

God's Community

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[0 : 00] What on earth is the church here for? What on earth is the church here for?! Acts 2, 42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

! And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together and had all things common, sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily, with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people.

And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved. What on earth is the church here for? Some of the characteristics of the early church.

God's community. Number one, the church of God, God's community, is spiritual. Verse 42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and prayers.

[1 : 10] And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. They were a spiritual church, a spiritual body. They had spiritual life.

They were spirit-filled. The church of God is a work of God's spirit. It's his spiritual work. This was not a soulish movement based on feelings and emotions and excitement.

This was not just some mere activity or busyness. It wasn't just some social club, some man-made kind of social gathering. Not meant activity or busyness.

This was a movement of God, the Holy Spirit. And holy fear came upon every soul. Spiritual. There's a danger in how some are seeking to make God relevant, yet lose something in the process.

They lose that sense of awe and of reverence that he is due. The Holy God with whom we have to deal. And while we do not have the apostles today, we have the Holy Spirit empowering every believer.

[2 : 17] Every believer. Spirit-filled. Every believer. And he, the Spirit of God, leads us by the Word of God. God's people's getting together revolved around the Word of God and fellowship.

Getting together with our brothers and sisters in Christ and breaking of bread and prayers. And here was a church praying in touch with heaven. They gathered together in prayerfulness.

It was a spiritual work. And we see the Church of God is functioning as it were together. Led by the Spirit of God. And it is the body of Christ on the earth.

It was a close-knit body of believers. Fityly joined together. Fityly joined together. Makes me think of, in some countries like in England, for example, you see these stone walls where they're just assembled out of stones.

Fityly joined together. What a picture that is of the Church of God that he's made us together. Different shapes and sizes and backgrounds. And he's brought us together as one body in one gathering.

[3 : 24] One assembly. And so the Spirit of God draws us together in this close-knit fashion. So we're knit together. Joined together fityly like a jigsaw puzzle.

And joined in that unity. And in that unity, it brings strength, doesn't it? As we join together, it brings that fullness. It's a bit like, you know, I was struggling this afternoon trying to put something together that was a workshop-type item, like to store some nuts and bolts and whatnot.

And the instructions, it must be my old age, I just can't read this small writing on these instructions, trying to fityly join it together. But eventually I got it together.

But, you know, God draws us together from different areas, different ways, different cultures, different countries. He brings us together. And when something is brought together, there's a

strength there.

There's a unity. There's a building. A building together. And the unity of the Spirit, we see. So it's a light to a symphony where there's a number of musical instruments playing together, but hopefully in harmony with each other.

[4 : 34] We're all making that common music, that common sound, that harmonising as we come together. Harmony. Would you like to hear a music concert where some parts of the orchestra play whatever appeals to them at the time?

No, you wouldn't, because it would be a mess, wouldn't it? It would be a clashing dim and a riotous conflict, wouldn't it? If everyone was just playing, you know, you had different sheets of music and you were playing different items at the same time.

Yet God's ideal is that we be the harmonious family of God, that we're playing the same, we're singing from the same songbook, aren't we? We're playing to the same tune.

We're not in disharmony, but we're in harmony. There's a harmony to it. And it's like to, in the footy field, for example, what if the team decides to use different tactics from what the coach had told the team to use, or they didn't do something the way the team had set out to play as the captain had told them to play?

But the Church of God is meant to be having that same, that one vision, that one purpose, that one spirit-led endeavour that we're in.

[5 : 49] And what about some people down at the Holden's plant, while it's still in production? You know, what if some of the workers chose to rearrange some of the parts and do it as they sort of thought it would be better to do?

Of course we can't have that going on for a production line to work well. And likewise too, in the Church of God, we're meant to be working together, but in tune with the Holy Spirit.

He's the one who sets the, he's the tuning fork, isn't he? We want to be in tune with him. He's the one that sets the place. He is the one that guides our direction, that as we accord with his word, we follow his leading.

And so we're working together in that prayerful unity as a spiritual body of people. And we have our Lord in all of his amazing power and grace.

Think of how amazing the Lord Jesus is. As we see, for example, in Luke 5, 26, where there was a man, our Lord healed a man sick of the palsy. Here was this man, paralytic.

