

Ground Zero for the Church

Acts 2:42-47

- I. The two manifestations of the church
 - A. **The local church** (visible church)—a local assembly of all who profess faith and allegiance to Christ.
 - B. **The universal church** (invisible church)—Refers to all believers in Christ worldwide.
- II. Positive problem identification.
 - A. Erosion in the church (last week).
 - B. Major contributor to the erosion—Lack of maturity (Hebrews 5:12).
 - 1. The “adolescent church”
 - a. Adolescent—a young person who is developing into an adult.
 - b. Adolescent church—a church that should be mature (adult) but is stuck in adolescence.
 - 2. The main characteristic of adolescence in “self-centeredness”.
- III. Pentecost.
 - A. Pentecost—*The feast of weeks or harvest* celebrated 50 days after Passover, the designated start date for the beginning of the building of “Christ’s church.
 - B. The Holy Spirit descends on all believers (Acts 2:4) about 120 including the apostles.
 - C. Peter preaches a sermon on the resurrection of Jesus Christ (the model for future apostolic preaching) resulting in 3000 saved souls.
- IV. The first church.
 - A. The first church is God’s great example for us to follow.
 - 1. God reveals very little on how “to do” church.
 - B. Some believe the Acts 2 church should not be a model for us to follow.
 - 1. It was a unique church at a unique time in history never to be duplicated again.
 - C. Argument for being an example:

1. The most perfect church in history—it was made up of 100% believers (for a short time).
 2. What better example to follow but the most perfect church (Not perfect! The *most* perfect—It doesn't last long.
- V. “Ground Zero Church—Four essential priorities (Acts 2:42).
- A. “They”— one body without distinctions that are in AN ONGOING STATE OF ENGAGEMENT.
 - B. **The apostle's teachings.**
 1. They were devoted to the teachings of the 12 original apostles.
 - a. They taught the Old Testament and the teachings of Christ from the last three years.
 2. The teaching of God's word must be central to the ministry of the church.
 - a. In a world where truth is elusive, the only sure source of truth is God's Word.
 3. Warning—Pride from biblical knowledge can develop in a Biblical church.
 - a. “*Theological puberty*”
 - b. Sophomoric biblical knowledge.
 - C. **Fellowship**
 1. *Koinonia— a closeness together, caring for each other's needs, sharing with all who are united (in communion) by the common bond of Jesus Christ.*
 2. The church is to be God centric and others oriented.
 - D. **The breaking of bread**
 1. Communion? Or a community meal?
 - a. 1st Corinthians 10:16; 11:26
 2. The Lord's Supper is to be a regular part of church activity.
 - E. **Prayer**
 1. Prayer is essential in the church—not only for God's guidance, but also for God to move hearts, to bring lives into conformity with Him.

Ground Zero for the Church

Acts 2:42-47

Last week we began a short series on the church... I want to try and get us on the same page as to what the church is, what it is supposed to be according to the Bible... Taking from the classic four “*Biggest Questions in Life*” which all people should seek to answer... the church should be asking them as well... in that the church is not a place but a people.

Who am I? *Who is the church?*

Why am I here? *Why is the church here?*

What am I supposed to do? *What is the church to do?*

Where am I going? *Where is the church going?*

So for the month of July I’m setting out to answer these in the context of the church... last week I began by talking about the long-term erosion that has been taking place in the church over the last several decades...centuries.

The result of not being vigilant in keeping Jesus Christ on the throne of the church due to personal interests and other erosion factors...what has resulted is a gradual destructive erosion...and the church has become compromised and off mission...and in many cases impotent when it comes to its impact on the world.

What is most likely review for many of you... I mentioned last week, the term church is a translation of a Greek word having to do with a meeting together or an “assembly”. This word pertains to the work of God in saving and sanctifying believers as “*called-out ones*.”...called out from the world.

Last week I did not make a distinction between what we might call the “*local church*” and the “*universal church*”

A local church (visible church—it has an address) is normally defined as a local assembly of all who profess faith and allegiance to Christ. Most often, that Greek word *ecclesia* is used in reference to the local assembly (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 11:8). There is not just one specific local church in any one area, necessarily. There could be many local churches in larger cities.

