

We Are Baptist

Autonomy of the Local Church

Part II - The Church's Purpose

Acts 2:41-47 *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

Introduction

When it comes to any type of erosion, people who are the closest to it don't see it as clearly as those who leave and then come back to the area. Whether it be a mountain side or a beach, erosion takes place over the years and sometimes quicker than we realize.

Erosion is what has happened to the church today. We don't have the same Christian era as we had fifty years ago. One could say we are in a "post-Christian era" as one author coined it. How true that is. We can no longer say that our nation is a strong Christian nation. The result of such erosion is that our nation's biblical literacy has declined.

We have also seen the erosion of the church. It appears that the church has lost its way. Churches have forgotten why they exist. Rather than being a pillar and a ground for truth while promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ, too many have become entertainment or marketing centers for self-help. The church has lost its purpose!

It is time that we get back on track. After all, the world needs the church! Even with all of its present flaws, the church is still the institution that God has blessed and ordained to reach the world. So rather than allowing the church to continue to erode, we must address the erosion and start building once again upon the principles and purposes that made the early church so powerful.

I. The primary purpose of the church is to worship Jesus Christ by praising His name (glorifying God) and preaching His Gospel.

A. These practices were present in the church not only after Pentecost, but also when Jesus started it. He told us to repent for the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

B. Two primary purposes

1. **Glorify** God – Acts 2:47

John 12:32 *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

2. Preach the **Gospel** – Acts 2

II. The primary purpose is fulfilled through steadfastness – Firm resolve and consistency of purpose.

Acts 2:42 *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

A. They were consistent in their commitment to God.

1. **Doctrine**

- They did not avoid learning doctrine!
- They knew what they believed.
- They were committed to learning the truth.
- Doctrine was the core of the church. Today churches are trying to grow and leave out doctrine. They are corrupting the foundation of the church and it will not last.

2. **Fellowship** – common things

- They spent time with other believers.
- “Iron sharpeneth iron.” When you isolate yourself from other believers you remove a key element of growth – Influence and accountability. Both of these are naturally produced when we fellowship with other believers and make friends.

- The church is commanded to edify itself. This is done through the fellowship of believers.

Ephesians 4:14-16 *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

3. **Prayers**

- They prayed a lot
- How much do you pray!
- They were consistent in their prayers

B. **Commitment** is an eroding commodity in Christianity today

1. **Faithfulness**

1 Corinthians 4:2 *Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

2. **Loyalty**

1 John 2:19 *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

III. **The primary purpose is fulfilled through unity – They were together.**

A. They were together and had all things common

1. Unity is a **universal principle** of Christianity
2. It is normal and good for churches to be unified.

Acts 4:32 *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*

Acts 15:25 *It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,*

Romans 15:6 *That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

B. **Division** is a principle of Satan!

1 Corinthians 12:25 *That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.*

Romans 16:17 *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

1. There should be no division in the church!
2. When divisions come, they should be dealt with immediately and for the glory of God.
3. It is never honorable to split the church! You will never find God happy with us dividing a church body.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 *Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

- C. Unity is an **eroding** commodity in the church today. Self-interest seems to have replaced community and unity. That is not how the church was built.
1. It is not what you can get out of it, but what you can contribute!
 2. It is about teamwork!

IV. The primary purpose is fulfilled through gladness – contagious Christianity.

Acts 2:46 *And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,*

- A. Notice that the people were **glad!**
1. Christians should be the **happiest people** on the planet!
 - It was not because of entertainment – they preached for hours
 - It was not because of drugs or alcohol – they were filled with the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 5:18 *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;*

2. We need contagious joy back in the church!
- B. The elements of gladness

1. **Unity of purpose** – singleness of heart
2. **Love** for God and each other
3. **Together** – we were made to be around other people!

V. **The primary purpose is fulfilled through growth – same day was added new believers**

Acts 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

A. The early church grew!

B. Two areas of growth

1. **Numerically**
2. **Spiritually**

C. Elements of growth included several areas.

1. **Sharing their faith**

- We need to get better at sharing our faith from house to house!
- If we do not speak up, they will not know.
- This week pass out one tract to someone and invite them to church!

2. Sent **Missionaries** out (Paul, Barnabas, Silas, John Mark, Luke, Timothy)

3. The **church was alive!**

- People want to be around life!
- Miracles and baptisms, and many salvations were taking place and that produces a contagious spirit that attracted people!

4. The Lord **added!**

- Notice it is God who grows the church.
- As the husbandman of souls, He would want to plant new believers in churches that were alive and that would teach His truth!
- If we do our part, God will see that the church grows!
- We work on the sharing, but He does the bringing!
- It was never about marketing the church, but the church grew as the Lord added! Today, we have an emphasis on programs instead of just doing what the Lord commanded and allowing Him to bless.

5. The church was not about them; it was always about **others**.

- When a church becomes intrinsic it will begin to erode.

VI. Conclusion

- The purpose of the church is found in praising God and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we glorify Him and preach His gospel, then the church is at its best.
- The church is essential to the Christian's life and should never be viewed as optional! Remember, Jesus died for the church, so it should be a central part of every believer's life.
- In a changing world, it is important that the church consistently fulfills its God given purpose!
- What are you doing to help fulfill the church's purpose? Isn't it time that all who call on the name of Jesus Christ do everything in our power to elevate the role of the church in a lost and dying world?