[6 : 52] He had something wrong with his legs. He couldn't walk so well. And he was sick of the palsy, so he's paralyzed. Luke 5, 26. And then the Lord healed him. And it says that they were all amazed.

And they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, we have seen strange things today. Now, you see some strange things in churches, don't you? Today. But praise God, that he will be the center point.

That he will be what attracts our amazement. And we're filled with that awe. And we glorify God that he would do strange things today.

That let's not lose our sense of amazement about our Lord and of his wonderful power to do more than we can imagine. You know, sometimes we limit his working in us and in our situation.

And we think that it's not possible. But with God, all things are possible. We can have that amazing kind of faith that we never cease to be amazed as that sense of amazement about our Lord and his wonderful power.

[8 : 01] In Luke 9, 43, it says, and they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. Luke 9, 43. Let's not lose that amazement, that sense of awe and wonder at what our God can do.

Luke 9, 43. They were all amazed at the mighty power of God. And his mighty power is just as mighty and just as real today as it ever was.

And we need to depend on the power of God to sustain us and lead us. Now, I'm going to quote a secular source here. A well-known person who I'll reveal to you when I've read the quote.

And here's what this woman said. Nowhere in the Bible is the word democracy mentioned. Ideally, when Christians meet as Christians to take counsel together, their purpose is not, or should not be, to ascertain what is the mind of the majority, but what is the mind of the Holy Spirit.

Something which may be quite different. It's an interesting quote, isn't it? That was Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher talking to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

[9 : 19] As Christians, as we meet, it's not to determine the mind of the majority, but what is the mind of the Holy Spirit. I think there's truth there. There's truth in what that lady has said.

That we want to know what is the mind of the Holy Spirit. That is our motive. And in all our decisions and choices as a church and as individuals, we want to be spirit-led.

We want to be sure of that. So, number one, we want to be a spiritual body. And number two, the Church of God, what on earth is the church here for?

To be sensitive. Sensitive. Verse 44 of Acts 2. Acts 2, 44. And all that believed were together and had all things common and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. So, they were gathered, they were having all things together.

[10 : 24] They were continuing daily with one accord. They were breaking bread, sharing their feed, their food with gladness and singleness of heart.

They were together and they had all things common. So, there was a sensitivity there for their brothers and sisters in Christ. We're told that they were sharing in their fellowship in caring ways and in closeness.

They were together. There was a togetherness. There was a sharing that went on. They were meeting needs. So, truly, we see here as the Church of God that we can take reference and example from, here was a family of God's people.

There was a wonderful sensitivity to one another. There was relationship here. This wasn't just some gathering of a mishmash of people that didn't fit together.

This was a close family, a close fellowship. It was in relationship. There was unselfishness there. There was thoughtfulness there. Now, we should, as the Word tells us, in honour, prefer one another.

[11 : 33] There's a sense where we should have regard even for the weaker amongst us. In 1 Corinthians, it talks about even those that might be less favoured that they should judge things.

There's a sense where we're all on a level playing field, aren't we? And we're all, it's all, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. And so, there's this sensitivity that seems to be evident here.

That there was a consideration for the needs of others. Now, sometimes we can discount others, but this church had a consideration for the needs of others. How can we be that kind of church, that kind of church, where we can have that kind of closeness, that we should be able to know each other and care for each other as a like to family?

Because as a real family, that is what we are. We are the family of God. Do we care? Do we truly care?

There's an account of a man who was employed as an emergency worker. His name was Jack Casey. He was an emergency worker on an ambulance rescue squad. And when Jack was a child, he had oral surgery.

[12 : 44] And five teeth had to be pulled under general anaesthetic. And Jack was fearful, having his teeth pulled as a young boy. And what he remembers most, though, was the operating room nurse who sensed the boy's terror and said, don't worry, I'll be right here with you, no matter what happens.

I'll be right here with you. And she was true to her word. When Jack woke up after the surgery, she was standing right there with him. And nearly 20 years later, Jack's ambulance team was caught to the scene of a highway accident.

A truck had overturned and the driver was pinned in the cab and power tools were necessary to get him out. However, the gasoline, the petrol was dripping out of the cab onto the driver's clothes.

