

Acts 2:42-43 Teacher's Lesson Snapshot of a Healthy Church

Introduction: Today we will examine some key components that help make for a healthy church experience. As we study this, you should be thinking, "How does our church measure up?" If you were looking for a church, which of these components would you judge to be the most essential?

Literary Pause: Today's passage (2:42-47), is like an oasis in the middle of the book of Acts. Luke pulled over to the curb and parked a minute. There are several other places in Acts like this where Luke pauses and summarizes the state of the church (4:32-37, 5:12-16).¹

******How did Luke describe what the early church was like (2:42-47)?** (*Write on the board some of the words Luke uses to describe what was going on*). There were devoted to a) teaching, b) fellowship, c) breaking of bread, and d) prayer (2:42). They felt awe (2:43). There were wonders and signs (2:43). There was generous giving to those in need (2:44-45). They met daily both in the a) temple and in b) homes (2:46). They ate together and were glad (2:46). There was praise (2:47). They had favor with the populace (2:47). New people were being saved (2:47).

—2:42—

******Acts 2:42 is a much studied verse for church renewal and for church basics. What was the early church was devoted to?** It was devoted seemingly four things: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

1. What does it mean to be devoted to something (2:42)? It means it is high on your priority list; it means you are loyal to it. The root meaning of the Greek (*proskartereo*) is to adhere to or persist in. Here in Acts 2:42 it means they held fast to these things; they persevered in these things.²

1. The Apostles' Teaching

2. How is it they were devoted the apostles' teaching rather than Jesus' teaching (2:42)? See *John 13:20, 14:26, 15:16, 16:12-13*. **Joke:** It was because they didn't have red letter Bibles yet! The word apostle comes from *apostolos* and means sent one, accredited messenger, envoy, ambassador, or one commissioned. The verb, *apostello*, means to send with a particular purpose. They were handpicked by Jesus to represent Him. The apostles were spokesmen for Jesus. They were the standard for doctrine and lifestyle in the church.

First Jesus was here, then He left the apostles in his place. They, in turn, left us the Bible in their place. Underlying the whole process is the Holy Spirit, sent to replace Jesus and guide the apostles and still with us to help us apply the Scriptures correctly.

Here are some unique promises/statements made by Jesus to the apostles:

¹ Marshall, 89.

² BAGD, 715.

ESV **John 15:16** . . . I chose you and appointed you . . .

ESV **John 13:20** Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me . . .

Application: It is still true today that those who reject the teachings of the original apostles are, in effect, rejecting Jesus' teachings. You should not listen to any church teacher who thinks he knows better than the apostles.

ESV **John 14:26** . . . the Holy Spirit . . . will . . . bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

ESV **John 16:12-13** I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . . and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Inspiration of Scripture: Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit would remind them of what Jesus had taught plus teach them new things is the basis for the inspiration of the New Testament. The epistles are, in a very real sense, commentaries on the teachings of Jesus.

3. Why is teaching so critical for a healthy church (2:42)? See *Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Timothy 4:1-4*. Teaching people to obey all that Jesus commanded is a critical aspect of disciple making.

NAS **Matthew 28:19-20** . . . make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . .

ESV **2 Timothy 4:1-4** I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus . . . preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Qualified Teaching: Not just any teaching will do. The teaching a church receives must to be based on Jesus' commands (Mt 28:19-20), the teachings of the apostles as found in the New Testament (Acts 2:42), and the whole Word of God (2Ti 4:1-4).

Expository Teaching: Even though the apostles are not here anymore to teach us, we have their letters. Most of a church leader's teaching should be systematically going through the New Testament letters in an expository fashion. One celebrity preacher in Atlanta who does not teach the Bible called teaching from the Bible easy and cheating. He even claimed people don't grow that way (!). Instead, he serves his massive congregation witty, entertaining, topical messages drawn almost entirely from his own brilliant imagination. Although his ideas and notions are entertaining, what ultimately matters is what the Holy Spirit inspired the biblical authors to write. In the final analysis, people don't need to hear what you or I think about things. Instead, we are to be devoted to the apostles' teaching. Unlike the celebrity preacher referred to above, I am not smart enough to teach anything other than the Bible. However, I am smart enough to know not to teach anything other than the Bible.

Application: *Would you describe yourself as devoted to the teaching of the apostles? Or are you casual about learning what they taught? Is your participation in the teaching ministry of the church consistent or it is hit and miss (mostly miss)?*

2. Fellowship

4. In general, what is fellowship (2:42)? The Greek word here is *koinoia*, which means “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship”.³

5. What did Luke mean by “the” fellowship (2:42)? Luke had in mind not fellowship in general, but a specific fellowship. In one sense you might say “the” fellowship meaning among believers as opposed to a within the rotary club or a civic association.

The answer to this question has to do with the word “and” (see next question).

6. Look at 2:42 again. What is the significance of the fact there is no “and” between fellowship and breaking of bread (2:42)? The lack of the word “and” (*kai*) suggests the two are connected. The fellowship occurred in or during the breaking of bread. It was not general fellowship; it was specifically the breaking of bread fellowship.

Three Activities, not Four: This means the early church was devoted to three things, not four: 1) teaching, 2) the breaking of bread fellowship, and 3) the prayers.