The universal church (invisible church) is the name given to the church worldwide....what the apostle Paul referred to as the body of Christ...which refers to all believers in Christ... In this case the idea of the church is not so much the assembly itself but all those that make up the body of Christ...

Now... it is easy to criticize things...much easier than praising things... I don’t want to dwell on the negatives of the church... there are plenty.

But I think it is important to identify the situation the church is in, in order to keep us as a local church on the right path...so yes the church has been in a continual state of erosion for these modern times...I believe one of the main reasons is due to the **lack of spiritual maturity** in the church...

This is not a new problem... The author of the New Testament book Hebrews addressed it... he was frustrated at his local church of believers... *I'm having a hard time explaining some of the deeper things in God's Word...you've become dull of hearing...* Hebrews 5:12

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern both good and evil.

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, **let us press on to maturity...**

They have not progressed... they are stuck in their infancy... actually the term I've heard many times to describe the maturity level of the American church today is "**Adolescence**"... past babyhood... not an infant...starting to look like an adult, think they're an adult...but they are adolescent.

An adolescent has all sorts of characteristics... mood swings...they can be argumentative because they are right...they often take unwise risks... impulsive... prioritize peer approval... test boundaries...emotional outbursts...rebellious... but all of those are a result of being **SELF-CENTERED**.

The adolescent church—the *experience* is of greater importance than spiritual growth... personal benefit trumps sacrificial involvement in ministry... You go to church more to "get something" rather than give yourself to the Almighty... the definition of "worship" is music that you like... not music that glorifies and elevates God to the highest...

Interesting book I read a few years ago by Thomas Bergler called *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* characterizes the adolescent church with these traits:

- The preference of self-exploration and personal transformation over spiritual growth and pursuing holiness.
- The church—A tool for personal fulfillment
- Care more about the quality of their religious friendships than about the truth in God's Word.

- Adolescent Christians blame someone else for the world's problems, seldom recognizing their own role in evil social systems.
- Adolescent Christians see faith as incomplete unless it is affecting them emotionally....it's more about feelings.
- Hence—they are drawn to religious practices that produce emotional highs and assume that “strong feelings” is the same as spiritual authenticity.
- More aware of their spiritual rights than their religious responsibilities.

With these attitudes it is easy to see the result is “spiritual erosion”... for to be self-centered you must:

- Diminish God's Word
- Diminish the centrality of Jesus Christ in the church
- Diminish the reality of sin in one's life

Jesus Christ does not want His church to be an “adolescent church”... we go to God's word:

Last week we looked at the very first time the word “Church” is mentioned in the Bible... Jesus has asked His disciples “*who do people say that I am*”...they gave them an answer then He pointed His finger to them and asked “*who do YOU say that I am*”... the most important ultimate question every person needs to answer.

Peter speaks for the rest of them and said *You are the Christ the Son of the Living God*... pleased with His answer... Jesus tells Peter and the disciples... On the basis of that answer which provides the foundation of one's faith... He was going to build His *church*.

Jesus didn't begin building His church right then... it would begin in the near future.... It would begin on the Day of Pentecost after Christ ascended to heaven after His death and resurrection...Pentecost is the New Testament name for an old Jewish feast that was celebrated annually... the Old Testament Jews called it “*Feast of Weeks*” or “*Feast of Harvest*”...*Pentecost* means “fiftieth” for it was celebrated 50 days after Passover....you can read about it in Leviticus 23...

I'm not going to spend much time on this because in just a few weeks we'll be looking at all this in more detail when we begin my next series on the Holy Spirit...

What is important to us is that it was the day of Pentecost that God determined to be the time the Holy Spirit would descend from heaven onto all believers in Jesus Christ...which takes place in Acts chapter 2, preceding the launch of Christ' church.

Please turn with me to Acts chapter 2...the Holy Spirit arrives in the first four verses... immediately ascends onto the believers...which would be the disciples and all the others who had accepted Christ... 1:15 says **about 120 persons**...

The results are amazing, [at another time], but eventually Peter stands up and addresses a very curious crowd along with the other eleven disciples... Peter, under the power of the Holy Spirit delivers his great sermon proclaiming the risen Lord...

