

Church is Not Optional: Part 3

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 2 verses 42 to 47. Church is not optional, part 3.

Let's pray. Our Father, we are grateful that you left us your book. You gave us your word so that we could read it, think about it, meditate upon it.

We could see you in it and your ways, that we could have a true spiritual encounter with you in your word.

We don't have to wonder what you want us to do. For the most part, you tell us. And even when you don't spell it out all the way, you give us wisdom from your book.

To know and to follow. We have all that we need for life and for godliness, according to your promises. So, Father, we come to open the book. They said, bring the book.

[1 : 08] We bring it. And help your servant now to preach your word in your power, in your grace, in understanding. And may your people hear with humble hearts so that, Lord, they might know you better and might grow in grace and walk worthy of the name of Jesus as your word calls us to.

Bless us now. Anoint your unworthy servant. Anoint your people. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Acts chapter 2, beginning at verse 42.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And all came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts. Praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

[2 : 31] Amen. And that is the word of the Lord. Amen. Amen. You may be seated. And while you're being seated, if you have a Bible with you, or use the Pew Bible, just put a note in 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

Just put a note. Just open that up there and just hold on to that. We're going to come to that in a minute. I want you to see something. It says 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Just hold on to that. Now keep in mind what the local church is.

Someone said the local church is an embassy of the kingdom of heaven. I like that. That's beautiful. In other words, we're heavenly ground.

We therefore live by and do life by different priorities, values, and even customs than our surrounding cultures.

We live according to Christ's laws and blessings in the fellowship. And we need each other in order for our embassy to thrive.

[3 : 40] As time goes on, you know how government workers are supposed to be, we say. And if you're a government worker, that's a joke. I'm just not true of all government workers. But the joke is that government workers don't, after a while, they just kind of get jaded and just go along and wait for pension.

Sometimes the churches get like that. We're supposed to be an embassy of heaven, but we just go along and we get jaded and we rest on our laurels.

And we're just not thriving. We're not alive. We get stale. And so we need the spirit to come once again with power to wake us up, to break up the fallow ground, to use the old King James language, to wake us up to who and what we are.

To this devotion is called for. Church family is not optional. And here today I want to give you a few more reasons why this is so from this passage.

We began last week, you know, just diving into the idea that we are to be devoted to the fellowship last two weeks. And now I want to bring you down to verse 44.

[5 : 03] Devotion to true fellowship involves sharing our material blessings. Notice 44 and 45.

And all who believe were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

All things in common. Most of the passage demonstrates this idea. Some have looked at this text and seen the rationale for communism and socialism.

But that is so wrong. Both of those isms involved forced sharing. And if I'm told, communism denies the right to private property.

The text does not say they were commanded to sell their property. Nor does it say they sold all of their possessions.

[6 : 04] Some people evidently owned homes in which to have fellowship group meetings. But they shared. The Bible shows us here that they shared with those who were in need.

When the church said we had a need, that's when they gave over and above what they normally gave. Sharing possessions and giving financially is a normal part and necessary part of church life.

Now, you got that passage that I mentioned, 2 Corinthians 8, because it's not going to be on the screen. By the way, everything doesn't go on the screen, so bring a Bible. Hope that's okay.

Oh, no, no, not that one. See, that's not that one. See, that's not on the screen. You don't have that one. 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Thank you, Isaiah. You're the man, brother. Susan, Isaiah. Susan, thank you. You're the girl. All right.

Here's what it says. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty, these guys were poor, have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

[7 : 20] So poor churches are giving. Note that. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord.

Paul said, I didn't make them do it. Watch this. Verse 4. Begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord. They trusted God. And then by the will of God to us, they gave.

Now, here's what I want you to see here. Note in verse 4. You see that phrase, taking part? Taking part? It's actually the Greek word *koinonia*.

That's the word for fellowship. So here, let me give you my translation of this section. Literally. Literally. For the grace and the fellowship and the relief or service of the saints.

