

Acts Series #4

“How To ‘Do’ Church” — Acts 2:42-47

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Doing Church*

1. We receive a number of catalogs for books at the office
2. Over the years we’ve ordered study and reference books to aid in our study and preparation for teaching
3. So, we’ve gotten on a few mailing lists and every couple months we get a new batch of catalogs
4. Just prior to the end of each year one of the books that is given a lot of promotion is the annual *minister’s manual*
5. It’s a hefty volume that gives pastors a complete breakdown on what to do every week of the year
 - a. it has lesson plans for Sunday morning and evening
 - b. complete with what scripture text to cover, a suggested outline and even illustration
 - c. there are lessons for mid-week services and even themes to use for special prayer meetings
6. And it’s all found in one handy volume
7. How convenient: There’s no need to pray and seek the Lord for direction in leading His flock - Why, I’ve got my *1996 Minister’s Manual*
8. Why depend on the Holy Spirit when I can lean on Baker Book House, or Thomas Nelson Publishers, or whoever it is that prints them?

B. *Doing Church God’s Way*

1. We have been blessed over the last couple years to host some excellent parenting classes called *Growing Kids God’s Way*
2. Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo have put together a course in parenting that is thoroughly biblical, practical, and effective
3. And the parents who have taken the classes virtually all comment on how thankful they are for them
4. The reason why they are so good is because they are faithful to the title of the class: They really do seek to raise kids God’s way - the way He has shown in the scriptures
5. Well, just as the Bible holds specific instructions and general principles for parenting, it gives the same for “doing” church

II. TEXT

A. V. 42-47

{42} And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

{43} Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

{44} Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,

{45} and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

{46} So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

{47} praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

1. What we read here occurs just after Peter had addressed the crowd on the Day of Pentecost and 3000 were saved, baptized, and brought into the family of God
2. Think of it, when Peter preached that first sermon in the history of the church, there were *only* 120 disciples
 - a. the entire membership of the whole church was 120
 - b. but with one short message, their ranks swelled 25 times
 - c. [graphic example - just this center section, to filling every seat in this room, 10 times]
3. Clearly, the apostles had a tremendous church growth problem on their hands
 - a. they didn't have any membership cards for the people to sign
 - b. they didn't have a clipboard to pass around
 - c. they didn't have follow up material to hand out to this mass of new believers
 - d. in fact they didn't have all the things churches today think are so important for holding on to these new people
4. Church growth experts have a word for this process of holding on to the new people that visit a church - it's called *assimilation*
5. The goal of assimilation is to hold on to new people and to move them from mere pew warmers to active participants
6. Well, Peter and the other apostles didn't have all the theory and techniques of today's church growth experts
7. But they did have the clear command of Jesus to make disciples
8. And they knew how Jesus had made them disciples; so they followed His example and lead
9. V. 42 shows us how those first disciples understood church should be done
10. That is, this verse shows us what the church, which is people, not a building, does to grow

B. Four Things

There are 4 things we find here that these first believers engaged in . . .

FIRST - They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine

1. These first believers wanted to learn everything and anything they could about this new life they had entered into
2. You know, this is something I've witnessed time and again in people who

- are genuinely converted to Christ
- a. they have a deep and abiding desire to learn about Him
 - b. they develop a hunger and thirst for spiritual things that rivals their physical hunger and thirst
 - c. and the only place this spiritual hunger can be fully satisfied is by sitting down to a feast on the Word of God
3. You see, that is what the Apostles' doctrine meant
 4. At this point in the history of the church, because the NT hadn't been written yet, the Apostles taught these first believers about the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus
 5. And their teaching was authoritative as the Holy Spirit recalled to their memory all that Jesus had taught and done
 6. Just as Jesus Himself had foretold, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles to lay down that foundation of truth upon which the church was built
 7. In Ephesians 2, Paul says this about the church . . .