By the way... the main subject for all apostolic preaching from that time forward was the resurrection of Jesus Christ...remember what Paul preached in 1 Corinthians 15:3 - 15:4?

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

So Peter preached...nobody knows how long Peter preached... it only takes about three minutes to read it...I'm sure Luke gave us the gist... in verse 40 it says **and with MANY other words, he (Peter) testified and kept exhorting**...This is where we justify the hour long or more sermon!

There's never been a sermon with a greater response... not because of Peter's clever words... but because of the power of the Holy Spirit... just listen to this:

Read Acts 2:37-41

Now you've got 3120 Christians... and it says the 3000 converts were baptized...I can't imagine baptizing 3000 people in a day... or a week, a month!... well... Jesus no longer **WILL** build His church... the church construction has begun!...what an amazing launch!...and what an amazing church!

What we see next in the following verses I think are God's revelation to all churches...to us.. on what a church, a healthy church is, what it does, how it exists together... its values... it helps answer so many of the "biggest questions".

Something that is rare in Scripture is God telling us anything about how to do church... there's no instruction regarding sermons... the style of music... or even if there should be any music... there are no instructions on whether or not we should have a liturgy...how long we should meet, where we should meet...how often... so much of what we do "in church"... is not specified in God's word... but here in these few verses...I think He gives us a great example to follow.

However...Many hold the view that today's church really should not hold the Acts church as an example to follow... it was a specific church for a specific unique time... it can't be duplicated and it can't be repeated...God had a specific purpose for the first church and it is not our purpose so they say.

And much of that is true...never has the church seen such growth, such multiplication of new believers... the context and situation of the early, first church has never been repeated... and that is true...

but think of this... never has there been a more perfect church... not a perfect church, just more perfect than any other time in history... today when the local church... the visible church meets together... even if everyone attending the meeting professes to be a Christian... we know that it is probable that some or many are not real Christians.

If all the people in our country that claim to be Christian, were really all Christians... we would be seeing the greatest revival in all of history... but the truth is, many have decided to be identified as Christian because for all sorts of reasons... *"I was born in America so of course I'm a Christian!"*

There are people attending church that truly believe they are Christians because they attend church... no... you must be born again (Jesus to Nicodemus to us in John 3 right?)... The apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:1 says, **"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins"**

To the Romans he wrote, **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"**... Sinners are spiritually "dead"; when they receive spiritual life through faith in Christ, the Bible likens it to a rebirth. Only those who are born again have their sins forgiven and have a relationship with God.

Not everybody who professes to be a Christian has been born again...***you must be born again***...I had a good customer years ago when I was in business who said *"I'm a Christian, just not one of those 'born again' Christians"*...well, sorry, you're not a Christian then! Many who go to church think they are Christians but aren't!

What took place at Pentecost was the **Lord adding to their number daily those who were being saved** (47) **THE LORD ADDED THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE** to the original 120 people that began in chapter 1... I take that to mean that every single person that was added to the church that day were actual 100% converted and regenerated by God Himself...NOT PERFECT PEOPLE, BUT SAVED PEOPLE!... the earliest church was full of people HE converted...

So... what we are getting is the ideal church... at least as ideal as it could ever be,... and why would we not look to this church for an example on how we should be as a church?... how thousands of God regenerated people living life together, worshipping together and growing together in the faith....this is the most pure church **in Acts 2** that probably has ever existed!...

Don't worry...it doesn't take long for this amazing church to prove its humanity... by chapter five! ...by the time John wrote his letters... the church had become a collection of genuine followers and believers in Christ and those who were really not...

1 John 2:19

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they were of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be manifested that they all are not of us.

That's a pretty good description of the church today... but that very beginning of the church... Acts 1 and 2... is I believe the purest church that ever existed... and we can learn much from it. Let's take a look:

Read verse 42

Who were the **"They" that were continually devoting themselves...**? It certainly included the original 120 plus the added 3000... but it's bigger than that... the original language reads more like this... *They were being in a state of constant engagement in the teaching of the apostles...*

"They" refers to **one body without distinctions... that are in AN ONGOING STATE OF ENGAGEMENT**...it doesn't stop... that's why some of your translation says **they were continually devoting themselves...devotion is an ongoing dedication...**

So the first thing we learn about this first church is they were completely devoted...this is not some passing event...not an emotional moment... not something once and done... it is ongoing devotion... what are they devoted to?