[8 : 22] Because the word relief is the word we get our word deacon from. It means service. Listen to the translation again. For the grace and the fellowship and the service of the saints.

Grace, fellowship, service. Grace, fellowship, service. You know, they saw taking part in the care of their poor brothers and sisters as a sign of grace in the fellowship.

To not do so is a sign of missing grace and missing fellowship in the local church.

I can't tell you how many times, and I say this, I'm not saying this proudly, I hope I'm not. How many times other members from other churches will come to our church asking for help.

It is the local church's responsibility to care for its own members when they have need. That is not, we're not special because we do that.

[9 : 41] We're just being biblical. We're only doing what we ought to do. As Jesus said, we're still unworthy of service. We've only done what we are. It's right.

This means there's grace and there's true fellowship when we care for one another because we have need. Now keep in mind what's happening in the book of Acts.

In that Jerusalem church. 3,000 plus people were pilgrims. These people were pilgrims. They had come to, remember Jerusalem, for the day of Pentecost.

And many of them, these folk didn't go back home. Some were from Judea. Some were from outside of Jerusalem because they came from all over the Roman world.

And they got saved. Jesus arrested them. His spirit, they weren't even looking for Jesus. Isn't that deep? Jesus can grab you when you're not even looking. If you're here today and you don't know Jesus, be careful.

[10 : 37] He may grab you. He grabbed them and, and, and, and, and, and, listen. They're there and they, they couldn't bring themselves to break away from the fellowship in Christ.

Likely the resources they brought began to run out. And those unable to replenish them needed the support of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here's the thing. I feel like monk. Here's the thing. They didn't have everything all worked out. All they knew was that they were being called to follow Jesus.

So they did. And they were trusting him to supply their needs. And today we want Jesus in the church to give us a five-year plan before we're even willing to give.

We got to know every, we're good Presbyterians. We got to know every detail before we're willing to step out in faith to follow Jesus anywhere. And there are times, therefore, that we paralyze ourselves and our churches because Jesus doesn't give us all the details.

[11 : 52] He may give us some. Amen. Thank God. Look for him. But he doesn't always give us all the details. We miss out on the joy of spontaneous faith and watching him provide for us as we go.

We need more Abrahams, I think. And many, listen, y'all, many, if not most times, God's provision comes through the fellowship.

As those who have material blessings give in faith to the work, the fellowship shares its stuff. And another example is given.

If you're back in Acts 2, turn over to Acts chapter 4. An example is given. And it's the same wording. The same wording in chapter 4, beginning down in verse 32.

Here's what happens. Now, the full number of those who believe were of one heart and soul. That's fellowship, y'all. No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

[13 : 02] Don't overread the text. It doesn't mean that they didn't have their own possessions that they were theirs. It means the attitude. Like you probably said sometime, my house belongs to Jesus.

Doesn't mean it's not yours. A man joined our church in Miami. I'll never forget him. Doug Link. Love this man. He joined our church in Miami and he said, Pastor, I have a boat.

He said, Pinelands. That church now has a boat. And he meant it. Everybody, 200 plus people went out on that boat. I even got seasick on that boat.

All right. So, are you with me? I just want to make sure you understood that. And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. Great grace was upon them all.

This is revival, y'all. Listen, there was not a needy person among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet.

[14 : 06] It was distributed to each as any had need. And they said, a guy named Barnabas, whom you'll meet later in Acts if you read it. A guy named Barnabas, Paul's companion, was one such guy who did that.

People sold stuff and said, I don't need this money. I want to give it to the saints. I want to give it for the work of the church. We talk about when people make wills today and leave money to their churches and to Covenant College.

Amen. Covenant College. People do that. So, saints do to organizations that they want to. They were doing this. We get this from them.

Now, why do Christians give like this? They do so because they've experienced the generous giving of our Lord Jesus. Now, Susan, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Listen, this is what happens when you come to know Jesus. And I want to know if you're knowing. Listen, Jesus shared his stuff with you. If you are a child of God, you are a beneficiary of Jesus sharing with you.