And one spark from the tools could have spelled disaster. The driver was terrified. He was crying that he was scared of dying. So Jack crawled into the cab next to him and said, look, don't worry, I'm right here with you.

I'm not going anywhere. And Jack was true to his word. He stayed with the man until he could be safely removed from the wreckage. And later the truck driver told Jack, you are an idiot, an idiot.

[13 : 57] You know that the whole thing could have exploded and we'd have both been burnt up. And Jack told him that he felt that he just couldn't leave him. He just couldn't leave him. And many years before, Jack had been treated compassionately by the nurse.

And because of that experience, he could now show the same compassion to another. Receiving grace enabled him to give grace. And it's like that for us as believers, isn't it?

You know, when you've been through something tough and you've got through the other side, you've had believers come alongside you, you can do the same for another. As our Lord says, now that I, your Lord and teacher, washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet.

There's that sense where what he has done for us and he has shown his love to us, we should show the same love. So the kind of church that God wants is where the teaching is translated into practice.

Where we do what he says. Where we show what we are Christians by our love. And do we care for one another? And sometimes that can be practical things we can do.

[15:03] I know some have called on me to do some practical things for them at home. To do some practical ways that we can show love and care for one another. And that's really important.

We don't miss that. Because it's where the rubber hits the road. And we really show our Christianity, how we live, how we treat other people. And in this dog-eat-dog world, it's easy to lose our sense of caring and consideration.

You know, sometimes it's about climbing the ladder and how many people you can stomp on as you climb up. You know, that's not how Christianity is. It's from its very beginning. It was this community, God's community.

And much more than a teaching, it was lived out in community. And so we see through the Scriptures, there's many New Testament passages that record over 50 one another passages. One another. Some over 50 times. For example, Christians are told to love one another. Numbers of times. Love one another.

[16:07] Build one another up. Encourage one another. Care for one another. Be kind to one another. Hebrews 10.24, it says, And let us consider one another.

To provoke unto love and to good works. Do we consider one another? Sometimes we're not in someone else's shoes to know what life is like for them and what's going on for them.

Someone has said, In life you can never be too kind or too fair. Everyone you meet is carrying a heavy load. When you go through your day expressing kindness and courtesy to all you meet, you leave behind a feeling of warmth and good cheer and help alleviate the burdens everyone is struggling with.

Now it talks about bear one another's burdens. We've got to have that looking out for one another. That sense of preferring one another.

As I say, there's another one that just can't quite catch it in my head. It's about considering the needs of others above our own.

[17:14] In Philippians, what does it say? I'm thinking of that one where there's many.

Well, there's all those two on and on another. I'm thinking of that one. The needs of others. You put them above your own. Yeah, esteem.

I've got a little blank here. Yeah, it's one of those memory verses I need to remember. It's really right through the scriptures where we're to put the needs of others ahead of our own.

Yeah. That one escapes me at the moment. But the point is that we could all use more sensitivity to take the time to care, to stop and care, to not be stingy and selfish, but to be giving and caring.

And this was such a church. It was sensitive. It was a spiritual church. It was a sensitive church. And thirdly, it was a soul-conscious church. A soul-conscious church.

[18:30] Verse 47. Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved. God was adding to this church.

new souls were entering into new life because of this church. So they were making an eternal difference. And what a joy it is when we reach out.

I know this church, there's folk reaching out on a regular basis in personal witness and in group witness, in giving out tracts, in public testimony, in private witness.

And what a joy it is to see new souls entering into the kingdom of God. And it's not so much about seats filled, but souls added. Souls added to the church.

Church is meant to be about the work of heaven. An outpost of heaven. A mission. It's meant to be a mission. I know someone I recollect put it that we're not a social club, but we're a crusade, really.

[19:39] We are a mission. We're a mission organisation. Sometimes churches can become a bit like a social club, where it's just like a very inward-focused kind of group, without having that eye to

the many that we need to reach.

And this church, the Lord added to the church, as people were saved, and their emphasis was souls, saving souls, reaching out, reaching out to their community and beyond.

And seeing those souls saved, and not only so, but transformed by God's converting power to the glory of God. That's our heart, isn't it? That's why we have a children's programme, and a youth outreach, different opportunities to witness.

