

“Going to Church: Being with God and Brothers and Sisters in Christ”
A Bible Study to Help Prepare Minds and Hearts for Worshipping Together Again
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Lessons 3-4

Outline:

- Lesson 1: Introduction – Acts 2: The Setting of the First Christian Worship
- Lesson 2: Repentance and Baptism: Becoming a Christian

Acts 2:42 – And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

- Lesson 3: Christian Worship Has the Apostles' Teaching
- Lesson 4: Christian Worship Has Christian Fellowship
- Lesson 5: Christian Worship Has the Lord's Supper (Part 1)
- Lesson 6: Christian Worship Has the Lord's Supper (Part 2)
- Lesson 7: Christian Worship Has Prayers

Lesson 3: Christian Worship Has the Apostles' Teaching

In Lessons 1 and 2 we have considered the historical and theological setting of the Christian worship recorded in Luke 2:42. Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would take from Him, Jesus, and give it to the disciples. We also noted in Acts chapter 2 that once the Holy Spirit came, Peter preached to the crowds that Jesus was the promised Messiah sent by God, that they killed the Messiah, and that Jesus did not stay dead but rose in power and authority. The crowds were cut to the heart and were afraid of their situation, asking Peter what they were to do. Peter announced that they and their children should be baptized for the forgiveness of sin and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

37 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?”

38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:36-41)

All these events happened *before* the activity of Acts 2:42, which will now be considered. Moreover, it has been noted that the activities of Acts 2:42 were happening only among baptized believers. Only believers converted by God's Word and who received baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit...

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

Clearly, the activities of the first Christians were not like any secular activity. These are activities only Christians do, unique to the Church.

Lessons 3-7 will carefully consider the activities of Acts 2:42 to learn more about our worship today. Lesson 3 will consider the first part of Acts 2:42:

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

Devoted Themselves

What does it mean that the Christians "devoted" themselves?

- "Devoted" is a translation from the NT Greek word προσκατεροῦντες ("they devoted themselves"). More broadly, the definition of the root word can mean:

to be earnest towards, i.e. (to a thing) to persevere, be constantly diligent, or (in a place) to attend assiduously all the exercises, or (to a person) to adhere closely to (as a servitor): — attend (give self) continually (upon), continue (in, instant in, with), wait on (continually).¹

In an article considering this NT Greek word, Walter Grundmann makes the interesting comment that Jesus' direction to "continue in my word" was being followed by the early Church by being "devoted." [My underlined emphasis.]

Luke sketches the Christian community for us in Ac. 2:42: ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς. With assembly for prayer we find the common meal, fellowship and apostolic doctrine.

Persistence in these things is a practical fulfilment of the direction of the Lord to "continue in my word" (Jn. 8:31). Hence the word προσκατερεῖν, used to describe the

¹ Olive Tree Enhanced Strong's Dictionary.

life of the community, expresses one aspect of the power and vitality of primitive Christianity.²

Question for self-reflection and personal prayer: "Am I as devoted as I need to be?"

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for inspiring Luke to research and record the activities of Your first disciples after You sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Renew in me also, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a deep devotion to gather with my Christian brothers and sisters that we may grow in Your Word and Sacraments, sing praises and bring our prayers. Bless my congregation's leadership to have wisdom how best to conduct our worship services at this time of pandemic, when our human wisdom is uncertain. In Your name I pray. Amen.

To the Apostles' Teaching

Jesus Christ authorized and empowered the apostles to be teachers of God's Word through which the whole world would know the Gospel.

- The Apostles' Teaching Would Produce Future Disciples

20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21)

As recorded in John 17, on the night before Jesus died He prayed for the disciples, and also for

future believers who " will _____ in _____ through their _____ ."

- The Apostles' Teaching Gives Forgiveness of Sins and Withholds Forgiveness of Sins

21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (John 20:21-23)

Jesus gave the authority to _____ and _____ forgiveness of sins. One regular

time when this authority to _____ sins is exercised in the worship service is during

² Walter Grundmann, "Καρτερέω, Προσκαρτερέω, Προσκαρτέρησις," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 619.

_____ and _____. The authority and teaching to do this comes through the Apostles' teaching.

- The Apostles' Teaching is the Only Way to know Spiritual Truth and be Spiritually Free

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

The teaching of the _____ gives Jesus' word through which Jesus gives spiritual _____ and _____.

- The Apostles' Teaching is the Correct and God-given Interpretation of the Old Testament Promises

44 Then he [Jesus] said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:44-49)

Jesus _____ the disciples' minds to correctly _____ all the Old Testament books and how they point to Jesus' suffering, death and _____. The witness about Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection to the whole world is founded on this correct _____ of the _____.

- The Holy Spirit gave the Apostles the Power and Ability to be Teachers for the Church.

During Jesus' ministry, He was the great Teacher. After the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles' are the teachers.

