

Acts 2:42-47 “Seeing the Glory of Christ in His Body”**

Series: “A People to Live with in the Crucible of Suffering”

Main Idea: In Acts 2:42-47 we see the glory of Christ put on display in the first church in three ways.

- I. We see the glory of Christ in the priorities of the first church (42).
 - A. The members were committed to the apostles’ teaching.
 - B. The members were committed to the fellowship.
 - C. The members were committed to breaking bread.
 - D. The members were committed to prayer.
- II. We see the glory of Christ in the togetherness of the first church (43-46).
 - A. They were together in their awe (43).
 - B. They were together in sharing their possessions (44-45).
 - C. They were together in the temple (46a).
 - D. They were together in their homes (46b).
 - E. They were together in praising God (47a).
- III. We see the glory of Christ in the testimony of the first church (47).
 - A. They enjoyed the people’s favor.
 - B. They experienced the Lord’s adding.
 1. A person can’t be added to the church until he is saved.
 2. If a person is saved, he is to be added to the church.

Implications: How then should we treat the church?

1. We should thank the Lord for it.
2. We should look for the glory of the Lord in it.
3. We should contribute to the Lord’s purposes for it.
4. We should enjoy the Lord’s intended blessings from it.
5. We should live for the Lord in vital connection to it.

In His kindness the Lord has given us resources to enable us to live for Him in this age of suffering. One resource is His Word, and specifically, *promises* in His Word. We’ve looked at those recently in our series, *Promises to Live by in the Crucible of Suffering*.

Yet He’s given us another invaluable resource, namely, *people*, and more specifically, *a people to live with in the crucible of suffering*. We have His people, His church. There is no escaping the fact that as followers of Christ “we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).” Yet we can know that we are never truly alone. Certainly, we have the Lord, but by His design, we also have His people.

I love the church, and I hope you do as well. It’s not because the church is perfect, for it’s not. It’s made up of sinners saved by grace, and sinners often behave sinfully. And so church becomes messy at times, even disappointing.

So why love the church then? For this bottom line reason. The church is *the* place in the world today where you can see the glory of Christ most vividly displayed. Why would that be? Because the church is *the body of Christ*.

Please remember that after fulfilling His redemptive purpose, after dying on the cross for sinners and rising from the dead, Jesus Christ returned to heaven where He is seated on His throne, awaiting His Father’s word to return to earth and establish His eternal kingdom. So we can’t see Jesus right now. He’s not here. But the truth is, we can, because He is.

The church is His Body, and His followers are the members of His Body. Ephesians 1:22-23 says, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

So if you want to know Christ, if you want to see the beauty and glory of Christ, then look at His body, look at the expression of His fullness, look at the church.

You say, “But something must be wrong. When I look at the church today I don’t see Christ, not very well, for sure. What’s wrong?” What’s wrong is that over the years we’ve added man-made traditions and religious trappings and programs and denominational machinery to what the Lord established. He’s been lost in the clutter.

What’s the solution to this tragedy? To scrap the church? Unfortunately, that’s the course some would take. But that’s unwise, for with all its imperfections, the church remains the apple of God’s eye. “To Him be glory *in the church* and in Christ Jesus,” says Ephesians 3:21. So to turn away from the church is to turn away from the glory of Christ, for the church, by God’s design, is *the* place where He intends to put His glory on display in this age and forever.

But if the glory is obscured, what can be done? What can be done is to go back. We need to go back and look at the first church, before all the clutter began to accumulate. When the Lord began to build His church, what did it look like? What did it value? How did it function? How did it portray Christ to the world?

That’s what we must see, and by God’s grace, to the degree we’re not seeing it today, we must change, so that Christ might be seen today, and people refreshed.

You’ll find the first church in Acts 2. In Acts 1, the risen Christ gave His followers a promise. “You’ll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes, and you will be my witnesses (1:8).” And then He ascended into heaven.

In Acts 2 the risen Christ sent the Holy Spirit to baptize the church into existence. It happened on the day of the Jewish feast, Pentecost, when, as the small band of Jesus’ followers were in a prayer meeting, the Spirit came upon them, and enabled them to begin fulfilling their mission. They preached in other languages, so that the message of Christ began to go forth to Jews assembled from all over the world.

Peter preached a message in Acts 2:14-39, and the Spirit took his words and produced conviction. “What shall we do?” the people asked (37).

And Peter responded, “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 (38).”

The Spirit of God worked, and 3,000 received Christ that day, were baptized, and as Luke states in verse 41, “were added to their number.” It was the birthday of the church.

