

The Helper Unifies (Spirit in the Church – Acts 2.42-47)

Intro | The Church

We have been spending some time studying the third person of the trinity, God the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus calls THE HELPER. Without Jesus helping us in death, we cannot be saved; but without the Holy Spirit helping us in life, we cannot experience the fullness of our salvation! Left alone, we are helpless. **Our first helper, Jesus, saves us from the helplessness of death, but another helper, the Holy Spirit, saves us from helplessness of our lives.** Not only does God the Holy Spirit convict us and calls us out of the world; not only does God the Holy Spirit seal our adoption and help us identify as sons and daughters of the Father; God the Holy Spirit gathers us together and makes us brother and sisters in Christ. **In other words, Jesus not only saves us to Himself, but also to a community of people by His Spirit.**

The American version of community is not the same as gospel community. Community in the world is man-centered, polarized around race, interest, or viewpoint, and devoted to shaping the culture accordingly. Though the world makes claims to be fostering unity through diversity, it works hard toward moral, social, and economic homogeneity. Even though it claims to be tolerant of differences and other-centered, but in fact intolerant of differences and self-centered. Essentially, that world tells us that, before we can love others we have to love ourselves and create our own spirituality—karma rules. **Unity in the world comes from loving the self first, others second, and God last.**

Gospel unity couldn't be any more different. Jesus prayed that his disciple would be unified by the coming Spirit. ***22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. John 17.22-23.*** Unity among the people of God flows from God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Spirit who are all, by nature, other-oriented. Biblical unity embraces diversity, not homogeneity, as Jews and Greeks from every tribe and tongue are gathered into one family. Biblical unity is not based on individual ever-changing preferences, but universal unchanging truth. The people of God may have different races, different interests, and even different viewpoints. But they all have a shared identity, shared allegiance, shared mission, and shared hope. We are not individuals unified with other individuals, we are individuals unified with Christ. **The gospel creates a counter-cultural unity that flows from loving God first, others second, and the self last.**

God's people are unified in this thing called the church. The church, *Ekklesia*, is the people who are saved by Jesus, called out of the world to God and to one another. The church is the people of God whom the Father calls together, Jesus saves together, and the Spirit sanctifies together. The church is not only generational and invisible, it is geographical and visible. The church is the people of God who gather together to love God, love one another, and make His love known. And, according to Scripture, the Holy Spirit works through the church in a way that He does not work anywhere else. **This is why the church must be FIRST in our lives.**

The Marks of a Spirit-Filled Church

I recognize that a statement like "the church must be first" is a difficult one to hear. If not explicitly, there is a perpetual sermon preached which proclaims: "Family first". There is a fear, often shaped by experience that such a commitment will result in idolatry of the church and neglect of the family. **Why is it that we do not possess the same fear regarding idolatry of the family and the neglect of the church?** Before we allow our flesh to make or shape our opinions, let us turn to Acts 2 and ask the Spirit to teach us what the Bible reveals about the rightly placed church in our lives. After Peter called the crowds to repent and believe, 3,000 sinners were made saints by Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who

believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. As Peter and John continued to preach about Jesus in the temple, they were arrested, interrogated, threatened, and eventually released. In celebration, the believers gathered, rejoiced, and prayed. When they did, the Bible says in Acts 4.31-32: *“the place which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart, one soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.”*

The church was filled with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus had promised, the church was unified. And the unifying power of the Spirit made God’s people a devoted people. **What were they devoted to?**

1. **DEVOTED TO THE WORD** (*apostle’s teaching*): The believers were devoted to learning God’s Word. They were not devoted to an Apostle, but the Apostle’s teaching. The Spirit who taught the disciples and inspired the words of the disciples, now instructed even more disciples. The Apostles were not teaching new revelation, but Spirit reminded them what Jesus had taught them. The church gathered to hear the word preached, to hear the doctrine explained, to hear encouragement, admonishment, and instruction. A Spirit-filled church is unified around and devoted to studying God’s Word.
2. **DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER** (*fellowship*): The believers were devoted to fellowshiping with one another. The world offers community full of activities and devoted to causes. Christian fellowship offers family that is full of relationship and devoted to Christ. This kind of fellowship is not merely about doing things together, but about drawing out Christ-like character in one another, which often requires hard conversations. Like our earthly families, we can’t choose who God brings into our family. But in Christ, we do not reject our differences; we embrace them and trust that God has brought us into the fellowship with another to be changed by the Spirit through one another (PHD in knowledge and a 1st grade education in Compassion). *1 Corinthians 12.18 ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*
3. **DEVOTED TO COMMUNION** (*Breaking Bread*): The believers were devoted to breaking bread with one another. In one sense, this means they were committed to eating together. Fellowship over a meal represents a deeper sense of unconditional love, as you invite someone into your home to share your table. *The welcome is an acknowledgment—I see you as important. The invitation is a kindness—I accept you as equal. The meal is a grace—I love you as family.* But more than just a meal, they are gathering regularly to devote themselves to THE MEAL—the Lord’s Supper. Essentially, the Spirit is doing his work to glorify and point his people to Christ. A Spirit filled Church is a “Christ-centered” church.
4. **DEVOTED TO SHARING** (*all things in common/selling*): The believers were devoted to sharing with one another because they believed that nothing that belonged to him was their own. The health and growth of the body is dependent upon its members’ willingness to give, not only their treasure, but their time, gifts, and resources generously. The Spirit of God gives to us so that we give to others. *Sadly, if most believers were honest with themselves they would acknowledged that they often give the better part of their time, energy, gifts, and money to all kinds of social activity, individuals and organizations rather than to the advancement of the Kingdom of God through the ministry of the local church.* The Spirit-filled church is a church where there is no want of volunteers, no want of money, or help; where everyone who is within never goes without.

