

The Mission #8 – A Christian Culture

Acts 2:40-43 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.

Acts 2:42 ESV

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

We are continuing our look at the lives of the early Christians and the nature of the early church

I want to give you a picture of what the Christian church is because here in I know lays the only hope for the world.

The world we live in is an old world with a long and old history.

Everything we are facing today, we have faced before.

Everything that is going on today has gone on before.

Everything that the church needs to be, she has risen and become before.

If people would only stop and give themselves to the study of history and the study of church history in particular it would put them at rest and give them the answers they are seeking. The answers lie before our eyes if we would only take the time to look.

If you would study history,

You would be far more aware of the grace of God and you would not walk in fear as many today do.

For example, in Australia during the great depression, America had an unemployment rate of 17%, Australia had one of 29%. Yet suicides decreased, overall health increased and satisfaction with life rose dramatically.

Did you know that more millionaires were made during the great depression of the 1930's than at any other time in history?

Probably not.

Instead you will sit hour after hour getting depressed, reading the USA YESTERDAY.

That in essences is what we are attempting to do here over these last weeks.

The world today is exactly the same as it was back in the 1st century in the midst of the Roman Empire.

Perhaps things are slightly different, but in essence they are the same. People feasted, they partied, they had their gladiator sports, they worshiped idols and engaged in all sorts of perversion, nothing has changed from then until now.

Voltaire said that human history is nothing more than a tableau of crimes and misfortunes.

The only thing that has ever made a real difference in the world is the church.

Nothing made such an impact on the Roman Empire or Greek philosophies as the church of Jesus Christ.

If the church becomes all she is supposed to become then the world will become all it is supposed to be.

We must realize however that the job of the church is not to change the plight of nations, but the state of the souls of men and women.

If the church grows will the moral climate of the country change?
Yes. But that is not the aim of the church.

Will the economy improve when the country adheres to the word of God? Yes. But that is not the job of the church

Will our standard of living and the safety of our families improve when we live for Christ?
Yes. But that is not the concern of the church.

The church is a spiritual organization not a government institutions or a financial aid lobby group for people with housing needs.

The concern of the church is for the spiritual state of every individual.

Should Christians be involved in these things...absolutely...we should be running them with passion and integrity.

We should be THE captains of industry.

We should be running all government offices.

We should be THE major influence in the arts.

That is what Christians should DO!

That is YOUR job.

But that is not the job of the church.

That is not the job of your pastor.

MY job is to equip YOU for the work of that ministry.

The job of the church is discipleship and evangelism – the souls of men and women are our aim.

We surely realize that we are seeing as the church today, the models we have of modern Christians are not the pictures we need.

Regardless of how badly the church of Jesus Christ has fallen into disrepute, there arises a cry in the souls of men and woman for Godliness and righteousness to walk the earth once again.

A photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy is a black smudge.

We need to go back in history to get a picture of the early church and the early Christians so we can see more clearly who we are suppose to be and the incredible possibilities we have lying dormant before us in this day and age.

Recap

In order to do this 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 continued by looking at the nature of true fellowship,

We first of all looked at what true fellowship was not:

- a.) It is not a group of dissenters
- b.) Fellowship is not a substitute for church
- c.) Fellowship is not a competition for church

Then we looked at the nature of what True Fellowship is.

1. The first aspect of true fellowship is that Christians had a love one for one another

Members of the early church loved their Christian brethren.

They liked being with them; they desired to be with them.

They gathered strength from the gathering together that enabled them to go out and touch their world for Christ

2. The second aspect is that true fellowship comes from common bonds

These common bonds don't just come from common beliefs, but from common experiences.

They knew what it was to have their lives transformed.

They knew what it was to have their lives totally transformed by Jesus Christ and it drew them together.

A person who has been radically change by Christ and for Christ will want to tell the world about it, but at the same time find it extremely difficult to articulate what has happened at the deepest level.

3. The third thing is that true fellowship is made possible because we share a common spirit

A true Christian, goes beyond a simple common experience.

The cults have that.

The cults can talk about how their life was changed

Alcoholics Anonymous has that.