I’ll say it again. The church is special, and for many reasons, but none greater than this. We see the glory of Christ put on display in His body, the church. How so, in specific terms? That’s today’s message. In Acts 2:42-47 we see the glory of Christ put on display in the first church in three ways.

I. We see the glory of Christ in the priorities of the first church (42).

Take a look at verse 42, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Luke, the physician, is writing this. Commenting on the first church he says, “They *devoted* themselves.” The Greek verb is *proskartereo*.¹ According to TDNT, “Its basic meaning is “to stay by,” “to persist at,” “to remain with.” In connection with persons it means “to be loyal to someone.” In connection with objects it means a. “to

¹ It means “to assist, to associate closely, to join, to adhere to, to keep on with devotion.”

occupy oneself diligently with something,” “to pay persistent attention to.”² The Young’s Literal says, “to continue steadfastly.” The same word appears in verse 46, “Every day they *continued*.”

Churches these days go through fads. Some will remember the Sunday School contests of the 60s and 70s, with big prizes and class challenges. Or the big bus programs that followed. Or the seeker services of the 80s and 90s. Fads come and go. That’s why they’re called fads.

But what we’re seeing in verse 42 are not fads. They are the non-negotiable priorities of the first church. It’s what church was all about. It’s what the first followers of Jesus were devoted to. Four things.

A. The members were committed to the apostles’ teaching. To the *didache* of the apostles, a word that means teaching, doctrine, learning. It comes from the verb that means “to teach, to learn.”

The first church was a teaching and learning community, and so must any church be if it’s following the direction of Christ through His Spirit. Remember, this is the first church. Christ just sent His Spirit, and His Spirit is directing this church in its function. There hasn’t been time yet for assimilation and compromise.

And what did the believers do when they got together? They came to learn. They came to be taught.

You’ll hear people these days talk about going to church “to get a blessing,” through high liturgy or powerful music or drama or stories. Ask them to define what that “blessing” looks like, and it’s a feeling, a pick-me-up.

But friends, that’s not why the first church gathered, nor should we. This is at the heart of why we come together as a church, not primarily to feel something, but to learn something.

This is mentioned first because it must be priority #1 in the church. A Spirit-led church will be a studying church. It will be full of learners, people who have an insatiable hunger to receive teaching.

But not just any kind of teaching. What was the content of the teaching to which the first church was devoted? They devoted themselves to the *apostles’* teaching. Jesus had told the apostles in Matthew 28:19-20, “Go and make disciples, baptizing them, and *teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.*”

And so they did. When the apostles led people to Christ, they taught them. No doubt, they taught them the Old Testament Scriptures (as Peter did in his sermon), as well as teaching them the words and works of Jesus. Eventually, the apostles wrote down this teaching in what we call the “New Testament.”

Let this sink in. The first evidence of a Spirit-controlled church will be a devotion to the Word of God. Its leaders will have a passion to teach and its members a passion to learn the Word of God. Beware of a “church” where people do not carry their Bibles.

To put it bluntly, a Spirit-filled church is always a Bible-studying church. The two things go hand in hand. And what’s true for churches is true for individuals as James Boice points out, “If you are Spirit-filled, then you will be drawn to this Book. If you are not drawn to this Book, if you do not really want to study it, if you say, ‘Well, you know, I look at the Bible from time to time, but it seems rather boring to me: it never really does

² . Vol. 3: *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (618). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

much for me,' you ought to question whether you are really born again. Or if you are born again, you at least ought to question whether you are filled by the Holy Spirit."³

Three thousand baby Christians devoted themselves to learning the Word of God. They were hungry. That's priority #1. The first church were committed to the apostles' teaching.

B. The members were committed to the fellowship. Not just to *fellowship*, but Luke says to *the* fellowship. There's a definite article.

In Acts 4 Peter and John were arrested for preaching Jesus, and after being released from prison, Luke says in Acts 4:23 that they returned to "to their own people." That's how the early church viewed itself. There are the *world's people*, and that's who we used to belong to. And there's the church. That's *our people*. That's who we belong to now.

Do you think of your church that way? These are *my people*.

Luke uses the Greek term *koinonia*. In its most basic sense it means "common." For instance, the language spoken by the world in Jesus' day is called "Koine" Greek. It's called such because it was "common Greek," and was the universal language of the Roman Empire.

As followers of Christ we have something in common. True fellowship involves a partnership and sharing. The people who receive Jesus Christ become partners with Him and consequently with other believers (1 John 1:3 "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ").

