

## Powerful Christian Living

### Chapter Eleven

#### The Church

Having been saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ we are not only people who are forgiven, we are people who belong. We belong to God our Father, to Christ our Lord and we belong to one another. All of us belonging together is what the Bible calls the church.

Too often people think of going to church in the same way as going out to dinner or to the movies. If the show is good and the food is delicious they will come back and even tell others about their experience. But if the food is bad and the show is lousy, then they leave and won't come back. But the church is not a restaurant or a theatre; it is the body of Christ, the family of God, and the temple of the living God as the following Scriptures show.

And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

(Ephesians 1:22, 23)

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 *cornerstone*, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted 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. (Ephesians 2:19-22)<sup>1</sup>

To belong to the church is to enjoy life's greatest privilege which is to be a part of the people of God. Every Christian belongs to the universal church which consists of every believer in the world. Every believer should also be involved in a local church. And a particular local church is only as good or as bad as the people who are in it. Therefore if you desire a loving, caring church then you need to be loving and caring. If you want an exciting church then you need to be excited and involved. If you desire a growing church then you need to be maturing in Christ and witnessing to others about Christ. And all of us have the ability to be loving and excited and growing because we have the Spirit of God within us empowering us to live for Him.

The English word "church" is derived from the Scottish word "kirk" which is derived from the Greek word *kuriakos*. Both of these words mean "belonging to the Lord". Now the church does

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<sup>1</sup> See also 1 Timothy 3:14, 15

belong to the Lord, but *kuriakos* is not the word the Bible uses for “church”. In the Greek manuscripts from which the New Testament is translated the word translated “church” is *ekklesia*. This word, *ekklesia*, means a called out assembly of people. You and I have been called out of a godless world to belong to God and the Lord Jesus Christ and to live forever with them in the coming kingdom of God.

In Acts, chapter 2, we have a snap shot of the early, first century church. And in the family photo we can see several vital factors that make a healthy and vibrant church. This second chapter of Acts begins with the Lord Jesus Christ pouring forth the promised gift of the holy Spirit upon the disciples at the Feast of Pentecost.<sup>2</sup> After this initial outpouring of the Spirit Peter preached Christ and three thousand people were saved and entered the church. Then we read the following,

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. (Acts 2:42-47)

These verses provide us with six principles for building a vital and healthy church. The principles are:

- being committed to the apostle’s doctrine
- to fellowship
- to breaking of bread
- to prayers
- to giving
- to witnessing

The first principle that we see in verse 42, is that the believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” This means that they dedicated themselves to learning and living the truth of God’s Word that taught by the apostle’s<sup>3</sup>. It wasn’t that these people had some kind of religious experience and were faithful for a while but then their religious fervor cooled. No,

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<sup>2</sup> This occurred fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ

<sup>3</sup> This principle of being devoted to the apostle’s doctrine is adhered to today when preaching and study remain faithful to the doctrines presented in the New Testament penned by the apostles.

they made the decision to remain faithful to learning, living and sharing the good news. The apostle Peter made the following exhortation in his first letter,

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.  
(1 Peter 2:1-3)

If you want to grow into a strong, mature, joyful Christian then you need to desire to read and study the Word of God just as a baby desires milk. And if your church is to be a vital fellowship, then you will need to be dedicated to strong biblical preaching and teaching. Remember, in Matthew 4:4, Jesus Christ said,

*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'*

And Romans 10:17 states clearly that, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

The teaching and learning of the written Word of God is the first essential principle in building a healthy church. The second principle is to be devoted to “fellowship<sup>4</sup>.” The Greek word translated “fellowship” is *koinonia* which means a full participation in something; it is the full sharing of our common life together in Christ. When a Christian is involved in fellowship he or she is actively seeking to benefit the church and to be blessed in return. The writer to the Hebrews encouraged this kind of involvement.