Four things... I call this ground zero for the church... Ground zero is *a place where something very important happens or starts happening*...these four things are foundational... every church should if not must have these at a minimum...they should be priorities... following these four priorities is some insight to their attitude and character... they reveal spiritual maturity when they've been Christians for a very short time.

1. Teaching

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching... some of your translations say **apostle's doctrine** which simply refers to what the original twelve apostles were teaching from God's Word...

Which was basically the Old Testament AND the teachings they gleaned from Jesus's direct teaching to them over the last three years of living with Him.... Which later would be the basis of the New Testament.

The first church was **continually devoting themselves** to Biblical truth...the teaching of God's word **MUST** be the centerpiece church activity!... Doctrine is the heart of the life of the church... Think about our world today... how difficult it is to know what is true!

We listen to news on media and can't be sure it is true... we can't be sure the medical world is telling us the truth or is it being manipulated by big Pharma...The health industry delivers what

they want us to believe but we can't be sure it is the truth... we can't be sure the video we're watching is a real person or not... AI has made all things suspect when it comes to knowing the truth.

There are approximately 4,200 distinct religions, faiths, and spiritual traditions worldwide with opposing conflicting views telling us they have the truth... **There is only one source of what Francis Scheffer called “True” truth today...and that is God’s Word!...**

Oh how I'm so glad we have this book!... It is the same today as it was yesterday and will be the same tomorrow... Hebrews 4:12 **For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

God's word is true...it is powerful and within it you will find life.... NOTHING can come close to God's word... Jesus said in John 6:63 **The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.”**

The teaching of God's Word is our lifeline here at Trinity Baptist... We preach and teach God's word unapologetically...*with love*. It is the center piece and basis for everything we do...In God's Word we get God's counsel on all aspects of life...

You have a troubled marriage... God's Word is your counsel... Depressed?...Discouraged?... dealing with death... a terminal health issue?... difficult people?... yourself?... God's word... needing direction in your life?

Psalms 119:105 **Your word is a lamp to my feet...And a light to my path.**

Jeremiah 15:16 speaking of God's Word...**Your words are what sustain me; they are food to my hungry soul. They bring joy to my sorrowing heart and delight me.**

it is the message of the Great Commission **Go and make disciples of all nations and TEACH them to observe ALL things whatsoever I (Jesus) commanded You.**

The first church was DEVOTED to God's Word... and so should we....and we are.

Here's a warning for us (maybe a little strange here)...it is possible to have a high view of scripture but handle it in an adolescent way...to actually get prideful about being so “biblical”...a theologian from the past... a Baptist I think... Helmut Thielicke wrote a piece called “*Theological Puberty*”.

Theological puberty is the stage that after a little study, you find that just by knowing more Bible, more theology than the average person, your Bible study has made you “smarter” than the others in your Bible study group... you get a rush of theological adrenaline. You can even be self-centered in your study of the Bible!

Michael Reeves, another theologian but of today said something similar... He delivered a warning for us **NOT to be sophomoric in our biblical knowledge**... *what is common for students in their second year of study... we call them "Sophomores"*.

They learn some things their freshman year, they're glad they are no longer at the bottom rung, they now think they know a lot!... they pride themselves in their Bible study... they feel like theological geniuses...but a little bit of knowledge has misled them and has puffed them up! That is why they are called sophomores! Sophomore—two Greek words:

Sophos = Wise

Moros = Fool (We get the word "Moron"!)

We don't want to be wise fools!... we want to place teaching God's Word at the center of our activity to grow us spiritually into the people God wants us to be!

2. Fellowship

Most of you know the Greek word for "fellowship"...*koinonia*.. it means more than our English translated word "*fellowship*"...we may think fellowship is having a good time with everybody... we call everything "fellowship"... coffee and cookie time is fellowship... having someone over for dinner is fellowship.

What is biblical *koinonia*?... we don't have a really good single word for it in the English... we just say "fellowship"... but if you look up all the 20 verses in the New Testament that *koinonia* is mentioned, you see that it has a broader meaning than simply fellowship.

