

Title: **THE LOCAL CHURCH**
 A Fellowship of Believers in Christ

Text: Acts 2:41-47

Subject: *Believers One in Christ*

Readings: *Ron Wood*

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Tape # Y-61a

Introduction:

(Acts 2:41-47) "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. (42) And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (43) And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles. (44) And all that believed were together, and had all things common; (45) And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. (46) And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, (47) Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

What a blessed, instructive description the Holy Spirit here gives of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ! How sweet are those words, "all that believed were together, and had all things common." That early church was truly a "*habitation of God through the Spirit.*" Several weeks ago, one of our men reads this passage before one of our evening services, and Bro. Larry Brown said, "I sure would like to hear a message on those last verses of Acts 2." Before Larry said that, I was already thinking, "There's a message in those verses for us." And believe the Lord has given me a message for us.

TWO INSTITUTIONS

In so far as the record of Holy Scripture is concerned, I read that God has established two blessed institutions in this world for the happiness, holiness, and well-being of his people, as we make our pilgrimage through this world.

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- **THE FAMILY** (Gen. 2:18-25)

(Genesis 2:18-25) "And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. (19) And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof. (20) And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. (21) And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; (22) And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. (23) And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (24) Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (25) And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

Happy indeed is that man who finds a good wife. "*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord*" (Pro. 18:22). "*A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband*" (Pro. 12:4). Happy is that woman who finds a good husband. One of the greatest blessings God can bestow upon you in this world is the joy of a peaceful, happy home.

- **THE CHURCH** (Matt. 16:13-18)

(Matthew 16:13-18) "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? (14) And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. (15) He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? (16) And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. (17) And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art

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thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (18) And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The Lord established the church in this world for the glory of his own great name. **The church of Christ is my spiritual family. The people of God are my brothers and sisters. The greatest earthly privilege that I enjoy, the greatest earthly blessing God has bestowed upon me, is the privilege of being a part of this local assembly of believers.** Happy is that man or woman who is blessed of God to be a part of a peaceful, joyful church family. God has honored us, favored us, and blessed us in this place with a blessed fellowship of love and peace in Christ.

These two institutions meet all my needs in this world, both physical and spiritual. No other institutions can serve their purpose. The family and the church, these are God's institutions. They cannot be improved upon. I would not give up my family for anything, or anyone, in this world. Nothing could replace it. And I cannot give up the church of God for anything, or anyone in this world, because nothing can replace it. **Yet, of these two divine institutions, the church is the most important.**

Here are four things that make the church of Christ more important to me than anything else in this world.

1. **The church belongs to Christ.** – "*My church.*"

- He loved the church.
- He chose the church.
- He redeemed the church.
- He called the church.
- He adds to the church, as he will, whom he will, when he will.

2. **The church is built upon Christ.**

The church is made up of men and women, sinful, mortal people of flesh and blood, frail, weak, depraved men and women; but they are men and women in Christ who are redeemed and regenerated by the grace of God. And those men and women are all built upon one precious Foundation. —

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Christ crucified! Christ is the Foundation (the only foundation) upon which the church is built (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20-22).

(1 Corinthians 3:11) "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

(Ephesians 2:20-22) "And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; (21) In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: (22) In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

3. **Christ is the Head of the church** (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:8-12; 5:23).

(Ephesians 1:22-23) "And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, (23) Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

(Ephesians 4:8-12) "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (9) (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? (10) He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) (11) And he gave some, Apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:"

(Ephesians 5:23) "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body."

As the Head, Christ has given certain established order to his church.

- Pastors
- Deacons
- Gifts to Each Member (Rom. 12:3-13).

As our Head, all things in the church must be subject to Christ.

- Our Ordinances

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- Our Doctrine
- Our Practices

As our Head, Christ has left his church with a definite work to perform
(Matt. 28:18-20).

(Matthew 28:18-20) "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. (19) Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (20) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen."