{19} Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

{20} having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone,

{21} in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

{22} in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

8. The word for "doctrine" here is *didache* and means *teaching*
9. The picture we get from verse 46 and other places in the book of Acts is that these new believers would gather each day in the temple and listen as one or more of the Apostles would teach them about Jesus and the Kingdom of God
 - a. the temple was the only place in Jerusalem with enough space to hold them all
 - b. and it was natural at this point that they would meet there anyway
 - c. remember, these were all still Jews
 - d. and at this point they had little to no idea that an unrepairable rift had been made between them and the old Judaism
10. So they came to the large open court around the temple, probably to a place called Solomon's Porch, and listened while the Apostle's taught them about Jesus

SECOND - The continued steadfastly in fellowship

1. Here was another important element to what it meant to be the church
2. The word "fellowship" is *koinonia* and means *a common sharing*
3. Very simply, it pictures an intimate interaction between people so that their life experiences were shared by all
4. It's a family word — it speaks of a community of people who are tied together by a common bond of love and devotion for one another that overcomes any divisions

5. As we look at the rest of the book of Acts we see that these first Christians quickly gained a reputation of being a definite community within the cities and societies among whom they lived
6. They were known for their intense love for and devotion to each other
7. Where did this sense of devotion come from?
8. Well as 1 John 3:14 says

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

9. Love is one of the proofs, one of the evidences of being born again
10. To be born again means to become a child of God, and so a member of His family
11. That means we are *more* than friends, *more* than fellow Christians; we are family, we are brothers and sisters to each other
12. We see how this fellowship was lived out in v. 46 where it says they broke bread from house to house
13. In other words, they opened their lives to each other and shared the things of daily life
14. The picture we get from v. 46 is that they would gather in the temple to worship and listen to the Apostles teach about Jesus —
15. Then they would break up into smaller groups and go to each others homes to share a meal and talk about what they had just heard, sharing their lives around the truths they had just received
16. You know, meeting in small groups, with other believers, to interact personally with one another and the Word of God is absolutely essential to spiritual growth
17. Going to church and listening to the Word of God being taught by pastors and teachers is a good and necessary thing, but it isn't enough
18. We all need the opportunity to get into God's Word with others and get to the business of applying our lives to it
19. While God uses pastors and teachers to communicate His word to His people, it is in the smaller group setting where each individual has the opportunity to ask questions, share insights, and bring forth specific concerns about the distance between where we are right now and where we see God wants us
20. In the larger church service - people generally benefit from one person's gift - the teacher's
21. In the small group setting, as we meet from house to house, we all get to enjoy and be blessed by the multitude of gifts each has been given
22. Again, as Paul says in Ephesians 4, the work of pastors is to equip the people so *they* can minister to one another
23. But as you look at the list of gifts the NT identifies, you realize most of them are things that are best carried out in the course of our daily lives, not at church on Sunday morning
24. As I see it, this is the great tragedy of the modern church: We have lost the sense of intimate fellowship and mutual ministry that marked the early church

25. Today, we've hired professionals to "do" church for us
 - a. and the professional have become very adept at putting on entertaining *shows*
 - b. while the congregation has become more of an *audience* than active participants in the family of God
26. I wonder what Peter's reaction would be if he walked in to a church today

THIRD - They continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread

1. Since fellowship certainly included the sharing of a meal, this breaking of bread speaks of something else
2. And what it refers to was something Jesus had told the disciples they were to do to remember Him - celebrate Communion
3. There were two rites Jesus commanded His followers to observe: baptism and communion
 - a. baptism was done once, when a person first came to faith
 - b. communion was something they were to do often
4. When they broke the bread and drank the cup, it reminded them of the basis of their faith and the common bond that united them together - the death of Jesus
5. Communion restored them to the root and foundation of everything they had now come to know and believe in
6. And as Paul taught in 1 Cor. 11, it was a time when they would each bring their lives before the Lord for the inspection of the Holy Spirit, making sure there was nothing hindering their relationship with the Father and with each other
7. Again, as we read in v. 46, they took Communion from house to house
 - a. it wasn't in the temple;
 - b. it wasn't in that setting where the whole group gathered
 - c. it was when they got together in those smaller groups
 - d. now, there were obvious logistical problems for why they didn't celebrate Communion at the temple
 - e. but the point is that it *was* something they saw as a part of their regular meeting together
 - f. in fact, records from this time give us a picture of what happened in these house meetings
 - 1) people would gather in a home and begin by singing some hymns of praise to Jesus
 - 2) then they would minister to one another and talk about God's word
 - 3) they would share a common meal from the food that each one brought = called the Agape, love feast
 - 4) and as a way of concluding the meal, they would take a piece of bread and a cup of wine, and celebrate communion
8. Our regular time for celebrating communion is the first Sunday of the month
9. It's right and fitting that we, as a fellowship, do remember the Lord this way