Therefore, brethren, *having* boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and *our* bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And **let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.  
(Hebrews 10:19-25) [my emphasis]

The great key to understanding what fellowship means is the phrase “one another.” In the verses above we are encouraged to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.” We are to observe one another and think about how best to serve each other. We are

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<sup>4</sup> Vs. 42

not to forsake being with one another for worship and edification. Just as the coals of a fire stay hot when they are near each other, we need each other to stay hot for the Lord. We are to love one another, pray for one another, forgive and admonish one another.<sup>5</sup> Each and every one of us is gifted by God for loving service to others in the church.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.  
(1 Peter 4:10, 11)

The apostle Paul, in Romans 12 also wrote about how every believer is gifted to serve other believers in the church, the body of Christ.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of *himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing<sup>6</sup> according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.  
(Romans 12:4-9)

When we are involved in fellowship with one another, we are participating in the life of the body of Christ. And we are growing more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul in Ephesians exhorts us to mature in our faith saying,

we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies,

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<sup>5</sup> How believers are to relate to one another in the church can be seen from a study of the following verses where the phrase “one another” occur: John 13:34, 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10, 16; 15:14, 17; 1 Cor. 12:25; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2, 25, 32; 5:19, 21; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 18; 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:24, 25; James 4:11; 5:9, 16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; 4:8-10; 5:5; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5.

<sup>6</sup> These individual gifts are given to us at the time of our salvation in the gift of the holy Spirit. The Spirit is God’s gift to us and our service is our gift to the church.

according to the effective working by which every part does its share,  
causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.  
(Ephesians 4:14-16)

The third key to a vital church is that believers should be committed to “the breaking of bread.”<sup>7</sup> Now eating food is hardly newsworthy so there must be some deeper truth for us to understand, and there is. I believe that what is implied here is simply sharing a meal with one another as well as sharing in “The Lord’s Supper” or “holy communion.” When Jesus ate his last meal with his disciples before his death on the cross he took bread and broke it and said that it represented his body being given for salvation. He then took a cup of wine and said that it represented his blood that would be shed for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever we eat bread and drink wine we are told to do this in remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore we should regularly share in the meal of holy communion where we remember the sacrifice of our Lord. And there should be opportunities for simply eating together to build bonds of friendship and love. Sharing a meal together brings a sweet family atmosphere into the church. The fourth key is being committed to “prayer.” Our Lord Jesus said,

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is*  
willing, but the flesh *is* weak  
(Matthew 26:41)

We do not want to be weak and give in to temptation. We want to be strong and mature in our faith and prayer helps us to do that. The apostle Paul speaks of,

Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.  
(Colossians 4:12, 13)

When we pray for one another we help each other to be faithful in our walk with the Lord. Therefore we should

pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23

<sup>9</sup> The acronym “ACTS” helps to remind us of the different aspects to prayer. “A” is for adoration and praise to God, “C” is for the confession of our sins, “T” is for giving thanks, and “S” stands for making our supplications.

The fifth principle to which we should be committed is giving. Proverbs 3:9, 10 states that our money should be given as an offering to the Lord,

Honor the LORD with your possessions,  
And with the firstfruits of all your increase;  
10 So your barns will be filled with plenty,  
And your vats will overflow with new wine.  
(Proverbs 3:9, 10)<sup>10</sup>

The New Testament encourages us to be a gracious giver and to expect God to bless us back for our generosity.

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.* 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work.  
(2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

When we give it helps to meet needs within the church. Our offerings provide an income for those who are in full time ministry. It purchases materials that are needed for biblical education and outreach. Finances can also be used for charitable needs. The more that a church gives the more it has an abundance for every good work.

Finally, the sixth principle for a healthy church is that it witnesses for Christ and reaches out to those who need to be saved. We are called to be ambassadors for Christ.

Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.  
(2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

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<sup>10</sup> In the Old Testament the standard for giving was the tithe or ten percent of what one earned. Often this was exceeded by joyful and thankful giving (Exodus 25:2; 35:5-9, 20-29; 36:5-7; 1 Chronicles 29:1-20). At times people gave all they had (Mark 12:41-44), and also out of deep poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

As a member of the church, the body of Christ, you are a royal dignitary. You are an ambassador for Christ! We have the “ministry of reconciliation” to bring men and women back to God through faith in Christ. And we have the “word of reconciliation”—we have the message that saves. What a privilege this is! Our world is doomed to perish because of sin. But we have been called of God to offer real hope. You are God’s love letter to a world in need of His grace.

The church is the house of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth<sup>11</sup>. For the church to be all that God has called it to be we must be committed to the apostle’s doctrine, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to prayers, to giving and to sharing the wonderful Word of God.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 3:15