They can talk about being changed by a 12-step program.

But True Christians, these members of the early church they shared a common spirit.

The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead quickened their mortal body. It was a supernatural thing!

They knew they were alive!

Alive, for the first time in their life.

This Jesus whom had been crucified and died for them had taken a hold of their life and for the first time that they could remember ...they were alive!!!

4. The fourth thing we looked at was that True Fellowship comes from a common belief system

The early church just didn't believe anything.

They didn't believe the tabloids or the latest teaching, they believed the Apostles Doctrine.

They believed what the Apostles taught and what the Apostles believe.

They had a common belief system, a common doctrine.

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian.

Listening to sermons doesn't set you free

Churches around the world are filled with people who are bound up and bored.

Not these early Christians they were transformed by truth.
A truth that had set them free

They were bound together by what they believed, not torn apart by it.

The fifth thing is that True Fellowship comes from common values

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?

A value is something that determines your actions in life.

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

The early church held common values.

They held a core set of beliefs that were based upon the apostles doctrine and it determined everything in their public lives, their private lives and their business and

Do you notice the order, that Luke records these qualities of the early church?

He does not start with prayers

He does not start with the breaking of bread

Or with fellowship

But with Doctrine.

They held a common set of beliefs that gave them a common set of values

Out of the teaching came the common values

Out of what they held dear to each other, came their convictions

Preferences are negotiable

Convictions are not.

It is out of your convictions that your values grow.

The Apostles love for the Church

At the beginning of this chapter in 2nd Corinthians Paul is outlining the things that the Apostles have done that prove their love and passion for the church, the love and passions for the fellowship of believers.

Paul in the first verses of the chapter list everything that he and the other Apostles have done to ensure the success and growth of the church and Christians in Corinth.

The Apostles have endured beatings, imprisonments, riots, hunger; they were slandered, punished and reviled.

Paul said we did all this to help build the church at Corinth, 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 YOUR church succeeds...here is something that is vitally important for YOU as a congregation to do, to continue to grow and succeed as Christians, as a fellowship

He **doesn't** say, *we as your leaders can do this*; He **doesn't** say *this is what we Apostles must do*. He has already said what the Apostles have done

He says 'church, you must do this'.

These things need to be your values that will determine your actions as individuals and as a body

'If you are going to continue to grow, continue to flourish you must continue in this fashion, in this way....you must have common values, you must hold each other accountable to these values and beliefs

As we often do, lets have a look at the negative before we have a look at the positive.

Lets have a look at 4 negative examples of what True fellowship is not, before we have a look at 6 positive ones.

So here is Paul seeing some well meaning Christians going off the rails and he brings correction, he gives instruction to the church.

The first thing he says is:

a) Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Clarke in his commentary says:

This is a military term: keep in your own ranks; do not leave the Christian community to join in that of the heathens.

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 or dissenting Christians.

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

A dissenting teacher or leader was one who was leading the early church away from the teaching of the Apostles

A dissenter is not just someone who says something against leadership, but is someone who draws others around themselves, pulling them out of fellowship, pulling them to themselves.

That is what Paul is dealing with here. He is saying do not leave your Christian Community, your church to join these people

Here he is saying that supporting an apostate Christian, being in an intimate relationship with an apostate Christian is to be judged 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.

In fact in Galatians Paul says very clearly do not give the time of day to people who do not share the same love for the truth and the same love for the bible, the same love for the Church, the same core values and beliefs that you have.

Galatians 5:12 ESV

(12) I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

Those who unsettle you

Those who make you wonder

Those who make you wander

Those who argue

These people, Paul says: Those who go against my pastoral direction and insight

I wish that they would emasculate themselves

Emasculate – to render oneself impotent

Emasculate – to castrate oneself.

The NKJV says: I wish they would cut themselves off!

The Greek rendering of the word means to amputate oneself!

Now I have at times had need to given some folks some very strong pastoral direction, and it has been suggested to me that I can be firm in my direction.

From now on I will simply be biblical

From now on I will simple turn up with a pocketknife quote them the scripture and leave the room!