τῆ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων
the teaching of the apostles

The NT Greek word for “teaching” is more than proclaiming or announcing. The word can also be translated into English as “instruction” or “doctrine.” During Jesus’ ministry on earth He was the great Teacher who astounded people, brought teaching from the Father and opposed the “teaching” of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders. (Matthew 7:28; 22:33; Mark 1:22, 27; 4:2; 11:18; 12:38; Luke 4:32) Jesus authorized and empowered His apostles to take over this work. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit (the “Helper” or “Comforter”) would teach the disciples.

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” John 14:26

- The Early Christians Accepted the Apostles’ Teaching as the Very Word of God.

13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

The believers accepted Paul’s teaching not as the _____ of men, but as what it really is, the _____ of _____ .

- Apostles’ Teaching was not myths, or man-made ideas, or personal interpretations; but the Word of God which is a lamp shining and bringing God’s light into people lives.

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16- 21)

The New Testament documents are the Apostles’ Teaching. Sermons faithful to the New Testament (which also guides the understanding of the Old Testament) are sermons based on the Apostles’ Teaching. Bible studies which lead the Christian to better understand and apply the New and Old Testaments are Bible studies based on the Apostles’ Teaching.

Our church services are times we gather to continue in devotion to the teaching of the Apostles’, which is the Word of God. When Christians gather and continue in the teaching of

the Apostles, this is receiving from Jesus Himself. Listening to, studying and learning the Bible is to listening to, studying and learning from Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, I ask You to continue to teach me through the teaching of Your apostles. Grant that my congregation be faithful to Your Word. Amen.

Lesson 4: Christian Worship Has Christian Fellowship

Acts 2:42 – And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching **and the fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The words “the fellowship” are the NT Greek word τῆ κοινωνίᾳ (koinonia). In other passages it may translated “communion” and “participation.” The basic idea is an association with mutual interests and sharing.³

The general concept of an “association with mutual interests” might be viewed in our day also about a number of nonreligious organizations. Many people who are members of Planet Fitness are glad now that the health club is again opening. Planet Fitness is an association with concern about health and social groups. But in the Church, what is the point of the common interest?

- The common interest of the Church is faith in our Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, the Church’s fellowship is not a set of common beliefs about Jesus by which people have decided to come together. No, the Church is a fellowship of people created by Father, Son and Holy Spirit by putting faith into people.

In 1 Corinthians 1:9 Paul includes in his greeting,

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship (koinonia) of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1. God called the Christian. The fellowship of the Church is not the making of human decisions, but the Church is formed by the grace and power of God.

2. “into the fellowship his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Oh!! The fellowship in the Church is not based on human decisions to be together, *but God’s decisions to join people to Jesus Christ*. The foundational “fellowship” is the believer to Jesus Christ. Being connected to Jesus Christ is what saves the sinner. The secondary fellowship is the Christian to other Christians.

³ A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Walter Bauer, edited by Frederick William Danker, University of Chicago Press, 2000, page 552-553.

- In his letter to the Corinthian Christians Paul used this truth that believers are in fellowship with Jesus to show that their human-made divisions are contrary to their fellowship with Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1:10,

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

Since the person is in _____ with Jesus, and Jesus joins them _____, then the members cannot decide to create _____. The power of the fellowship in the Church is from _____.

- The New Testament Concept of “Fellowship” is Connected to Many Teachings

A quote from Gregory Lockwood in *Concordia Commentary: 1 Corinthians* gives a hint of teachings on fellowship (koinonia) that will yet come in this Bible Study:

Basically the words in the κοινόν group signify “to share with someone in something.”⁴ In 1 Corinthians Paul uses the κοινόν words for the participation of the believer in Christ (1:9), in the blessings of the Gospel of Christ (9:23), and in the body and blood of Christ (10:16). The term is packed with theological significance in a context where the congregation was threatening to fly apart, forgetting the precious κοινωνία in Christ on which it had been constituted.⁵

- The Unity of Fellowship Created by God

The unity in the fellowship of Christians depends on what God has done and is doing among them, not their own decisions. When we carefully consider the topics this Bible study has already covered, we see that the fellowship of the Christians in Acts 2:42 has been preceded by:

1. The life, ministry, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus
2. The coming of the Holy Spirit
3. The preaching of Peter through which the Holy Spirit stirred up repentance and faith in the hearers.
4. Adults and their children receiving baptism as Jesus directed for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins

⁴ F. Hauck, “κοινωνός,” *TDNT* 3:804.

⁵ Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2000), 33–34.

All these actions of God that created and brought together the first Christians—so that they devoted themselves to the fellowship—show how different the gathering of the Christian Church is from other human gatherings. The first Christians did not choose God and choose to be the Church. God choose, called and gathered them.

Martin Luther said it well in the explanation of the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own _____ or _____ believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the _____ has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, _____ and kept me in the true _____.

In the same way He calls, _____, _____, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on _____, and _____ it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church He daily and richly _____ all my sins and the sins of all _____. On the _____ Day He will _____ me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in _____. This is most certainly true.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for all the fellow believers whom I can call brothers and sisters in Your Name! I ask You to keep my fellow members at my congregation safe and encouraged in Your Word. May You bring us together in Your Name! Amen.