5. **DEVOTED TO WORSHIP** (day by day, temple, homes breaking bread) Finally, the believers were devoted to worshipping together often. Sometimes they gathered together publicly at the temple. Other times, they gathered in small groups, in homes. **All times, they organized their days around gathering with God's people to worship together.** Their lives were not characterized primarily by building marriages, building families, or building careers. In truth, **they were not committed to building anything at all for themselves, but to being built into something by and for God.** **Ephesians 2.19-22**
So then, you are no longer aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the cornerstone, in whom, the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being BUILT TOGETHER into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit... a house of living stones built to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ. 1 Peter 2.4-6

The Church and ME

And as the Spirit of God unifies His people around these things, devotion to sacrifice gives way to glad hearts filled with joy. More than that, the kind of community that is built is naturally attractive to the world. Today, in hopes of making their congregations joyful, pastors often become activities coordinators. In an attempt to make their congregations attractive, pastors often adopt the world's version of unity and compromise truth. **It is not the pastor's job to entertain or to attract in order to keep or grow the church. It is the pastor's job to call the people to faithfulness in first things.**

According to the book of Acts, the church was central to lives of Christians. Not only do we live in a time where the church is separated from the state, we live in a time when the church is separated from our spiritual growth. **Because we do not see the church comparable to the fun-filled communities of the world, we either despise it as burdensome or reject it as completely unnecessary.** **This ends up creating a very individual and privatized spirituality** where "so called" Christians become devoted to very different things than found in Acts 2: MY INTERPRETATION, MY NEEDS BEING MET, MY PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS; MY PROSPERITY, and MY WORSHIP PREFERENCES. **Hear me clearly...your personal time with God is not enough for your spiritual growth.** Your personal interpretation is dangerous. Your refusal to personally commit is hurtful and your refusal to personally invest is anything but wise stewardship. Your personal worship preferences are not a good reason to leave a church and your personal relationship with Jesus is never emphasized by the Bible as the center of growth.

On the contrary, **the Bible promotes spiritual growth in the context of relational community with other believers, mainly through the organized gatherings of God's people.** Every book in the New Testament was addressed to local churches. Obedience to the 60+ "one-another commands" of Christ is impossible without the local church. The general pattern of the apostolic letters is one where the gospel is brought to bear on the community of God's people before anyone else. This is important. If the Apostle had applied the gospel to families or individuals first, we might be left with the impression that our family life or our individual priorities takes precedence to our commitment to the church. Jesus addressed churches by name in the book of Revelation reminding us that, even with all of its bruises, Jesus finds the church beautiful and expects His people to be gathering in the church preparing for his return. **Jesus loves the church. Jesus died for the church. Jesus continues to build his church. Jesus is returning for the church.**

So...the church must be first. The church first means learning God's word first, loving people first, keeping Christ at the center first, sharing with those in need first, gathering to worship God first. To say the church must be first is not to say it is right to neglect the responsibilities you have as an individual or a spouse or a parent. On the contrary, this kind of prioritizing is designed by God to ensure that you actually pursue and protect that which God says is important including being a godly individual, a godly spouse and a godly parent. Where else in the world will you be taught that? Where else in the world will you be reminded of that?

Where else in the world will you be encouraged towards that? Where else in the world will you be admonished against ignoring that? ***One's neglect of the church is the path to neglect the things of God.***

Conclusion | The Church and WE

The Church is the place of safety, encouragement, correction, growth, joy, and hope for believers precisely because ***it is the place where Jesus has promised to put His name.*** My life in Christ is not merely about ME...it is about WE. *Hebrews 10.19-24...since WE have confidence to enter holy places...WE have a great priest...let US draw near...let US hold fast...let US consider how to stir ONE ANOTHER to love and good works...let us NOT neglect to meet together.* Everyone understands what it looks like to neglect our marriages, to neglect our families, to neglect our health, even to neglect our jobs. **But are we willing to ask whether we are neglecting His church?**

Consider what would it look like if everybody in the church was as devoted as you were? We are a body, that is growing, and being built up by God's Spirit for God's glory. The body of Restoration Road Church's is composed of ALL of you...and every BODY looks different. **But don't be a lame part of the body—it hurts you and us. You have been brought here to function as a part of the body.** You have not been brought here by accident, but because we need you and you need us. *¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 1 Corinthians 12.12-14*

What would the church of our lord Jesus look like if all the energy and time and sacrifice you gave to every other community you poured into the church? If you are in Christ, God has given you His Spirit. And His Spirit is devoted to reminding us what Jesus commanded. And what Jesus said in **John 15.34: ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**"

The Spirit is calling us to love one another as Christ loved us. And Christ loved us with more than sentimental thoughts or good intentions. He loved us in way that we could feel it. The realness of the Communion elements remind us that what has been done spiritually extends into the physical. **We have a new life. We have a renewed life. We have an eternal life. But we also have a shared life.**

As you take Communion consider who you take it with...you are not only confessing that that I AM IN CHRIST, but that WE ARE IN CHRIST...together.