It takes more a table of food to have true fellowship. The fellows at the lodge can have a jolly time eating a meal together, but that's not biblical fellowship.

Kent Hughes is right when he says, "Fellowship comes through *giving*. Fellowship costs! So many people never know the joys of Christian fellowship because they have never learned to give themselves away. They visit a church or small study group with an eye only for their own needs (hardly aware of others) and go away saying, 'There is no fellowship there.' The truth is, we will have fellowship only when we make it a practice to reach out to others and give something of ourselves."⁴

Do you want to have fellowship? Then you must learn to be a giver, not a taker. And if you want to experience devotion to *the* fellowship, you must learn to be a giver in the body life of the church.

Too often today church is simply a place we go. For the first church, it's who they were. For us, it's a piece of our lives. For the first church, it was their life.

Look at Luke's description of the church in Acts 5:12-14, "The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."

People sometimes object to church membership by saying, "God's not interested in numbers or names on a roll. He looks at the heart." Indeed, He looks at the heart, but this text, which God the Holy Spirit led Luke to write, indicates He is interested in numbers and membership lists. The first church knew who belonged to them, and those who received Christ were *added to their number*.

³ James Boice, *Acts*, p. 58.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*, p. 49.

So the first church devoted itself, first, to the apostles' teaching; next, to *the fellowship*. Thirdly...

C. The members were committed to breaking bread. "To the breaking of bread," says our text. Luke uses the same expression in Acts 20:7, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread." The phrase can refer to an ordinary meal as it does in verse 46, but here Luke seems to have something more specific in mind. It's *the Lord's Supper*.⁵

The first church made the Lord's Supper, or Communion, a high priority. Why? Because Jesus commanded them to do so. "Do this in remembrance of Me (Luke 22:19)."

We're so prone to forget, aren't we? Why do we have eternal life when once we were heading for eternal condemnation? It's because of what Jesus did. He died in our place. He shed His blood for the remission of our sins. Three days later He conquered death, and one day is coming again.

We must remember. The early church did. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. They made remembering the person and redemptive work of Christ a priority on their schedules. Do you?

One of the things that thrills my heart is to see how people in this church value the privilege of worshipping Christ. On more than one occasion I met a man at the door who told me, "I had to work all night, so I might be a little groggy this morning, but I just didn't want to miss church."

Do you value your church and the corporate worship of Christ in it? Do you guard your Sunday schedule so you can be with *your people* and worship your Savior with them? The first church members did. They devoted themselves to the *breaking of bread*.

D. The members were committed to prayer. Literally the text reads "the prayers." It's plural. The early church members devoted themselves to public prayers as well as private prayer in a variety of contexts and settings.

Sadly, the contemporary church doesn't pray much. Offer a concert, and a crowd will come. Put on a drama, and the multitudes will arrive. But have a prayer meeting and what happens? The ranks are thinned. Maybe that's one of the reasons the typical church today is so anemic.

The first church was a praying church. They made it a priority to talk often with their Master, and in so doing they put His glory on display.

We see one compelling example in Acts 4. I mentioned that after their release from custody, Peter and John went back to their *own people*. Do you know what they did when they assembled? Verse 24 says, "They raised their voices together in prayer." Don't miss that. The authorities just told them to stop preaching Jesus, so how did the church respond? By organizing a letter writing campaign? No. They had a prayer meeting and called on their Risen Lord. And what did He do? Verse 31 says, "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

The church moves ahead on its knees, beloved. That's by God's design. We express to Him our need, and He displays His power, and the church moves ahead. It's not surprising that we find the epistles calling churches to pray again and again.

Romans 12:12 "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Ephesians 6:18 "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17, 21; 11:20-26

Colossians 4:2 “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

Jude 20 “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.”

So there’s the first way we see the glory of Christ put on display. We see it in the priorities of the first church, as they valued the Word, the fellowship, the worship of Christ through communion, and praying together.

You might be saying, “Okay. So that’s what happened in the first church. Does that mean that’s what should happen in today’s church?” That’s a valid question, and here’s why. Acts is a historical book. The book of Acts is simply telling us what happened in the early church, which was a transitional time. It’s not necessarily telling us what should happen in the future. Where do we find what *should* happen? In the epistles, right? The Holy Spirit guided Paul and Peter and James and the others to give normative direction to the churches.

