

Distinct Community

Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:1-21

Study Texts: Acts 2:42-47

Sermon Recap: In this portion of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul is showing us both the command for godliness and the fruits that such godliness produces both within the church and within the larger culture. In the first portion, vv.1-17, Paul develops and deals with a number of topics related to godliness. The entire passage rests on his command in v. 1, *“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”* Everything rests upon this command being taken to heart. He goes to call the church to a life of love, light, and wisdom. To state it differently, Paul calls the church, together in community, to lives of holiness. We see this clearly in v. 18 where Paul contrasts being drunk with wine versus being filled with the Holy Spirit. The only controlling authority in the Christian’s life should be the Holy Spirit, Who works all things unto the glory of God. When the people of God are indwelt by the Spirit of God, they will shine as gospel lights in the sin-darkened world.

Sermon Connection: Having considered much of what Paul said to the Philippians about life together in gospel community, we want to reconsider the text where we began our study: Acts 2:42-47. Here we find a number of things. First, it is important to note that we are being given a glimpse into the birth of the New Testament Church; to Church to which we belong even now. She is an ancient institution who perseveres by God’s grace. Second, we note this is a community on display. As we read through Luke’s descriptions it is not hard to see that something wonderfully supernatural is at work in the lives of these people; in the life of this first church. And so, as we read this text we want to ask, what makes this gospel community distinct, and why?

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To see how the gospel of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, creates and shapes true gospel community.

Lesson Points:

Point 1: Distinct Gospel Community (vv. 42-47)

The Context: The book of Acts (short for Acts of the Apostles) is actually part 2 of a story. It is the second part, or the follow-up, to Luke's gospel message. Throughout Luke's gospel, he develops many themes about Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. And, in the book of Acts, we find Luke explaining and fleshing out the work of the Holy Spirit of which he had formerly spoken. One of the most tangible expressions of the power of the Holy Spirit in the formation and faithful life of true gospel community.

Opening Question: How have you viewed church life and gospel community in the past? What effect has this study had on your view?

Transition Statement: Acts 2 brings us face-to-face with the reality of God-centered biblical community. It is distinct and purposeful...

Point 1 - Distinct Gospel Community (vv. 42-47)

What are some of the striking/surprising elements of this community?

There are many elements of this gospel community that should strike as odd, surprising, desirable, hard, etc. There is something distinct and other-worldly about how Luke describes this community. To many of us, such a group of people only exist in the world of television and movies...not in real life. If we are honest, it is hard to believe in the actual reality of such a community. Is it desirable? Without question. Is it attainable? Here is where we often fall short in faith. But, here is the truth, Acts 2:42-47 is so very striking because it pictures a *heavenly, transcendent community*. We might often miss that God has designed and ordered His gospel community to be practice and preparation for Heaven!

What is this community like? How would describe the nature of this community (besides their actions)?

This is a community taken with God, meaning that they are fully consumed with God in every way. But, we must keep in mind that this is not a group of perfect people. These are real, live men and women, boys and girls...the same kind of people who make up our growth groups. That which makes this community distinct is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. And because the Holy Spirit is present and at work in this community, we see that the nature of the community is gospel-centered. The gospel infuses and influences everything they do. And because the gospel is influencing their actions, we know that it is influencing and shaping their beliefs and thoughts; it shapes and develops their innermost convictions. This is a community of gospel people.

Why do you think this community of Christians lived this way? Read Acts 2:37-41.

The look into the first community (Acts 2:42-47) follows Peter's Pentecost sermon. In vv.37-41, we see the people responding to the truth they had just heard. Luke records, "*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the*

apostles, Brothers what shall we do?” This is the effect of the gospel in our lives. When the Holy Spirit awakens our heart to hear and believe, our hearts will be wrecked over our sins and we will know “I must do something.” These early Christians knew that apart from God they stood hopeless and condemned. The reason this early gospel community lived this way is because they understood their sin, they lived repentant lives, they loved the gospel, and they treasured one another. Such community is available to us...

Read the passage and ask, “What are they doing?” Make a list...

- They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.
- They devoted themselves to fellowshiping together.
- They regularly shared communion and ate together.
- They regularly prayed together.
- They were overwhelmed and awed with God’s goodness.
- They were overwhelmed and awed at the power of the gospel demonstrated through the apostles.
- They had all things in common; unity.
- They sold their material possessions to meet each other’s needs.
- They sold and gave their material possessions to care for the poor.
- They daily attended the temple together.
- They regularly praised God together.
- They had favor with all people. They were kind and sought peace.
- They lived missionally and saw non-Christians saved and brought into their community.¹

Which of these activities might conflict with our modern culture, and why?

As we consider this list, each and every one of these actions conflict with our culture. And why? Because each and every one of these actions is God-centered. Furthermore, we are living in a radically individualized culture, and this picture of community is entirely opposed to such individualism.

- If we are to devote ourselves to the faithful teaching of God’s Word, we must reject the teaching of the world.
- If we are to devote ourselves to gospel fellowship, we must reject cultural individualism and a spectator mentality.
- If we are to pray together, we must realize our desperate need for God and make time to regularly pray with one another.
- If we are to be overwhelmed with God we must set our eyes and minds on God; this means rejecting a world-centered mindset.

¹ This list is not meant to be exhaustive. We should not get hung up thinking that the ideal Christian community functions exactly like this. This is, rather, a faithful pattern.

- If we are to hold all things in common, it means that we have to submit ourselves to our brothers and sisters valuing the gospel more than our own preferences. (Eph. 5:21)
- If we are to meet each other's needs we must reject the idea that our stuff is "our stuff." We must see ourselves as stewards of God-given resources.
- If we are to gather regularly, we must rethink our schedules and our priorities.
- If we are to be kind and favorable, we must allow the Holy Spirit to work out the gospel within us.
- If we are to see people saved, we must be intentional with the gospel in our normal lives.

Why is important to remember that all this activity is happening in the context of the gospel community and not individually?

It can seem a bit overwhelming to read all of this and think, "Can I really do this? Can I really be a part of something like this?" By God's grace, the answer is yes! It is crucially important to remember that the command for gospel community does not rest of the individual Christian. No one Christian can facilitate such a community, no one Christian can carry out all the work of the church. God has designed all of this to take place within the gathered community of His people. He has designed us to experience all of this with one another, to invest the gospel into one another through discipleship, to carry out the work of the mission with one another. Individual Christianity is not only unbiblical, it is also harmful because it cuts us off from God's people and His intended purpose. We must faithfully and humbly ask God to help us come together, to love one another, to reorient our lives around one another for the sake of the gospel. Gospel community is more than a word, it is a way of life.

Group Reflection Activity - Neighborhood Engagement

Application Questions

- What would have to change for our growth group to become an Acts 2 gospel community?
- What change(s) would I have to make personally to help this?
- What has to change in my heart?
- What part can I play in contributing to the flourishing of my growth group in an Acts 2 manner?

Group Activity:

- Neighborhood Engagement - Plan a Neighborhood Engagement event together with your group.
 - Something tangible and measurable.