

Community on Display

Sermon Text: Acts 2:42-47

Study Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:1

Sermon Recap: Acts 2:42-47 gives us a glimpse into the life of the early church as the Holy Spirit came to dwell in each Christian and, through His divine power, formed the Church. We note several important things that arise from the text. First, the early church was devoted to the authoritative teaching of God's Word. God's Word formed the heart of this community. Second, we see that the early church was devoted to sharing meals together and praying together. There was a divine unity among this community of people, and one of the tangible expressions of this unity was their willingness to give what they had to meet the needs of others. Out of the overflow of God in their hearts, they were generous. We come away with a sense of "this is a gospel community on display for the world to see."

Sermon Connection: God designed His Church to be a particular and purposeful kind of community. He designed the Church to be a gospel community, a place where the gospel is embraced individually and corporately, and a place where the gospel is on full display. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul is describing how the gospel creates and shapes God's Church, the gospel community. He notes that there is a fundamental change in how we regard ourselves and one another. No longer are we fleshly; we are godly, and we are godly through the gospel. Jesus Christ has caused something miraculous within each member of His Church...new birth! Paul goes on to help us see just how the gospel shapes and defines God's gospel community on display.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To see that the gospel radically redefines our view of life together and our shared mission

Lesson Points:

Point 1: Our New Identity in Christ (vv. 16-19)

Point 2: Our New Mission in Christ (vv. 20-21)

Point 3: A Time of Group Reflection

The Context: 2 Corinthians is a letter of love. Paul deeply loves the Corinthian church and has labored throughout his years to see it healthy and thriving. In his absence, other false teachers attempted to lead the church astray, and 2 Corinthians is Paul's letter of warning and correction. In chapter 5, we find Paul reflecting on the radical effects of the gospel in the lives of the people of God.

His point is that only God does the work of the gospel, and He does so with a purpose. God intends for us to lead a certain kind of life because of our salvation.

Opening Question: What is church membership, and why is it important? What does it mean to be a member of the church?

Transition Statement: In a culture where many have decided to answer this question for themselves, Paul provides a helpful explanation of being a member of God's community which serves as a needed corrective in a confused culture...

Point 1 - Our New Identity in Christ (vv. 16-19)

What do vv. 16-17 teach us about the nature of the gospel and its work in our lives?

The gospel of Jesus Christ radically and totally transforms who we are. It, without overstating the point, makes us into new people. Paul shows that the gospel so transforms who we are, that within the community of faith, we do not even treat one another the same. We are not to deal with each other on the basis of who we were before Christ but on the basis of *who we are now in Christ*. Verse 17 teaches that a transformation, a metamorphosis, has literally taken place. Through Christ, we are made into new creatures.

Shepherding note: It is important that we help our people see that while justification is an immediate change in our position before God (God now regards us as fully righteous), sanctification does not happen instantaneously or overnight. Through the gospel, the Holy Spirit begins the good work of the gospel in us that He works out within us for the rest of our lives. And while we are always growing in holiness, Paul's command is that we treat one another on the basis of who we are in Jesus now and who Jesus is making us into.

How do vv. 16-19 help us to better understand how we are to relate to one another in the context of God's gospel community (the Church)?

This should radically change the way we look at and think about one another. The world teaches us to evaluate people based on how much we like or dislike them, on how they make us feel. The gospel, on the other hand, teaches us to love because Christ first loved us. Just as God is working the new creation of the gospel in our own lives, He is also working it in the lives of those within the Church. And because this is so, we learn to love each other because of what God is doing in each of us.

Verse 18 reminds us that salvation is God-centered. Why is this important?

This truth is foundational. It is hard to think that the gospel calls us to overcome learned behaviors, such as how we naturally relate to others, but Paul understands this. He is helping us by showing that this is all from God and is a reflection of God's character. Why are we to love others who are being made new through the gospel? Because *"All this is from God, Who through Christ reconciled us to Himself..."* And so, just as God reconciled us to Himself, we are called to be reconciled to others within the Body.

