesus.'

This is not only the height of biblical illiteracy but personal arrogance.

To say you have no need of church or fellowship is to say you have no need of God.

We were created to fellowship with God and with each other

Paul says clearly, do not forsake the gathering together of the brethren

**e.) Then you have the 'we live in a post-church' ear people**

They say that we just gather together in small groups, do what we like; it doesn't really matter as long as we all get along. We all have our own journey, our own view, and our own story.

What an absolute load of twaddle.

## **What is fellowship?**

Fellowship is something that binds a church together; it does not split a church.

It does not replace the church.

It cannot compete with the church, because true fellowship is the very nature of who the church is.

Some times it is hard to image what Fellowship is if you do not have a picture of it.

How do you describe blue to a person who has never seen it before?

It is hard; you have to use a lot of different words and analogies

So let me give you some illustrations of what real Fellowship looks like and contrast that with what you have experienced and what we have already talked about.

## **The Church in Rome**

Have you ever read the story of the church that used to meet in Rome in the catacombs or the under ground burial chambers?

Around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century large burial tombs were carved out of the soft volcanic rock outside of the city limits of Rome.

They were used for the burial sites of Christian and Jewish martyrs.

There are about 600 acres of them and there are believed to be between 1,750,000 and 4,000,000 people buried in there.

The persecuted church would come to bury their dead and they would end up worshipping together.

They would come together in these underground tombs and have church, engage in fellowship, meet together, share with each other, encourage each other, undergird each other – in other words have

fellowship. And as a result of this strengthening, the word would spread and more would be saved.

## **The Spanish Inquisition**

Then there were times in the middle ages where the Roman Catholics would persecute any who did not adhere to her erroneous doctrine.

Over 50,000 trials were held during the Spanish Inquisition for crimes like reading the bible.

Or not believing the Pope was infallible.

Or not believing that the communion emblems turned into actual flesh and blood,

Or for being a follower of Martin Luther

3,945 trials were held simply for 'offenses against the Holy office of the Inquisition.' 2,575 for miscellaneous offences.

In the midst of this incredible persecution in Northern Italy people known as the Waldensians were forbidden to meet together because they liked to gather and read their bibles in homes because they did not believe in the doctrines of the Catholic Church

They were persecuted as heretics and called witches because they preached the scripture, they called for social justice and advocated religious freedom.

When they couldn't meet in houses they would gather in caves or on hillsides.

Do you see the difference?

Do you see how fellowship was based around their love for Christ and each other, not the fact they were upset because they didn't get their own way in church?

## **Scottish Covenanters**

Then what about the story of the Scottish Covenanters?

In the 1630's in Scotland the Crown decided it wanted to be the leadership of the church.

It wanted to make things like the Catholics

A group of people arose and refused; they signed something called a Covenant that confirmed the unity as Christians against an unbiblical, non-scriptural governmental state.

You believe all of those things?

In the midst of this incredible period known as 'the killing-time' ministers and covenanters were kicked out of their homes.

6,000 government troops looted and plundered. The covenanters were flushed out and hunted down. Common soldiers were empowered to take life without rail. Men were killed, women raped or drowned, and burnt, or transported.

But these people would gather on the hillsides, gather in the hollows.

Gather in pastures a man would stand on either end of a pass to keep watch for English troops.

The Word would be preached and the Holy Ghost would fill their glade.

If the troops were sighted a cry would go up and they would run through the moors.

They risked life and limb to meet, to listen and to fellowship. To strengthen each other, to encourage each other, to share all things they had in common

What was the set of beliefs that the government found so vile?

What were these people killed for?

Here is what they were killed for; here are just three things from their statement of faith;

- As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so we firmly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be, a kirk, that is to say, one company and multitude of men chosen by God, who rightly worship and embrace him by true faith in Jesus Christ, who is the only Head of the kirk, even as it is the body and spouse of Christ Jesus.
- We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom alone we must worship, and in whom alone we must put our trust;
- When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, his eternal Wisdom, the substance of his own glory, into this world, who took the nature of humanity from the substance of a woman, a virgin and that by means of the Holy Spirit.