[15 : 30] His stuff was his righteousness and glory. He set aside his glory to take up your poverty, your sinful poverty he's talking about, and your unrighteousness to make you rich in his righteousness.

So, when you stand before God now, you don't stand there showing God your resume of good deeds. You stand before God just as if you've never sinned because you point to someone else whose account you now share.

You're a beneficiary. You stand before Jesus as a recipient of his great giving.

And, see, when you allow that reality to seep down into your soul and we need to let it do it, it causes you to loosen up on stuff.

Because you realize it's just stuff. And as they always said, you can't take it with you. You realize your stuff is only on loan and you're just a steward.

[16 : 41] And you don't mind. As a matter of fact, you rejoice in sharing your stuff with your brothers and sisters in Christ who are in true need.

True need. Because when you do this, you not only enjoy Jesus, fellowship with Jesus in your giving, you testify to those around you that he is glorious, he is good, he is real, and he is generous.

Second, I want you to notice that devotion to true fellowship involves sharing our time and homes with each other. Notice back to chapter 2. Notice verse 46. Day by day.

Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts. There were two venues for church fellowship.

Two venues. Large group corporate worship was taking place in the temple. Remember, they were Jews. The temple was still there. Had not been destroyed yet. So they would go every day.

[17 : 48] The Christian Jews were going to the old covenant temple to worship. The temple was going to the temple. Because they were the new temple. And they were going to the man-made temple to worship every day.

But listen, but they couldn't stay in the temple all the time. You can't stay here all the time. And so they seemed to have thought that it was important to meet on more than just one day.

So they began a small group house ministry where they could be together around the things of Christ and serve one another.

Wow. Wow. Amazingly, the spirit-filled church doesn't believe that one large meeting a week is enough for true fellowship.

That's why when revival comes, you'll see the church exploding. There's prayer meetings. There are meetings. Things are happening. People are going into the community. And when revival comes, there's this desire, the renewed desire for the fellowship.

[18 : 53] That's why many churches like us have a small group ministry. It's so that you can have grace-sustaining fellowship with your brothers and sisters between Sundays.

Because when I go out into the culture, I get some lumps. I get a few sucker punches. The enemy beats up on me. The world beats on me. I beat up on me and my own stupid, sinful self.

And I need you. I got to see some of you soon to encourage me. And what happens in those groups is you begin to discover your own spiritual gifts.

You experience intimate friendships that you can't really have here. I know how much we love the greeting time. But family, that's pre-fellowship.

You're not sharing much, but how you doing? Some is just socializing. Amen to that. But the fellowship begins when you do life on life. You can even experience what James says in 516.

[19 : 58] Confess your sins to each other. Pray for each other so that you may be healed. Prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. You get, in the intimacy of these fellowships, you can even get some help to deal with your personal sin.

You can get help when you're, when you're, when you're, instead of waiting for, for, for, for third, the fourth Sunday to come for prayers for healing. You can get prayers for healing in your small group.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, somebody. We support one another through the hard times and rejoice with each other in the good times.

No one confesses their faults when socializing. But in Christian fellowship, this happens. It should happen.

It should happen. There's no shame because when I confess my faults to you, you recognize he's just like me. And we're in the same boat and it's not sinking because we're in the boat with Jesus.

[21 : 02] Here's the catch. It takes time and transparency. Nothing is more transparent than your home. Isn't it glorious that in the gospel, Jesus also not only shares his home with us, we become his home.

That's why we do it. Why do we share our homes? Because Jesus did. In John, it's on the screen, listen, John 14, 1 to 3. Jesus said, let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you? That I go to prepare a place for you?

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am, you may be also. Jesus has a home for you. And he's calling us to share our homes because he's sharing his home.

You are destined for the glory. And he says, I got plenty of space. 1 Corinthians 6, 19 and 20. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?

[22 : 16] Whom you have from God? You are not your own. For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

He said, listen, not only did Jesus have a, he shares a home with us. He says, we are his home. The spirit of the living Christ lives in you.