What astounding message does v. 19 teach us about the gospel?

To make sure we understand just how radical the gospel truly is, Paul gives us v. 19. God was under no obligation to save humanity. But, we read and learn about the deep, deep grace of God. We must

internalize this truth and allow it to mold and shape us; for if we understand that God does not hold our sin against us, we, in turn, learn not to hold our brothers' and sisters' sins against them.

Transition Statement: So, not only does Jesus radically save us from sin, and not only are we saved into the community of God's people, we are also commissioned as workers in God's mission...

Point 2 - Our New Mission in Christ (vv. 20-21)

In v. 20, Paul lays out the mission of the Church: Reconciliation. What is the basis/foundation for this? See 2 Cor. 5:18-19.

We read in v. 20 that the Church has a mission: to proclaim the message of God's gift of reconciliation through the gospel to the world. So, Christians must reckon with the fact that to be a part of God's Church, His gospel community, means taking up the cause of His mission: Gospel Proclamation and Discipleship. We recall vv. 18-19 where Paul lays out the foundation for this mission. God is only calling us to do what He has already done. It is accomplished; it cannot fail; what tremendous hope and assurance for us!

How does this understanding of mission help to shape and define the purposes of gospel community for us?

First, it teaches us the foundation for gospel community. Whether we call it growth group, community group, small group, Sunday School, etc., we learn that it has a definite foundation: The Mission of God. This means that those groups that do not live out the mission of God are not truly gospel communities. Second, it teaches us how we are to relate to one another: On the basis of the gospel work God is working in each of us. No longer do we choose a group based on how well we like the other people or how well the teaching fits our wants and needs. Rather, our primary connection and commitment to a gospel community becomes the gospel itself. If the gospel is present, we have all that we need. And because our shared focus and treasure is the gospel, we will embrace the mission of reconciliation—both reconciling ourselves to those in the group and bearing the gospel to the lost world—as a natural function of gospel community.

What does Paul intend for us to understand in v. 21? What life-giving elements does this hold for gospel community?

This verse is often described as teaching the doctrine of imputation: the fact that on the cross, God imputed (literally transferred) my sin to Christ, and in turn imputed Christ's righteousness to me. Take a moment to internalize that reality. On the cross, Jesus did not merely cover our sin, He dealt with it. And He dealt with it through a final death blow. Think of how this would radically transform our relationships within gospel community if we related to one another on this basis. "I will not be angry with you because Christ died both for me and for you." "I can get over these annoying tendencies because Christ died for them." "I can look past your sinfulness because I, too, am a sinner and Christ has died for both of us." Gospel community is meant to be theological and God-centered at the core.

Group Reflection Activity: Asking the Hard Questions...

Why does Paul say in 6:1, "...we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain"? Considering what we have studied, what might it look like to receive the grace of God in vain?

What assumptions have we made about being a part of a growth group? Have those assumptions lined up with God's purposes for His community?

What aspects of gospel community have we been in conflict with or perhaps ignored?

How does God's purpose for His community affect how we experience and participate in community?

Based on the text we've just studied, 2 Cor. 5:16-6:1, what is the mission of God?

How do you, the individual, view the mission of God as it relates to your life? How do you view the mission of God in relation to your growth group?

Our lives can get busy fast. How often does the mission of God enter your mind when you make decisions about what events fill up your calendar? (Things like your children's extracurricular activities, your work schedule, entertainment, etc.)?

How would you rate your ownership of the mission of God personally? As a group?

What are some practical ways for us to encourage one another toward owning this mission?

What are some things we can start doing this week as a growth group to respond to God's call to own His mission?

Intentional Prayer for Community

- Pray that God would begin to bring clarity as it concerns true gospel community.
- Pray that God would reveal areas where you have misunderstood community, and therefore, had wrong assumptions.
- Pray that God would help you to better understand both His mission and His community.
- Pray that your growth group would help you in these things through intentional and loving discipleship.