10. But this monthly event should not be a substitute for you celebrating communion in your own homes, with your own family, roommates, and home groups
11. This is again a great tragedy that the church has taken Communion out of the hands of the people and placed it solely in the hands of a select priesthood who are somehow supposed to convert the elements of communion into sacred objects
12. No friends - Communion is for all God's people, at any and all times
13. Jesus did away with the need for a select priesthood by His death
14. That's what the ripping of the veil in the temple was all about
15. Husbands and father - lead your family in communion
16. Single parents, lead your children in communion
17. Single people who live with other Christians, celebrate communion together
18. Remember Jesus - Remember what He has done for us!

FOURTH - They continued steadfastly in prayers

1. That doesn't mean they all quit their jobs, moved to monasteries and convents, pulled a hood over their heads and prayed 24 hours a day for the rest of their lives
2. Luke says they continued in *prayers* not *prayer*
3. The difference is subtle but important
4. It simply means that prayer was a distinguishing mark of what they did
5. When they met, they prayed
 - a. they prayed prayers of praise
 - b. they prayed prayers of intercession
 - c. they prayed prayers of supplication
 - d. they prayed prayers of petition
 - e. they prayed prayers for boldness
 - f. they prayed prayers for each other
 - g. they prayed prayers for their enemies
 - h. you name it—they prayed it!
6. Prayer was a vital and central part of who they were and what they did because they had a new perspective on it
7. Prayer was not some dry and uncertain religious duty by which one gained brownie points with God
8. Their prayers were filled with the expectation that God really heard them and that Jesus was right there in their midst listening to them and setting about to answer them
9. After all, the Apostles had taught them that Jesus said where two or three met together in His name, seeking His will and agreeing with each other about the things of the Kingdom, He was there and would do what they asked
10. So they prayed in simple faith and with complete confidence
11. The result?
12. There was such a strong sense of the presence of God in their midst that a

- profound awe came upon every one of them and they lived their lives in the conscious presence of the Holy Spirit
13. The inevitable result was that Jesus continued to work through the Apostles, performing signs and wonders
 14. And each day, more people were led to faith
 15. Those poor Jewish leaders who thought they had gotten rid of Jesus suddenly were confronted with a growing army of people who seemed to possess the same power and whose sole delight was to proclaim the His name

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Where's The Power*

1. Where's that power today?
2. God has not lost His power - but it sure seems as though the church has
3. One day the great philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas was in Rome
4. One of the church officials gave him a tour of the Vatican
 - a. he saw all the treasures and masterpieces housed there
 - b. the gold and silver and precious jewels adorning countless statues and filling hundreds of chests
5. Later that day he appeared before the Pope who asked him if he was impressed with what he'd seen
6. He replied that he was
7. The Pope said, "Yes, no longer can the church say as did Peter, "Silver and gold I do not have."
8. Aquinas replied, "Yes—and no longer can she say to the lame man, "Rise and walk.'"

B. *Back To Basics*

1. Friends, God hasn't changed
2. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow
3. The mission of the church hasn't changed either
4. But the church has been seduced by the world and has come to redefine it's idea of success according to the world's standards
5. We need to repent, and get back to basics
6. And that means we need to continue steadfastly doing what Jesus told us to do
7. We need to continue in the study of the Word of God
8. We need to continue in devoted love of one another
9. We need to keep our lives centered on the simplicity of Jesus Christ and Him crucified
10. And we need to continue in prayer, utterly dependent on the Lord for everything
11. If we do these - God will make His presence known and restore to us the church's legacy of power
 - a. power to heal

- b. power to save
- c. power to love