As we go about the business of serving our Lord's cause and interest in this world, we must not expect to be treated any differently than he was while he was here (Matt. 10:16-40). — "*Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.*" Slander, abuse, and persecution are the things we may reasonably expect from men who despise our God and Savior.

4. **The church is the immortal, everlasting family of** God (Eph. 3:14-15).

(Ephesians 3:14-15) "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

My earthly family, dear and precious as it is, is only temporary. It will be diminished, broken up, and dissolved in God's good providence. But the church of Christ will only increase. It shall never be diminished, broken up, or dissolved. You who are my brothers will be my brothers forever. You who are my sisters will be my sisters forever. Even in heaven, our relationship will be the same. Only then, it will be a perfect, glorious fellowship in Christ.

Proposition: I want to talk to you about this, the most important of all earthly relationships. **The local church is a fellowship of believers in Christ.**

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Divisions: In our text Luke sets before us an example of what every local church should be, by showing us what that first local church at Jerusalem was. It was a blessed fellowship of believers in Christ. Their fellowship was fourfold.

5. A Fellowship of Doctrine
6. A Fellowship of Brethren
7. A Fellowship with Christ
8. A Fellowship with God the Father

DOCTRINAL FELLOWSHIP

- I. *First*, the local church is and must be a fellowship of believers in the Apostles' doctrine.

Luke tells us that these early believers at Jerusalem gladly received the Word. — “*And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine*” (41-42).

Nothing is of greater importance in the church than our doctrinal foundation. What we do and what we are is determined by what we believe. If our fellowship is not built upon the doctrine of the Apostles, then we have no real fellowship at all. It is impossible to have fellowship with Christ, while denying the doctrine of Christ. It is impossible to have fellowship with God, while denying the doctrine of God. Our fellowship as a church must be built upon the Apostle's doctrine.

- A. **The Apostles' doctrine is that body of truth revealed by God through the Apostles.** — *The New Testament.*

The Apostles' doctrine is the gospel of God's free, sovereign, saving grace in Christ. There are certain fundamental truths of the gospel, which are essential to the fellowship of God's saints. **Fellowship involves communion, agreement of heart, and unity of spirit. Where there is no agreement upon gospel truths there is no fellowship.**

SEVEN VITAL TRUTHS

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Here are seven things which we hold to be vital, essential truths of the gospel. We have no fellowship, no communion, no agreement, and no unity with those who deny any of these things.

1. God is absolutely, totally, and universally sovereign (Ps. 115:3; 135:6).
2. The Bible is the inspired Word of God; and as such, it is our only rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Isa. 8:20).
3. Man, by nature, is totally depraved, a fallen, sinful, guilty, and helpless object of God's just wrath (Eph. 2:1-4).
4. God has chosen a people for his own glory and sovereignly predestinated them unto salvation as the objects of his grace (Rom. 9:11-18).
5. The Lord Jesus Christ has effectually accomplished the eternal redemption of those people for whom he died as a Substitute (Heb. 9:12).
 - God's elect.
 - His sheep.
 - All who believe.
6. The Holy Spirit regenerates and calls dead sinners to life in Christ by the effectual power of his irresistible grace (Eph. 1:18-19; Col. 2:12-13).
7. All true believers will persevere in the faith, being preserved in life and grace by God himself (John 10:28-30).

What I am saying is this, we believe, according to the plain statements of Holy Scripture that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9).

(Ephesians 2:8-9) "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast."

- Planned by God.
- Purchased by God.
- Performed by God.
- Preserved by God.
- Perfected by God.

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These blessed gospel truths are essential to our fellowship in the Apostles' doctrine. These are the things that unite us. The gospel of the grace of God is our common bond.

B. **The people of God (all of them) gladly receive the Apostles' doctrine**
 (v. 41).

(Acts 2:41) "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls."

God's people do not debate and argue about gospel truth. They receive it, and receive it gladly.

- They receive the gospel as the Word of God, submissively.
- They receive it gladly, rejoicing in it.

