

April 19, 2015

The Church

In our study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the believers in Rome we kept coming back to the conclusion that our God and Father wants so much more for us than simply "going to church". His goal for us is complete transformation so that day by day we become more and more like Jesus. It is important, however, to understand that the church plays a huge role in that transformative process.

God created the church, but not I believe, in the form that it presently exists. In the history of the church as it is recorded in the book of Acts the earliest form of the church is described in this way, ***"They (the first believers) devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*** (Acts 2:42-47)

This earliest and purest form of the church was composed of a very obviously transforming people. Their belief in the risen Savior and their willingness to lay down their old sin-filled lives in baptism brought them together. Their new lives were marked by their devotion to God and to one another and that transformation impressed everyone who saw it.

I am convinced that this is what God meant for the church he created. From those early days to today mankind has tinkered with the church that God brought about and perverted it from its initial form and intent. To rediscover that pure form of the church would, I think, demand some major changes in our beliefs and in our actions.

Let's consider how the author of this history, Luke, describes these earliest believers. He says first of all that they were devoting themselves to some basic functions. They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching. These early believers were hungry for knowledge and understanding. They were desperate to learn all they could about God and his Son and his plan for them. They were in fact, so devoted that they gathered every day to hear from the apostles who had personally known and lived with the Master.

They were devoted to fellowship. These believers loved to be together. They not only met together daily to learn from the apostles; they also were meeting together daily to share meals with one another. In our world where we drag our feet about meeting for a few hours during a whole week to experience this kind of devotion is rare or completely non-existent.

They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. This phrase can be misleading, but most serious students of Scripture believe it is referring to what we have come to call the "Lord's Supper". This simple celebration of Jesus that he gave us on the night before his betrayal is a constant reminder of the core of our faith. Initially these earliest believers probably shared this memorial with much less pomp and circumstance during their evening meal.

They devoted themselves to prayer. They spent time everyday talking with the Father. A natural function of relationships that matter to us is conversation. We want to talk to and listen to those we care about. Our love for the Father is directly reflected in the devotion we have to time in prayer.

The devoted themselves to one another. In specific obedience to the Lord's commandment to love one another they shared everything that they had willingly with each other. No one in fact had need because they were so devoted.

The key characteristic that screams from this description of the earliest church is **DEVOTION**. A transforming people will be devoted as a natural outcome of that transformation. Are we a devoted people?