These pictures to me are an incredible account of what true fellowship is.

I hope you see how different it is, how much a shadow the light of true fellowship throws on the current state of things.

**So let's now have a look at the aspects of true Christian fellowship.**

## **The first aspect of True fellowship is a love of one another**

1 John 3:14

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.*

When people became true Christians, they wanted to spend time with other Christians and they became concerned about people other than themselves.

The moment these 3 thousand people got saved they became joined. They wanted to be with each other. Their love for each other became the most important thing to them.

How unbalanced, how wrong has the modern church movement become when we tell people that the real mark of their spirituality is how little time they spend with Christians and how much they spend with the non-believers.

Some of you have been made to feel guilty for only having Christian friends.

You have been made to feel unspiritual because you desire the company of Christians.

No do I keep this salvation to myself?

No

Do I keep this revelation to myself...of course not

It is the strength and comfort I gather from the brethren that enables me and strengthens me and encourages me to go out and touch the world for Christ.

My relationship don't make me want to hide from the world, they make me want to touch and change the world.

They are the stronghold from which I can venture out and tell others about all that Christ has done

**The second aspect is that true fellowship comes from common bonds**

This new birth gives us common family bonds.

In the natural I would rather spend time with my kids and my wife than anyone else.

Does that mean I do not associate with others?

No.

But no relationship outside my family can match the intensity of love and intimacy I feel within my family... these are **my** family.

**The third thing is that True fellowship is made possible because we share a common spirit**

You see we have the same spirit within each of us that are true followers of Christ.

We are quickened by the same Holy Ghost.

1 Cor. 2:10

*These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.*

I was speaking at a business function last week and someone came up to me and asked 'are you a Christian?'

I said, 'Yes.'

You see it wasn't in the content of my speech, but in the content of my character,

I had never seen them before,  
I may never see them again, but our spirits recognized each other.

That is the start of fellowship.

The same spirit that rose Christ from the dead, quickens your spirit and quickens mine.

True Fellowship is only possible if we have a common spirit

**The fourth thing is that True Fellowship comes from a common belief system**

Jude 3

*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*

We have a common salvation.

I am not talking about a common expression.  
But a common salvation.

Jude here is writing to a group of Christians and warning them about the rise of false teachers perverting the truth.

Jude is saying there is a 'common salvation.'  
There is 'one salvation.'  
There are not many gospels.  
Not many interpretations of the scripture.

We can fellowship together because we hold a common belief system.

We can gather with the brethren,  
We may not agree on everything,  
But we agree on our 'common salvation.'

I am not talking about Clones, but I am talking about essentials

If you do not believe in the infallibility of God's Word  
If you do not believe in the Incarnation of Christ  
If you do not believe in the resurrection

Then we will at some point part company

Now I know God does miracles  
The Word says it, and I have seen it

But if you don't believe it  
It you have not seen it

Then we can still get along, because in the purest sense this issue is  
not a fundamental one.

All I know is if I can get you to hang around long enough we will scare  
that old Baptist thing out of you the first healing you see!

## **The fifth thing is that True Fellowship comes from common values**

A value is something that determines your actions in life.

They are the foundations upon which our internal belief system is based.

2 Cor 6:14-15

*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial?*

Paul here is outlining what goes towards making up the components of the temple of God.

Paul in the first verse of the chapter list everything that he has done to ensure the success and growth of the church and Christians in Corinth.

The Apostles have endured beatings, imprisonments, riots, hunger; they have made sure that they were pure, patient, and truthful.

They were slandered, punished, reviled.

Paul said we did all this to help build the church,  
To ensure the success of your fellowship,  
He then goes on and says here are some things that you all must do to ensure that the church succeeds.

He doesn't say, *we as your leaders can do this*; He doesn't say *this is what we Apostles must do*.