Friend do not be unequally yoked. Do not bring yourself down to the level of those that do not hold the same values as yourself.

b) For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness

The word unequally yoked also means to be crossbred with an animal of another species

Paul is saying it is an abomination to be yoked with someone who does not follow the teachings of the Apostles

These people are totally incompatible.

A dog makes a great dog, a cat makes a great cat, but you are not going to get Pittens of kuppies

They just don't go together

He then starts to go and list some examples of things that to him just don't make sense

What partnership?

What fellowship?

What communion do you have with people who don't share the same values as you?

Some people look at this and they use this as a justification for why Christians should not have non-Christian friends

That is not the context of the Scripture. Paul is talking about people pretending to be Christians and modeling a version of Christianity that is not the best.

c) Then he says *what fellowship has lightness with darkness*

Paul is asking these Corinthians ...why are you even tolerating these people in your midst?

These people do not share the same values, the same beliefs as you do, so let them go their own way and have nothing to do with them.

Sometimes I see people waste so much time and effort out of a false sense of obligation

The word Christian and doormat are not synonymous.

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.

I run to the light

I want the Word to shine light into my life.

I have people I ask to speak into my life – I want them to peer inside and look around

Do I give this privilege to many...no!

Do I ask them to do it on everything...no!
But I can tell you this

Not one major decision is made with me consulting our pastoral team or our leadership team

This is not a pastoral team driven by ego, but by mission
We are not arrogant, but passionate!

I want to save the world and I will change what ever I must in order to be qualified to do it!

Friend if you value what Christ has done for you

You want to be pure, 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.

Paul seems to ask the question, why would you even bother to do these things? Why are you forming relationships with them?

Law and rebellion cannot get along.

Light and darkness cannot mix.

Light and darkness cannot occupy the same space.

In all reality 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, or real common interest with people who do not know Christ and do not hold the same values as you

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?

Does that mean that you do not have non-Christian friends...no – that is not what Paul is addressing, Paul is addressing people within the church who are not living or being the example they are suppose to be

Does that mean that all your friends need to have all the same opinion?

No...that would be kind of Stepfordwife-ish - that is called cloning

Some of my deepest and closest friends are the ones I have argued for years with about doctrine and I will argue for many more I am sure!

But we share the same love of the local church
We share the same passion for the kingdom of God
We share the same vision of a church triumphant!

d) What accord has Christ with Belilal?

Then Paul asks: what accord does Christ have with Belilal?

Accord means: harmony, unity, to be in agreement with.

Belilal is the name of a demon mentioned in the bible in several places. It is one of the names for Satan

The name Belilal means **worthless** one or **yokeless** one.

Let me read you couple of references and you will see the picture that it paints

Idolaters

Deuteronomy 13:11-15 ESV

(11) And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you.

(12) "If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to dwell there,

(13) That certain worthless fellows (worshippers of Belilal) have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known,

(14) Then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently. And behold, if it be true and certain that such an abomination has been done among you,

(15) You shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction, all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword.

Here where a group of people that neither feared God nor feared man.

All they wanted to do was to keep the children of Israel out of the promises of God

All they wanted to do was to destroy someone else's destiny

That is what the devil wants to do,

He wants to keep you from the promises and the fullness of God.

How did he do it in this case?

Was it people that said they were satanist?

Was it people who said that they did not worship the One True God?

Not, in fact it was the opposite

It was people who lived amongst them

People who lived amongst them, dwelt amongst them, their children played together, yet they harbored ambitions that were.

How many times I have had to deal with people who have said things like...I know I shouldn't have done it, but they were my friends, or...I know I should have done it, he said he loved me, she said she'd marry me

If you do not know what you are standing for, then you will fall for anything

The Sons of Eli

1 Samuel 2:12 ESV

(12) Now the sons of Eli were worthless men (worshippers of Belial). They did not know the LORD.

Have you ever meet a street-wise person?

It is a term used of people who have become hardened by life. They know how to act a certain way to present a certain front Their hearts have become hard to the world around them, they continually put on a front

Do you know people can become church wise?

Streetwise people may be profane, but the church wise are religious.

