

## Devoted to the King: the Example of the Early Church

Intro: What is the idea that comes to your mind when I say the word, “stewardship” regarding my sermon this morning? Did you think that I was going to ask you for money? Obviously, I could preach this morning that stewardship implies a biblical orientation of wealth and its use as a tool for the Kingdom. However, stewardship goes deeper than *merely* a financial stewardship. It is not less than financial stewardship, but it is much more. Biblical stewardship of the King’s resources for the King’s glory in the King’s Kingdom is rooted in our devotion to the King. Stewardship finds its source, not merely in duty, but in devotion to the King. It is the motivation of worship, the highest love of the most worthy object. So, today we are going to look at how the early church functioned in its devotion, its love of God as the person worthy of its highest affections.

God has inaugurated His Kingdom in Christ and the way that He is revealing Himself to the world now is through the local church. Since it is God who is working, we must be a church who is following the Holy Spirit, what we called “Spirit-filled.” The early church is an example for us of how a church in step with the Holy Spirit functions. The book of Acts is the missionary book, telling how God’s plan to bring the Gospel to the world was being accomplished through the church. Therefore, in the devotion of the early Church we find a pattern of what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

Acts 2:42-47 – What we see here is a summary of the function of the church filled with the Holy Spirit. Did it have its problems? Yes. Later in Acts we see those. But Luke gives us a picture here of how a Spirit-filled church functions. Let’s take a look to see the pattern in which the Holy Spirit works within His Kingdom. We will see that the Spirit-filled church is devoted to 4 primary things: the teaching of the Word, Fellowship of the Saints, Worship, and Prayer.

### 1. The Spirit-Filled Church Devotes Itself to:

- Devotion: “to give constant and perseverant attention toward”
  - i. To desire something so greatly as to give your strength for it
  - ii. Strongly rooted in desire/affections, but with a sense of action that pursues its object with fervor and perseverance
- a. the Teaching of the Word (v42)
  - iii. Apostolic
    - 1. What defined an apostle? Acts 1:20-22 (canonical books were chosen based on apostleship)
    - 2. What proved “apostolic”? v43 (signs and wonders)
      - a. Now we have Scripture to check apostolic teaching
      - b. Notice that they were not devoted to the signs and wonders, but to the teaching
      - c. A “Spirit-filled” church is not defined by signs and wonders, but by devotion to the Word
  - iv. Teaching of Truth
    - 1. Teachings of Christ (John 14:26)
    - 2. Holy Spirit teaches us of Christ (John 16:13-14)
    - 3. Psalm 119; 2 Tim 3:14-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 1 Tim 4:13-16; Rom 16:17; Titus 1:9
      - a. **1 Timothy 4:13-17** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. <sup>15</sup> Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. <sup>16</sup> Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- b. **Romans 16:17** I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.
- c. **Titus 1:9** holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

b. the Fellowship of the Saints (v42)

- v. “fellowship” is a joint participation, an intimacy of relationship, a commonness
  - 1. They didn’t find their fellowship or common issue to be race, culture, social status, intellectual endeavors, likes/dislikes, they found their common ground in Jesus Christ. It was centered on Him!
  - 2. “...spiritual love proves itself in that everything it says and does commends Christ. It will not seek to move others by all too personal, direct influence, by impure interference in the life of another. It will not take pleasure in pious, human fervor and excitement. It will rather meet the other person with the clear Word of God and be ready to leave him alone with this Word for a long time, willing to release him again in order that Christ may deal with him... Thus this spiritual love will speak to Christ about a brother more than to a brother about Christ.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*)
- vi. Sharing (v44-45)
  - 1. not communism (no right to own anything)
  - 2. not socialism (right to own, but compelled to give)
  - 3. Willing generosity with eyes of the heart upon the Savior-King and His kingdom
    - a. Just as Jesus shared His inheritance with us (Rom 8:17; Eph 1:13-14; Col 1:12; Heb 9:15)
    - b. Gospel-Centered motivation
- vii. Serving (v45)
  - 1. like Christ (Phil 2:3-11)
    - a. For the sake of those who are in need
    - b. Giving time, treasure, and talents to benefit others
    - c. Giving even of our own lives and livelihood (Matt 20:28; 2 Cor 8:9; Titus 2:14; Rev 1:5)
      - i. Matt 20:28 – “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for the many.”
      - ii. 2 Cor 8:9 – “for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”
      - iii. Titus 2:14 – “who gave himself to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.”
  - 2. Gospel-Centered motivation
- viii. Hospitality (v46)
  - 1. Open houses (1 Pet 4:9; qualifications of an overseer/elder in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1)
  - 2. Open tables (the breaking of bread was most likely a shared meal with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper) cf. 1 Cor 11:20-23 and Jude 1:12
  - 3. Gospel-Centered motivation
    - a. Just as Jesus has opened His Father’s house to us (John 14:2), so do we open our houses to each other

c. Worship of the Lord (v42,46,47)

- ix. Communion (42)