FRATERNAL FELLOWSHIP

II. *Second*, the local church must be a fellowship of brethren in Christ.

If there is no fellowship, there is no church. By fellowship, I do not mean social gatherings, though it is good for us to get together with one another socially. When I talk about fellowship, I am not talking about church dinners, though I enjoy those too. **By fellowship I mean a real unity of heart and purpose.** That is the meaning of the word as it is used here. — "*All that believed were together, and all things common.*" **Fellowship is a genuine oneness of heart.** Believers are men and women united in Christ. They truly have "all things common." Each uses what he has for the good of all. They are of "*one accord*," built up in love, with singleness of heart, seeking the glory of God.

A. **Fellowship is the love of God's saints for one another.**

Illustration: John, "*Little children, love one another.*"

B. **Fellowship is the sympathy of God's saints with one another.**

- Sympathy with Each Other's Weaknesses.

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- Sympathy with Each Other's Trials.
- Sympathy with Each Other's Sorrows.

C. **Fellowship is the care of God's saints for one another.**

You have often heard the expression, "We care for our own." Well, in the family of God, "We care for our own."

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows,
The sympathizing tear.

This loving care of God's people basically involves three things:

1. Patience
2. Forgiveness
3. Care – Provision

ACTS 4

Turn to Acts 4, and you will see a tremendous example of this sweet fellowship of grace and love in Christ.

(Acts 4:32-35) "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. (33) And with great power gave the apostles witness of the

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resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. (34) Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, (35) And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

Believing hearts are gracious hearts. True faith really converts sinners. The person who is born again by the Spirit of God is no longer a selfish, self-centered, self-seeking, self-serving person, but a grateful, thoughtful, generous, serving person. All who live unto God die unto the world. The person who finds his life in Christ loses his life to Christ (Matt. 10:39).

These early disciples showed by their example that faith lives not for material gain, but for spiritual good. — Faith seeks not temporal riches. — Faith loves not the things of this world, which are passing away, but the things of that world which is to come, which are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). — Faith seeks the kingdom of God and his righteousness, not the mammon of unrighteousness (Matt. 6:24, 31-33). — Faith in Christ produces an attitude of grace in the heart. **Those who have experienced the grace of God are gracious. Is this not the teaching of these four verses?**

Faith unites the people of God. Luke tells us that "*the multitude of them that believed were of one accord*" (v. 32). All of God's people truly are one in Christ. We are **one family** (Eph. 3:14-15), a family of sinners saved by grace. Our hearts **love one Person supremely**, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:8; 1 John 4:19). We are **devoted to one cause**, the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:10). We **seek one thing** above all other things, the will of God (Matt. 6:6). We have **one dominate, ultimate goal**, the glory of God (John 12:28).

These things are true of all believers! Many other things, regrettably, may divide us while we live in this body of flesh and sin. But here we are one. Let every child of God endeavor, therefore, to keep "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:1-6).

(Ephesians 4:1-6) "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, (2) With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one

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another in love; (3) Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; (5) One Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all."

Faith in Christ makes men and women generous with their possessions.

— "*Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common*" (v. 32). These men and women were so taken up with the cause of Christ and with their love for one another that they placed no value upon personal property, personal wealth, or personal advantages. These believers were truly indifferent to such things. They did not even look upon their own possessions as their own. In their hearts' affection they had forsaken all to follow Christ. They recognized that all earthly, material things are only temporary. They were so thoroughly united to one another in love that they each looked upon their own property as the common property of God's people. God give me such grace!

These men and women had learned what every child of God in this world must learn. — **All that we have in this world belongs to God.** God has entrusted each of us with certain of this world's goods to use as stewards in his house. We are responsible to use them wisely for the advancement of his kingdom, the furtherance of his gospel, the comfort of his people, and the glory of his name. **These men and women were willing to rob themselves of comfort, convenience, and personal satisfaction for one another's good.** Is it any wonder that the Apostles preached with such power, "*when such great grace was upon them all*" (v. 33)?