That they all have that ultimate goal in mind of souls. And we can best measure a church, not by the greatness of its numbers or its range of programmes, but when we see God at work changing lives, when we see God's kingdom extended here on earth, and when we can play a part in that eternal work of harvest, and we all can, in this 21st century, we can see God work, as He did way back then.

And friends, souls are more important than any other thing that we could count. Anything to do with the atmosphere of the building we happen to meet in. More important than seats filled.

[21 : 19] More important than the entertainment value of our gathering, or the activity of whatever kind it can be. All the trappings that can make church what it is today, that sometimes gets in the way of that, that we're here for souls.

That's our mission. That's why we're here. That's why we plan to be an outreach station. And if what we do fails to serve our mission, we must consider how the Lord would best want us to serve Him. Are there things we need to drop off and change? Have we that heart for the souls that our Saviour had? And really this should shape our thinking on how we are to meet and minister.

That we make right choices about our priorities, our finances, our choices, the use of our time, our energies, and our commitment. Because it's all about souls.

Just to close one final picture of this, that General Booth, who founded the Salvation Army, we know today it's not what it was, and even then it might have had some room to move to be better, but he was used of God.

[22 : 43] Nevertheless, this man, General Booth, and General Booth told of a man who was leaving Australia. At the time, he'd come to Australia for a time, and he was moving back, I guess, to his homeland, I guess the UK, and he'd come to Australia to acquire a fortune.

And this man, he'd worked hard while he'd been in Australia, and he had worked in gold fields. And so this man had acquired a fortune, and he was headed back to his homeland.

And the people were on the ship when a leap was sprung, and the ship started to sink. And the lifeboats were lost, and the people had no hope.

And this strong man thought that he could fight through the waves to the island. There was an island off where they were sinking. And he was about to spring into the water when a little bit of a girl, whose mother had been lost in the storm, asked him, Sir, can you save me?

And here was this man, he'd got a belt of gold. And this was all his wealth that he'd amassed in his labours in the gold fields. He had this belt of gold. And he looked at his belt of gold, and then he looked at the child, and then at the belt, and then at the child again.

[24 : 04] And then he threw the belt of gold away, took her on his back, and threw himself into the sea. And he struggled through the waves, and with life almost gone, he reached the land.

And the next day, when consciousness returned to him, the little girl put her arms around his neck, and kissed him, and said, I'm so glad you saved me. And he said, That was worth more than all the gold in Australia.

And Beth says, That is the soul winner's crown. It is for some man, whom you have won for Christ, to meet you on the streets of gold, and say, I'm so glad you preached that sermon, that you sung that song, that you gave that word of witness, it saved me.

You know, it's worth all the gold in Australia, in the planet. It's about priorities, isn't it? It's about souls. And we can all play some part in God's eternal plan.

And that's what moves me, that's what motivates me, that's what makes me get out of bed in the morning, to know that, that's what we're here for, as a church. We're here to be, a spiritual body.

[25 : 11] They continued, in the teaching, in the fellowship, in the prayer. It was a spiritual work. We see it was a sensitive work, where they cared for one another.

They were together. They shared. They cared. It was sensitive. And it was a soul-conscious church, that their mission, led them, and drove them, and God blessed them, with souls, because that was their heart.

And that's our heart. That's our priority. That's why we're here, and that's what, God, leading us, that's what we must do, until we come.

So, be encouraged tonight, to, let's be, such a people, that we can learn, what on earth, is the church here for? Yeah. And let's be a part of that.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that your word, encourages our hearts, as we see, the early church, with your favour, and blessing upon it, with your spiritual working, with that sensitivity, to one another, and with the soul-saving message, that we still want to impart, to our world, to where we live, Lord, to the people about, us, where we travel, and walk, and go about, our daily lives, Lord, help us to be, messengers of that message still.

[26 : 42] Let it burn in our hearts, let it set us on fire, such that we will not, hold back. This message is too critical, for this world, that we live in. And Lord, help us to be, spiritual people.

We pray, Lord, that if there's any here, yet to trust you, they'll know what it is, to put their hearts trust, entirely in you, and in your saving grace. We thank you, Lord, that we can trust you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.