1. “*the breaking of bread*” is definite, relating to a specific act, i.e. the ordinance of Communion (Acts 20:7)
2. not just having dinner, note the repetition of the phrase and the difference therein of v46
3. Every group of believers ought to be remembering the atonement of Jesus, because it is His blood that has freed us from our sins and gave us all the spiritual blessings of Christ
4. GOSPEL-CENTERED motivation (atoning death of Jesus *for us*)
- x. Formal (46)
  1. Communion together was one of the purposes of gathering together
  2. Worship in the temple together
  3. Praising the Lord
  4. Their worship flows out of their joyous appreciation toward God for their redemption from their sins, and it leads to a desire to worship *together*
  5. Worship is simply defined as a response of love to the revealed beauty of God: giving to the object of our highest love because He has revealed His beauty to us
- xi. Informal (46)
  1. From house to house
  2. They weren’t just together formally for worship, but informally as well
    - a. Living their lives together
    - b. Their entire lives coming into contact with the entire lives of other believers in joy!
  3. Centered on Christ (Communion, Evangelism)
- d. Prayer – 5 out of 10 uses of “devotion” in the NT are about prayer
  - xii. *The prayers*, i.e. formal in worship
  - xiii. Part of Fellowship, prayer together
  - xiv. The lifeline of the Kingdom
    1. Prayer glorifies the King
    2. We get the resources we need for the Kingdom and God gets the glory He deserves
    3. Prayer humbles us and exalts God
  - xv. C.S. Lewis quote from *Mere Christianity*:
 

“Prayer is either a sheer illusion or a personal contact between embryonic, incomplete persons (ourselves) and the utter concrete Person. Prayer in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its wine. In it God shows Himself to us. That He answers prayer is a corollary – not necessarily the most important one – from the revelation. What He does is learned from Who He is.”

## 2. The Outcome of this Devotion is:

- a. Awe of the LORD and His work (v43)
  - i. Lit. “fear” of the Lord, an attitude of deep humility and wonder
  - ii. Awe b/c of their reconciliation with God through the cross and their salvation through the risen Christ
  - iii. Awe b/c of the reconciliation of people (“continuing with one mind/purpose”) with people and the unity of the Spirit
  - iv. Awe b/c of signs and wonders that the Lord was doing as He “poured out His Spirit” upon the world (see Acts 10:35; Titus 3:5-6; Rom 5:5)

- b. Gratitude and Humility (v46)
  - i. “received their food” – gratitude for the Lord’s generosity
    - 1. “received” comes from a compound word meaning “received with” or “received together”
  - ii. “sincerity of heart” – “plainness of heart” indicating the openness of their hearts and the baring of their souls with one another
    - 1. The Gospel leaves us nothing to hide from!
    - 2. God loves us so much that He died to redeem us from all the evil that lies within our hearts and brings us near. He has done it all, what do we have to fear?!
- c. Joy in the LORD (lit. “exultant joy”, particularly re: redemption, Luke 1:14,44; Jude 1:24) (v46)
  - i. Taught with Joy
  - ii. Fellowship with Joy
  - iii. Worship with Joy
  - iv. Prayer with Joy
- d. Evangelism and/or Praise (v46-47)
  - i. Praise, by its nature, is vocal, public, and exalting to God; it is proclaiming God’s goodness through Jesus Christ
    - 1. Inferred by v47 that they were sharing the Gospel
    - 2. See 2:38-39; 3:16; 4:2,10-12
  - ii. The primary actor is the LORD, fulfilling His purpose
  - iii. The church is built (adding to their number) by God through the proclamation of praise in the gospel of Jesus Christ
- e. The LORD working in the lives of others to draw them to Himself (v47)
  - i. People were being added to their numbers daily
  - ii. True worship through praise is what draws people to the Lord, not slick presentations or “mysterious” moments of “truth-seeking” and “spirituality”
  - iii. What do people see in our lives: worship, praise, love of the Word, humility, gratitude, joy, prayer?

### 3. How Do We Get There?

- a. We *want* our Savior to be glorified
  - i. His reputation built up in all the earth
  - ii. His glory revealed to all peoples
  - iii. His name to be honored throughout the entire world
- b. We must *be* a Spirit-functioning church
  - i. Form vs. Function
  - ii. Function is the key
  - iii. The Early Church had little form, but their function was centered on the Gospel and was shown by their love for God and each other.
- c. A God-honoring church is not something that you do, it is something that you are!!
- d. The Holy Spirit must reveal JESUS to our hearts so that our hearts are overwhelmed with His glory in the Gospel, asking the Lord to fill us with hope and joy by the power of His Holy Spirit as we believe.
  - i. Romans 15:13 - *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*
  - ii. Revelation 5:9 - *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation..."*

Conclusion:

This is how we want to *be*! Not just appear, but really be! Worthy is the Lamb who was slain for the forgiveness of our sins! Worthy is the Christ who became flesh and reconciled us to God through His death and victorious resurrection! Let us examine our hearts and be truly honest with ourselves and Jesus, who took your death sentence upon Himself, asking Him: Am I devoted to Your Word? Am I devoted to true fellowship with other Christians? Am I devoted to worshiping You formally and informally? Am I devoted to prayer, both corporate and individual? Am I proclaiming Your good news to those around me? Am I praising you among the people? Am I rejoicing in Your redemption?

This is an examination between you and the Holy Spirit. Don't shrug it off, put it off, or set it aside. The time is now to ask the Lord to change you into who He wants you to be and who you've always wanted to be. Let us repent of our selfish desires and ask the Lord to make us fully devoted to Him! Right now let us take some time to ask the Lord to remind our hearts of the greatness of the good news of the Gospel:

I am more sinful than I can even fathom.

The love of Jesus is even greater, going deeper than I can even dare to hope.

PSALM 40

Octavius Winslow: "Cheer up! You are in Christ's heart, and Christ is in your heart. You are not alone; they God and thy Father is with you. They Shepherd guides you; the Comforter spreads His wings around you, and heaven is bright before you...Then look up! Christ is thine, God is thine, heaven is thine."