True faith actually causes God's saints to prefer each other above themselves. This is manifest in verses 34 and 35. These men and women sold their possessions, their houses and their lands rather than allow their brothers and sisters in Christ to be in need of the necessities of life! **The grace of God still produces this kind of graciousness, mercifulness, and love** (Phil. 2:1-8; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18).

(Philippians 2:1-8) "*If there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels

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and mercies, (2) Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. (3) *Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (4) Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (5) Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (6) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: (7) But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: (8) And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

(James 2:14-17) "What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? (15) If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, (16) And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be *ye* warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? (17) Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

(1 John 3:16-18) "Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. (17) But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? (18) My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

Their gifts were free, voluntary sacrifices of love. No one told them to give. No one told them how to give. No one told them how much to give.

- In the church of God giving is not regulated by law, but by love (2 Cor. 9:7).
- The only constraint these people felt was the constraint of love (2 Cor. 5:14).

They saw what the needs of the church were and willingly met those needs, without the least pressure to do so.

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Notice this, too. — **The people of God trusted the servants of God to distribute their gifts under the direction of the Spirit of God** (v. 35).

(Acts 4:35) "And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

Where the Spirit of God rules the hearts of men there is trust and trustworthiness! The Apostles of Christ were not (and his servants are not) greedy men. They took only what they needed to sustain themselves. Everything else was distributed as needs demanded.

BARNABAS

The Spirit of God inspired Luke to tell us about one man specifically, who was an example of the rest. Barnabas performed a great deed, an act of generosity (4:36-37).

(Acts 4:36-37) "And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus, (37) Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet."

As one that was ordained of God to be a preacher of the gospel, Barnabas disentangled himself from the affairs of this world (2 Tim. 2:4; 1 Cor. 9:6-14). Perhaps Barnabas did not know it at the time, but God was preparing him for the work of preaching the gospel. Indeed, all who are called of God to preach the gospel are prepared, equipped, and qualified by him to do so (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9).

Barnabas was just the kind of man God uses in the work of the ministry. God had made him such a man by his Spirit and by his grace. He was **a peaceful man**, one who comforted and encouraged the saints. He was **a generous man**, an example of Christian charity. He was **willingly submissive to the Apostles**, the servants of Christ (Heb. 13:7, 17). Barnabas was **a man of good report**, who in the providence of God gained the love and respect of God's people. Then, after God prepared him for it, he was made a preacher of the gospel (Acts 13:2).

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(Acts 2:44-46) "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; (45) And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. (46) And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,"

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

III. *Third*, the local church is a fellowship of believers with Christ.

Our Lord promised, "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matt. 18:20). Basically, our Lord Jesus Christ manifests his presence in our midst in three ways.

A. **Christ reveals himself to us through the Word, through the preaching of the gospel.**

The whole point of preaching is that you might see the Savior.

B. **Christ reveals himself to us in the ordinances.**

- Baptism
- The Lord's Supper – "*Breaking of bread*" (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

(1 Corinthians 10:16-17) "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (17) For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

C. **Christ reveals himself to us in our songs of praise to God.** – "*Praising God.*"

It was our Savior's purpose on the earth to glorify his Father. And it is still his purpose to glorify the Father through his church. He joins us in this blessed work, for it is Christ who presents our praise to the Father. —

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“Father, hear the songs of your chosen, redeemed people, they’re praising your name.”

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER

IV. *Fourth*, the local church is a blessed fellowship of believers with God the Father.

In our prayers to God through the mediation of Christ, we have fellowship with God himself (1 John 1:1-3).

- Our Private Prayers
- Our Family Prayers
- Our Public Prayers

(1 John 1:1-3) "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (2) (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) (3) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Application: This is what the church will be in heaven, a perfect fellowship in the gospel of Christ, a perfect fellowship with our brethren, a perfect fellowship with Christ, and a perfect fellowship with God our Father. Every local church ought to be this. — **A Fellowship Of Believers In Christ.** In great measure, I believe God the Holy Spirit has given us that fellowship. Let us cultivate it with gladness and singleness of heart. And the Lord will add to his church daily such as should be saved.