And what do we find in the epistles? Commands like these. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching (1 Tim 4:13).” That’s priority #1—be devoted to teaching. “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another (Heb 10:25).” That’s priority #2—be committed to the fellowship. “Do this in remembrance of me (1 Cor 11:24).” That’s priority #3—be committed to breaking bread together at the Lord’s Table. “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone (1 Tim 2:1).” That’s priority #4—be committed to corporate prayer.

So it’s no different for us. This, by the Spirit’s design, is what church is all about. It’s how the glory of our Savior is put on display in this world. When we fulfill these priorities, Christ is gloriously made known for the world to see.

II. We see the glory of Christ in the togetherness of the first church (43-46).

You’ll notice the word “together” appears three times in this section, in verse 44 (“all the believers were *together*”) and twice in verse 46 (“Every day they continued to meet *together*...and ate *together*”).

Sin alienates. That’s what happened when sin first entered the world in Genesis 3. It caused Adam and Eve to hide from God and hurl accusations about each other. But Christ reconciles. He brings sinners together with God and with each other.

Luke says the togetherness of the first church was evidenced in five ways.

A. They were together in their awe (43). “Everyone was filled with awe⁶, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.” Who was filled with awe? *Everyone* was. They were together in their awe. Does that refer to those within the church only, or does it also include those outside the church? I think it includes both groups.

And why were they in awe? For starters, because of the priorities being lived out, but also because of the wonders and miraculous signs. And please notice, the apostles did these signs and miracles. This isn’t normative for all believers.

By the way, a good test to determine if a work is from God is this. Does it cause people to fear God? If the work is from men, then men will be exalted. But if it’s from God, then God will be exalted.

⁶ Literally, “Fear came on every soul.”
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Throughout Acts we see this. “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events (5:11).” “When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high esteem (19:17).”

Why are people filled with fear when the Holy Spirit works? It’s because they are seeing something that’s inexplicable humanly speaking.

So the first church members were together in their awe. There was no glorying in human personalities, not yet anyway (it won’t be long and they’ll have to battle that divisive curse). For now, it’s all about the Lord. They are together in their awe of Him.

B. They were together in sharing their possessions (44-45). “All the believers were together⁷ and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”

We mustn’t read too much into this. The first church was not a commune, nor does this text support such a notion. MacArthur rightly observes, “The family, not the commune, is the basic social unit in God’s design.”⁸

But two things were true of the first church. First, they were *together*—that doesn’t mean they lived together, but they certainly spent a lot of time together. That’s because when Christ saves you, He *changes the way you look at yourself*. I’m not an island. There’s no place for the attitude, “The church doesn’t need me. I think I’ll stay home today.” No way. They were *together*. So must we be.

Secondly, Luke tells us they had “everything in common.” Again, that doesn’t mean the people sold *all* their possessions and pooled their resources in a common pot. It’s clear from verse 46 that some still owned homes. No, the giving was purely voluntary.⁹

What that says to us is this. Not only does Christ change the way you look at yourself, but also the way you look at *your possessions*. Keep in mind that many Jews had come from all over the world to observe the feast of Pentecost. I would assume that many didn’t go home right away after becoming Christians. That meant they needed lodging and meals. And so the believers who had the means to do so met needs.

Not *wants*, but needs, as the text clearly indicates. “They gave to anyone as he had *need*.” Food, clothing, and shelter.

Know this. Poverty was a big problem in the first century. There was no Social Security to care for the elderly and orphans. There were no unions to insure fair wages. There was no Appeals Court to prevent abuse. Instead there was high taxation in a system filled with corruption.

Having enough food to eat was a *big* challenge, a *daily* challenge. To complicate things many lost their jobs when they became Christians. They were ostracized by their families. It’s a dog-eat-dog world out there. It’s every man for himself.

But not in the church. God expects His people to be serious about each other. When a brother can work, he should work and earn his own bread (2 Thes 3:10). But when a brother is in need and can’t do anything about it, those who can help him should do so (see 1 John 3:16-18). And they did in the early church. They were together in sharing their possessions.¹⁰

⁷ Literally, verse 44 says, “All those believing were at *the same place*.”

⁸ MacArthur, p. 88.

⁹ Later, Ananias and Saphira got into trouble, not because they didn’t give more but because they *lied* about what they gave.

¹⁰ Other texts that talk about this: Ps. 112:9. Pr. 11:24, 25; 19:17. Ec. 11:1, 2. Is. 58:7–12. 2 Cor. 9:1, 9. 1 Tim 6:18, 19. James 2:14–16; 5:1–5.