7. What is the breaking of bread (2:42)? *See Luke 24:30.* This is likely Luke’s way of referring to the Lord’s Supper (Luke recorded that, at the Last Supper, Jesus took bread and broke it). The early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper as an actual meal (1Co 11b). The *ESV Study Bible* states that the term breaking of bread “likely covers both the Lord’s Supper and a larger fellowship meal”.⁴ This seems incredible to those who’ve never heard it before; listen to these scholars:

Leon Morris, Principal of Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia, writes, “Holy Communion was not simply a token meal as with us, but an actual meal. Moreover it seems clear that it was a meal to which each of the participants brought food”.⁵

I. Howard Marshall, Professor of New Testament Exegesis University of Aberdeen, Scotland, stated that the Lord’s Supper “was observed by His disciples, at first as part of a communal meal, Sunday by Sunday”.⁶

John Gooch, church historian and editor at the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, Tennessee, wrote, “In the first century, the Lord’s Supper included not only the bread and the cup but an entire meal.”⁷

³ BAGD, p. 438.

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, 2085.

⁵ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, (Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 158.

⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *Christian Beliefs: An Introductory Study Guide* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1972) 80.

⁷ John Gooch, *Christian History & Biography*, Issue 37 (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today) p. 3.

John Drane, lecturer in Religious Studies at Stirling University, Scotland, wrote, "The early church observed the Lord's Supper as an exclusive community meal".⁸

It was a wonderful time of fellowship, not a time of morbid, individualistic introspection. It is no accident that communion and community are from the same root word!

Food & Fellowship: In Jewish thought, to eat with someone was the perfect picture of acceptance and fellowship. For example, speaking to the church in Laodicea, Jesus said:

ESV **Revelation 3:20** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Application: When the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper, it was a time of fellowship and gladness. It did not carry a funeral atmosphere as do modern observances of the Lord's Supper. We learn from the rest of the New Testament that the pattern was that the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly, each Lord's Day.

The Agapé: Eating together was an important part of early church life. Elsewhere this common meal was called the *agapé* or love feast. Walter Bauer explained the love feast as "a common meal eaten by early Christians in connection with their church services for the purpose of fostering and expressing brotherly love."⁹ Churches today that jettison the communal meal are robbing their congregants of the blessing of building friendships and brotherly love.

3. The Prayers

8. What is the difference between prayer and "the prayers" (2:42)? See *Acts 3:1*. It may well be that the early believers continued on in the formalized prayers of the temple system.¹⁰

ESV **Acts 3:1** . . . Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

Application: We cannot follow their example and participate in the formalized prayers of the Jerusalem temple. In general however, the early church was characterized by prayer—if not by the church corporately, then at least by its individual members. Spurgeon is reputed to have said he rarely prayed more than five minutes, but he rarely went more than five minutes without praying. *Do you have an attitude of prayer?*

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:17** pray without ceasing,

ESV **1 Timothy 2:8** I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

Public Worship

⁸ John Drane, *The New Lion Encyclopedia*, (Lion) 173.

⁹ Kistemaker, 113.

¹⁰ Marshall, *Acts*, 89.

9. Why is corporate worship not mentioned in Luke's list (2:42)? See 2:47, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Corinthians 14:26. Although we call church meetings "worship services", this really is a non-biblical name and an unbiblical emphasis.

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:26** When you come together . . . Let all things be done for building up. [It is God's people who need building up, not God.]

ESV **Hebrews 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 . . . [God is not discouraged. However, His people do need to be encouraged.]

On the other hand, is clear from **2:47** that a healthy church is a praising church We don't go to church to worship; we bring our worship with us! Public worship, especially through song, is an important way to be edified (Col 3:16). However, churches meetings are not primarily to be moving, emotional events (achieved with stained glass, imposing architecture, candles, incense, hushed whispers, special costumes, pipe organs, or moving messages). Instead, church meetings are to be about the practical kingdom business of obedience, building up, edifying, encouraging and equipping God's people through teaching, fellowship over food (the Lord's Supper/Agapé) and prayer.

Summary: The early church was devoted to "the" apostles' teaching, to "the" fellowship in the breaking of bread, and to "the" prayers.

Application: The activities of listed in Acts 2:42 should describe every church. A healthy congregation will be devoted to good Bible teaching, wonderful fellowship over a meal, and prayer.

10. If you were looking for a church home, but none practiced everything in 2:42, which one practice is the most critical? Which one might eventually lead to the others? How would you rank them in order of importance?

—2:43—

11. What hint is given in 2:43 as to why we don't see many wonders and signs in the church today? See *Matthew 10:1*. They were done through the apostles. Church history records that with the death of the apostles, wonders and signs greatly decreased.

ESV **Matthew 10:1** And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.

Optional Extra Material

******What was giving like in the early church (2:44-45)?** They practiced serious, sacrificial giving.

New Week: Next week we'll explore how this Christian communalism was different from modern communism and the progressive socialism of the Democrats.

What special need might have moved the Jerusalem church to such sacrificial giving (2:44-45)? *See Acts 2:5-11, 41.*

What principle might we derive from 2:44-45?

So What?

12. What truths were dealt with in today's passage that you need to act on?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

Stephen E. Atkerson
www.NTRF.org
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