You are his home. So what you do with your body matters to him. Because he's alone for the ride. How you share matters to him.

When we fellowship in our homes with one another in the name of Jesus, we are sharing Jesus. Now I know what you're thinking. And this is an amen to this.

You may not have space. Or there may be other impertent circumstances that keep you from having people in your home. Amen. But are you willing to go to your brother or sister's homes?

[23 : 27] Are you willing to come outside of your door and give up some of your time to share with your brothers and sisters? You need them. And they need you.

We complain about time constraints today. Everybody's got time constraints. So we may have to get creative then. But are you hungry? You may have to change some of your priorities.

Because you're hungry. Here's one. Maybe Sunday after church becomes your time to fellowship. In the homes of the people of God. Because your week is so hectic.

Whatever works for you. If you're hungry for the fellowship, prioritize it. And understand something. If you're hungry for the fellowship, it's because the spirit of God has put the hunger in you.

And listen, I don't want to hear this stuff. Black church, white church. Black churches don't do fellowship. We don't do home groups. We do worship services.

[24 : 32] Only white churches do. The Bible says. It's not about culture.

It's not about culture or ethnicity. It's about hunger. And need. For one another. In Jesus.

We must not allow ethnic stereotypes to govern the body of Christ. But only the word of God.

And love for one another. Amen? Amen. Devotion. Next one. Devotion to true fellowship. This is important. Involves suffering with Christ.

And with one another. Is that on? I'll put the one another if you get anyone on there.

[25 : 31] The spirit-filled church was a persecuted church. You know this, right? The Jerusalem church was persecuted. It begins in chapter four with the arrest of Peter and John for preaching and healing in the name of Jesus.

They were threatened and then released. In chapter five. All the apostles are arrested and beaten. In chapter six. Stephen. One of the first deacons is arrested for the gospel and finally put to death in chapter seven.

In chapter 12. The apostle James is killed. Murdered. And also in chapter 12. Peter is arrested and freed miraculously by an angel.

What? Now you say, hold on. All this suffering in the church? What was the result of that? It must have split the church. It must have, you know, killed the church.

Let me give you some. This will be on the screen. Acts 5.14. More than ever. And more than ever. Believers were added to the Lord. Multitudes of both men and women.

[26 : 33] Acts 6.7. And the word of God continued to increase. And the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. And a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

After Saul was converted by Jesus and became Paul, the apostle. Acts 9.31. So the church throughout all day and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Acts 12.24. But the word of God increased and multiplied. Listen, what we learn here is that the church grows and is even strengthened under persecution and suffering.

Why? Because she shares in the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. And Paul sees this later.

He will write. He sees it as a plus. Philippians 3.10. He prays that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

[27 : 44] Listen, the word for fellowship in Acts 2. To share is to fellowship in Christ's sufferings, he says.

The fellowship of his sufferings, though painful, is yet under the sovereign hand of God for our good. And the church actually grows.

Grows in depth. And even in size. When she suffers. When she suffers. When she withstands the enemy's attacks through faith and unity in Jesus.

That's why Hebrews 10 is so important. 24 and 25. Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some.

But encouraging one another in awe the more as you see the day drawing near. That was a suffering church that he's writing to in Hebrews. And they needed each other.

[28 : 53] And he says that coming together, when you fellowship together, it's there. That's where you're going to encourage to keep on going. To be loving.

To be careful. To do good deeds wherever you go. So, I don't know about you, but I need your encouragement. But here's the question about that passage.

Have you ever asked? Why did he have to write it? Why were Christians not fellowshiping together? He said some weren't doing it.

That's what he says, right? Do you know why? Why, to put it in succinct terms, it was too risky. In Hebrews, same chapter, 32 to 36, just write this down.

He says, but I recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction.

[30 : 01] Sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. Since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and abiding one.

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance. So that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised. People have stopped gathering because it was risky because people, they were losing their stuff.

They were being imprisoned. If you were one of those Christians, you were labeled. You were labeled. And some of them found themselves in deep waters.