1 John 1:7 **but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.** The idea of having close relationship with one another through Christ.

Romans 15:26 **For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to share [contribution] with the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.** It means to make a contribution to the needs of others.... There's a generosity attached to *koinonia*.

Hebrews 13:16 **And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.** Sharing resources with others.

2 Corinthians 13:14 **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.** Fellowship here is the idea of communion, some of your translations say that.

So if you take all the verses that contain *koinonia*... you could come up with something like... *"koinonia is a closeness together, caring for each other's needs, sharing with all who are united (in communion) by the common bond of Jesus Christ."*

It's more than talking with each other eating cookies and drinking coffee... there is a personal investment involved.

Years ago Anne Ortlund wrote a book on corporate worship...in it she describes two kinds of communities commonly found in churches... One she describes as a *"bag of marbles"*... *"The people come together for fellowship, they clack and clatter, they glitter and throw off light beautifully, and they scratch each other, they connect, but they don't mingle"*

That is not koinonia... but the other community found in church she describes as a bag of grapes... *Shake the bag around a little, and it starts to drip, look inside and it's NOT a pretty sight, but they're mingling! Each life bleeds into the others.*

That's koinonia....it's supernatural... it's not normal... what is normal is looking out for number 1!... God's design for His church is Philippians 2...listen to Paul's words:

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 fulfill my joy, that you think the same way, by maintaining the same love, being united in spirit, thinking on one purpose, 3 doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves, 4 not merely looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this way of thinking in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could build a culture that looks to the interests of others...setting aside the self for the good of others... fighting together for a warm fellowship, where we look out for each other through the hard times and the harder times...

Brothers and sisters in Christ who stick together in the struggles that come out of the church?... what is normal when struggles come into the church is to leave and find another church!...that's adolescence!... Koinonia says we are in communion together in Christ... so we work out disagreements... we work through our disappointments.... Our conflicts with each other...

This is how God matures us from adolescence to adulthood in the family of God! ...the first church was devoted to the apostles teaching... to intimate fellowship and third:

3. The Breaking of Bread

There's been differing opinions over the ages as to what this is referring to... is this the Lord's Supper, communion?...or is it just a community meal?... verse 46 says:

Read verse 46

Which may mean they would often eat meals together AND break bread together... take communion...the apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians 10 says **Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the**

body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

And remember Paul chastens the Corinthian church for coming to church and basically partying...eating and drinking until they were drunk instead of partaking of the Lord's Supper (1st Corinthians 11).

So it is apparent that the Lord's Supper was a major, important activity in the first church... the first church met in homes... enjoyed a meal together... sang hymns, read scripture, heard teaching, have communion together.

Communion should be a regular part of church activity....so it is here

4. Prayer

The Christian community does not rely on "feelings" or intuition... searching for pragmatic ways to operate... but actively submitting themselves to the Lord's direction... Prayer was central to the first church... they were dedicated to prayer.

Not only for God's guidance, but also for God to move their hearts...to bring their lives into conformity with Him... I appreciate what Al Mohler wrote in His book on the Lord's Prayer:

Prayer, is cooperating with God to bring about His plan, not trying to bend Him to our will. As we abandon our own desires in submission to the One who knows our circumstances far better than we ever could and who "knows what you need before you ask" (Matthew 6:8), our prayers reach their highest level. Prayers offered in submission to the Divine will, therefore, are always answered positively, whether offered by one person or a thousand.

I'm going to admit something terrible for a pastor to admit... but I've always struggled with corporate, public prayer... I've always been a **go to your closet and pray** guy...there I don't have to worry about how I sound... *am I sounding reverent enough?*

We make praying so hard!... it's not that we need 250 people to pray to get a good answer from God...prayer is getting 250 people to submit their selves to God's will, unifying the body with God... *cooperating with God to bring about His plan...*

I was in Randy's office last Thursday...I can't remember what we were talking about... I was probably complaining or something... Scott unexpectedly walks in...I thought I had locked all the doors!...but in walks Scott... *Hey you guys want to pray together?...*

I'm busy complaining!... and my schedule was full for the day... But we prayed!