

How Did the Early Church Treat Each Other?

Acts 2:42-47

Introduction

If what we talked about last week is true (and I think we have to admit that it is), then **we should figure out what it means to love each other practically** so we can fulfill what Jesus said in John 13:34-35. And as we agreed last week, **90% of what it means to be a follower of Jesus has little to do with what we do on Sunday morning at 11AM.** Andy Stanley says that the 90% of what it means to be a follower of Jesus is “one-anothering one another.”

There are a lot of ways we can try to figure out what all of this looks like, but one important way is to look at the early church and see how they treated each other. While it is true that their culture was about as different from ours as is possible, they are still a really great example from whom we can certainly learn some principles and probably find some things we can still practice today.

Background Passage

Two passages give us a clear description of the early church in its first days of existence, and we'll look at the first today:

Acts 2:42-47 – ⁴²And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all those who had believed were **together**, and had **all things in common**; ⁴⁵and they *began* selling their property and possessions, and were **sharing them with all, as anyone might have need**. ⁴⁶And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were **taking their meals together** with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Background

This part of Acts is describing what was going on less than two months after Jesus' last supper with his disciples, and less than two weeks after his ascension into heaven! So this is early, early, early in the life of His church. This was before there were elders, deacons, choir, the SBC, RAs, AWANAs, and even the New Testament! Before the church had time to start fighting over the color of the carpet and how hard the pews are, and all the other sordid history of the organized church, **this passage describes their first reflex, their first instinct, under the raw, un-conditioned leadership of the Holy Spirit.** It's pretty important.

But so that we can actually have a chance at getting closer to God's ideal for us, let's think baby steps. Among the characteristics of the early church, what baby steps can we take toward what they were doing? Even baby steps make a big difference.

James 4:8 – **Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.** Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

They Were Engrossed: (“They were **continually devoting themselves to...**”)

4342 προσκαρτερο proskartereo {pros-kar-ter-eh'-o}

AV - continue 4, continue instant 1, continue steadfastly 1,
attend continually 1, give (one's) self continually 1,
wait on 1, wait on continually 1; 10

- 1) to adhere to one, be his adherent, to be devoted or constant to one
- 2) to be steadfastly attentive unto, to give unremitting care to a thing
- 3) to continue all the time in a place
- 4) to persevere and not to faint
- 5) to show one's self courageous for
- 6) to be in constant readiness for one, wait on constantly

Robert Gundry translates this “engrossed.”

What are you engrossed with? _____

How do you know when you're engrossed? _____

They were engrossed with:

Apostles' teaching – They were engrossed with God's Word to them. (At that time through the Apostles.) (But today, we have “a more sure testimony...”)

2 Peter 1:19-21 – ¹⁹And so we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. ²⁰But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Today we can live this out by spending significant time in God's Word. And this *does* happen partly during the 11 hour!

What would a baby step toward that ideal look like for you? _____

Fellowship – κοινωνία, which means fellowship or sharing. They were engrossed with fellowship!

2842 κοινωνία koinonia {koy-nohn-ee'-ah}

AV - fellowship 12, communion 4, communication 1, distribution 1, contribution 1, to communicate 1; 20

- 1) fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse
 - 1a) the share which one has in anything, participation
 - 1b) intercourse, fellowship, intimacy
 - 1b1) the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office)
 - 1c) a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship

Fellowship refers here to close association involving mutual involvement and relationships. (NET)

How can we live this out today? _____

Today we can live this out by _____. And this *does* happen a little during our Bible study time!

What would a baby step toward that ideal look like for you? _____

Breaking of bread – Probably eating together versus communion. They were engrossed with it! (Thus it wasn't uncommon, but frequent!)

How can we live this out? _____

Today we can live this out by _____. And this seldom happens during our Sunday church schedule.

What would a baby step toward that ideal look like for you? _____

Prayer – They were engrossed with prayer. Wow.

There are so many things that keep us from prayer. _____

Are you engrossed with prayer? _____

Are your prayers answered? _____ Have you noticed that some of the best pray-ers (people who actually pray) may see great miracles in the lives of those for whom they pray, but yet still not see God answer their prayers for their own major problems? Why is that? _____

James 4:2-3 – ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

It is really difficult to pray for our own concerns unselfishly.

What does prayer have to do with loving others? Well, if we all agree to pray for each other, then we can overcome the selfish trap and fall into the promises Jesus had for us when we pray with others in agreement. And there is nothing greater we can do for others than to pray for them. That is love!

What would that look like? _____

What would a baby step toward that ideal look like for you? _____

What Did It Look Like Then?

They were in **awe of God** because of all the things He was doing around them!

There were **miracles** happening through the apostles!

They were **together**.

They had **all things in common**.

They **shared** what they had with others who had need.

They continued to fulfill **Jewish religious practices**.

They **ate together often**.

They had **joy**.

They **praised God**.

They had **favor with the people**.

People were saved as a result.

Conclusion: What Can It Look Like In Our Lives?

They will know us by our love.

What baby steps are you willing to take? _____