And so it was too risky to gather. And so that's why some of them were not gathering. They missed out on what they were called to as the people of God, as an embassy of heaven.

To share in the sufferings of Christ, but also to share in one another's sufferings. Did you hear what he said here, what I read here?

[31 : 13] That they were part, verse 33 of Hebrews 10, they were sometimes being partners with those who had been afflicted.

Those who had been exposed to reproach and affliction. Sometimes being partners with those so treated. Partners.

The fellowship. It's the word fellowship. They were partners with those who were suffering. When one person, when church suffered, the rest of the believers came along and shared in their suffering.

They cared for them in their suffering. They identified with them in their suffering. This is huge, brothers and sisters. This is huge. Because in our time, and particularly in a cross-cultural congregation like we say we have.

Listen, your African-American, Latino brothers and sisters are asking, will you fellowship in our sufferings? Will you fellowship in our heartbreak over the years of deaths by racist police officers?

[32 : 29] Thank God all of them are not like that. And I would say most of them are not. But there are too many on the floor. Will you share in the sufferings as we lament and grieve the gun violence that breaks our hearts and breaks apart communities in this city and around this country?

Will you grieve with us? Will you share in our sufferings as fear stalks some of us as we go into all white spaces? Will you grieve with us and share in our sufferings of being targeted by deranged racist men in stores or churches as we simply go about our lives?

Will you share in the fellowship of our sufferings in this city as for several years we are losing the black community in this city? The black community in this city is decreasing every single year as what we call progress and gentrification.

I will say targeted progress, targeted gentrification continues to raise property values, push people of color out of our city. Will you share?

Will you share? I don't need you to politicize this. Don't politicize my pain. But in the name of kingdom fellowship stand with us as we seek in Jesus to do our part responsibly to address these issues.

[34 : 06] The church weeps. Right? Romans 12. The church weeps with those who weep. And rejoices with those who rejoice.

In too many churches the rejoicing is political when their candidate wins. I don't care about that. When you hurt, I hurt.

And when I hurt. If you don't hurt, there's something wrong with me, you. We all just messed up. We share in the sufferings of Christ.

And we share in one another's sufferings. When injustice. Let me hear. Hear me. When injustice is being done. No one should turn their head.

In the body of Christ. Maybe one day. White people will need affirmative action. And believe me, I'm going to be standing right beside you as my brother and sister.

[35 : 14] Standing in front of you. Defending you with everything I've got. We're family. The church shares.

Why? Because Christ shared in our sufferings. By tasting death for each one of us. That he might deliver us from the fear of death. In order that our sufferings, listen, would not destroy us.

But remind us that we have a better inheritance. Suffering means I lose something. But here's the thing. You cannot lose anything Jesus has given you.

You cannot lose any of the spiritual blessings in heavenly places. And when we suffer, it just reminds us that our spiritual blessings are even more real. Are even more important.

Are even more true. And certainly eternal. And we stand beside each other in love. And we hold one another up.

[36 : 21] And we call upon God to do a work in us again. To pour out his spirit and revive us. That Lord, we begin to share your priorities. Including the priority of the fellowship.

And I will tell you. In my study of revival. Revival is always fought. Always fought.

Because it means change. God never leaves his people the same. He may revive us according to his word. But it will look a little different. Than it did in the past.

Every revival. Go back. Read the right about the great awakening. Every revival. Is challenged. Not by the culture.

By people in the church. We are our own enemies. Against revival. Because we don't want change. We want Jesus to do it.

[37 : 21] The way he's always done it. And you know something? He won't play the game. He's going to do it. And it's going to look a little different.

But it will be biblical. Grounded in his word. And his people will grow. And be blessed. What's your priority? Are you addicted to the fellowship?

Or are you addicted to doing things your way? And doing it alone? Not healthy.

Father have mercy upon us. And help us. Help us. Oh. Teach us what it means to be addicted to the fellowship.

Trusting in Christ alone. His name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[38 : 28] Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.