He says 'church, you must do this. These things need to be your values that will determine your action.'

'If you are going to continue to grow, continue to flourish you must continue in this fashion.'

The first thing he says is:

**a) Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers.**

The verb used means do not leave your place or rank or order to go to another.

Don't lower your values, your beliefs; don't bring them down to the level of another.

Don't associate with the heathen and don't lower yourself down and embrace some of the practices engaged in by apostate Christians.

An apostate Christian is one that uses the teaching of the bible for its own gain and it's our agenda.

Paul is saying that supporting an apostate Christian, being in an intimate relationship with an apostate Christian is to be judge and condemned as one.

You cannot associate with, listen to, read works by Christian ministers that are contrary in spirit or statement to the full council of the word of God – to do so is to give credence to an apostate

**b) Light and dark don't mix**

Paul seems to ask the question, why would you even bother to do that?

Light and darkness cannot mix.

Law and rebel cannot get along.

Light and darkness cannot occupy the same space.

You cannot mix the two.

Can I go to a strip club?

Can I physically walk in the door without God striking me dead?

Yes

Would I? No!

I have no desire to.

And I don't want to hang out with the sort of people that do that sort of thing

Light does not want to fellowship with darkness, righteousness doesn't want to spend its down time with lawlessness.

There cannot be true fellowship, true communion, and real common interest with people who do not know Christ.

If you have more in common with the boys in the bar.  
If you find it easier to associate with the ladies at the country club.  
If you can't wait to get away from Christians to be around 'real' people  
then friend you have too much darkness in you and what are you trying to hide?

People hide things in their darkness and they don't like being around people of light incase their darkness is exposed.

When you realize you are a child of the light you have so much to live for.

When you realize the freedom that comes from things exposed and dealt with you run to the light.

You want to be pure, and you want to be clean.

You want people to help you walk in freedom, not hide in darkness.

Real fellowship promotes this.  
Real fellowship encourages it.

There are five things that real fellowship promotes.  
Five traits of authentic Christian fellowship:

## **Passion**

The first is passion.

Real fellowship will encourage you to pursue the things of God with all that is in you.

Authentic brothers and sisters in Christ will urge you forward, not pull you down.

They will hold up your hands, not drag you down.

## **Accountability**

The second thing Christian fellowship does, is it holds you accountable.

If the light in my life and faith shines on an area of your life and makes you feel broken, that is making you vulnerable.

But if my light shines and it gives you the reason, courage and purpose to change, that is called accountability.

That is the second aspect of true fellowship.

## **Consistency**

Real Christian fellowship is consistent.

Persecution could not discourage Paul.

People lying about him or physically beating him would not change his mind – he was consistent.

Fellowship will help hold you on course even when things around you are shaky.

## **Transparent**

When you are equally yoked. When you are walking that close with a brother or a sister you cannot help but be transparent.

True fellowship gives you the freedom to be open and it gives you the ability to instruct.

With true fellowship comes a transparency across your life because the temple of God has no agreement with the idols of the world.

An idol is anything that takes away from your worship of Christ.

An idol can be bitterness.  
An idol can be anger or disappointment.

True fellowship breeds a transparency that allows you to speak into another's life and allows them to speak into yours.

## **Stability**

And finally true fellowship promotes stability.

True fellowship means that when life breaks you down, I hold you up. When you are overwhelmed, I help you overcome.

I fill in the troughs of your life with the highs from mine and will bring to each other stability to every area of our life.

I might encourage you because you are moving too slow.  
You might slow me down because I am going too fast.

And the results are wondrous, together we build this thing called the temple of the living God.

And what does it look like?  
When it is complete?

2 Cor 6:16-18

*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are*

*the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

*17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,*

*18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”*

He would ultimately say you are building the living temple of God – and that is the most wonderful way to view the true church.

That is what every preacher should give himself to.

He should give his being to not building his ministry, but building the living temple of God on earth – because that is what the church is.