Both have hard hearts
Both have disdain for authorities
Both know how to put on a good front
Both know how to con someone

The sons of Eli were church-wise

They had grown up in the temple
They learned how to con people, how to do things to impress people

We often talk of streetwise people, but did you know there are church wise people

Paul is saying that there are people in the Church at Corinth that are church-wise

The people Paul is talking about here are not righteous.
They are not in right relationship with God
They are not righteous with their fellowship
They are not righteous with the other believers
They are church wise

To be honest - I would rather deal with the streetwise, than the church wise.

At least with the streetwise you know there is room and the possibility of repentance, the church wise have been attending altar calls and praying false prayers for years.

Apologizing and meaning nothing to them.
They are pretending instead of repenting
Paul is saying that the true believer cannot be in close association with someone that does not have the same values and beliefs that you do.

You have to exercise discernment and judgment concerning key relationships in your life if you are going to grow and become all you can become in Christ.

The characteristics of Real Christian Culture

There are six things that real fellowship promotes.
Six traits of authentic Christian Culture.

What is culture?

Culture is the force that works for you or against you in any church, organization or group

Cultures are either deliberate or detrimental

It is either something you build or it is something you put up with.

These early Christians had a culture

It was this culture for Christ and His Kingdom that the Apostles fought so hard to ensure throughout all of the epistles, the letters to the early churches

Now the forces that make up a culture are the forces that, when in balance, keep it operating at its optimum level

The letters that the Apostle wrote were letters all with the intent and aim of keeping the early church doing what it was suppose to be doing, being what it was supposed to be being.

In others, they were letters that were addressing issues that were either impacting or infecting their culture

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 push you forward, not pull you down

Accountability

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

To be accountable means that you are held responsible,
That you are answerable for your life.

One of the definitions of sin is to miss the mark

To live below your potential, to not be all that you can be

Real fellowship will speak to your greatness, even if you don't like what you are hearing.

And in order for there to be authentic vulnerability there has to be intimacy

Intimacy

Into-me-see

Only when you allow someone in, can they help you be great

Why people are so reluctant to allow others in is because they have been hurt by people before.

In church life you have to be careful who you allow to speak into you life, but I would encourage you to be forming relationships that will spur you onto great things for God

Consistency

Real Christian fellowship is consistent.

Persecution could not discourage Paul.
Shipwrecks did 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.

I want to thank you, that as a people – when Christians all over the nation are getting weird and funky with the tithing and their giving you have not been.

How silly of us to think that tithing is something we only do when it is convenient

Or when CNN tells us that things are good

Giving the tithe back to God is something that you do despite the circumstances, not because of the circumstance

You don't share your faith because it is convenient

You share it because there are souls desperate for it

You don't wait for the Spirit to move you to pray; you pray and believe that the spirit will move!

We were at the Gym on Friday and we walk up behind a man who had obviously had a stroke

He had a scar across his forehead.

He drug his legs and shuffled

We are in the locker room

Guys yelling, caring on

ESPN blaring on the TV

And I got to talking to this guy

I asked him about his legs

And asked if I could pray for him

I prayed and asked Jesus to heal him.

I said Lord; A man should be able to walk from this life to the next in dignity

And he burst into tears

He said *With Dignity, that's right!*

He told me about how he had been depressed, drowning his pain in alcohol and drugs and now he was at the gym doing the best with what he had and believing for the rest

Was it convenient...no. But it was opportune

Was it conducive no...but we are not moved by what we see, but Whom we know!

I saw a man with a need and I know that THE MAN answers needs just like that.

How inconsistent it would be of me to only pray for people on a Sunday pm in church and not pray for people in a locker room on Friday afternoon.

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.

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

Stability

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 together we 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 Kingdom of the living God.

Spirituality

What a sad state we have become when Christians no longer encourage each other to pursue Christ, but rather we brand someone as not being culturally irrelevant or not relating because they have a passion for prayer, the supernatural or the things of God

Why is it that some people spend all their time trying to drag people down from their moral standards instead of giving them room to live by their convictions?

True Fellowship promotes authentic spirituality!
More next week