C. They were together in the temple (46a). “Every day they continued to meet together [AV “continuing daily with one accord”] in the temple courts.” How often did the first church meet? They were together *every day*.

Warren Wiersbe remarks, “The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for ‘services as usual.’ They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won souls daily (Acts 2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine.”¹¹

Where did they meet? Luke says they met together in the temple courts. Why there? For starters, it was the largest place in town, and you’d need it to accommodate 3,000 plus people!

What’s more it was a great place to evangelize. Every day hundreds of Jews would bring their sacrifices to the temple, so the believers went to the temple to tell them, “You don’t need to bring sacrifices any more. The Lamb of God has come and He has made the final sacrifice for sins. Let us tell you about Him!”

So the first church isn’t some little clique. They’re together in fulfilling their mission of making Christ known to others, on this occasion, in the temple.

D. They were together in their homes (46b). “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts...” Here “breaking bread” doesn’t seem to refer to communion, for we’re told specifically that they broke bread and “ate together.” Apparently, after meeting for evangelism in the temple courts, the people went home to eat. And they invited others to eat with them.

Are you experiencing this joy? It’s such a privilege for Christians to eat together, and especially, to do so in their homes. When was the last time you invited a family or two to your home to eat, and then sat around the table and talked about the things of the Lord?

You say, “I’m not the entertaining type.” That’s fine, because we’re not talking about entertaining. Entertaining is inviting people to put on a show, to showcase your house or your cooking skills. We’re talking about hospitality, not entertaining, using what God has entrusted to you to meet the needs of others. They need food. They need encouragement. They need edification. And it’s our privilege to share what we have in meeting those needs.

I’m impressed by the simplicity of the early church. They met in houses, not stained glass cathedrals. And they broke bread together.

But they didn’t just eat together, but did so “with glad and sincere hearts,” or as the AV puts it, “with gladness and singleness of heart.” So there was *gladness*. They enjoyed being with each other. And there was *singleness of heart*. They experienced unity in relationships and purpose.

E. They were together in praising God (47a). Verse 47 begins with this participle, “Praising God,” which is linked to verse 46. I take that to indicate they did the praising God while they were eating together in their homes. That, too, is such a joy, to sing songs and share testimonies in the intimacy of our homes, and thereby giving God honor for what He has done in our lives.

Together. We see the glory of Christ, first, in the priorities of the first church, and now in its *togetherness*.

¹¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 411.

Is this normative? Should we be together? There are over 40 one another commands in the epistles that give an affirmative answer to that question, and we'll begin to look at those commands next time.

For now, let's notice a third expression of Christ's glory in the first church.

III. We see the glory of Christ in the testimony of the first church (47).

Verse 47 says, "...praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Notice a couple of things associated with the testimony of the first church.

A. They enjoyed the people's favor. This is a beautiful thing. God granted this favor. True, He doesn't do so always. Sometimes He allows His people to feel the heat of persecution (as in Acts 8:1 & 12:1). But for now, there was favor in Jerusalem as the believers banded together and made Christ known to their community.

B. They experienced the Lord's adding. Verse 47 makes it clear that the Lord did the adding. "The Lord added to their number." He is sovereign in salvation.¹² He adds to His church. The tense of the verb (imperfect), literally "was adding," indicates that people were continually being added to the church.

And who was being added? "Those who were being saved." Don't miss two things from this.

1. *A person can't be added to the church until he is saved.* However...

2. *If a person is saved, he is to be added to the church.* Again, the church isn't some option B for the really committed follower of Jesus. It's option A for every believer. Get saved. Get baptized. Get plugged into a local church.

Implications: How then should we treat the church?

Five responses are in order.

1. *We should thank the Lord for it.* Friends, the Lord has given us something so amazing, *a people to live life with*, so we're not alone. Thank Him for it.

Back in the 1930s, when Hitler was promoting Nazism in Germany, many in the state church liked his anti-communist, pro-morality message, and naively bought into his agenda. But the Lord raised up a German pastor by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who saw the folly of such devotion. He understood what we've been seeing, the distinction between the world and the church.

Through studying the Gospels and seeing Jesus' interaction with His disciples, Bonhoeffer saw the importance of community for the Christian. He wrote *The Community of the Saints* and *Life Together*. I want us to listen to some quotes from *Life Together*, for they help us to understand the importance of *church as community* and how to live for Christ as a church in a *hostile political environment* (Bonhoeffer was eventually arrested and executed by the order of Hitler).

What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, as though in the course of time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity. I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us.

¹² See Acts 13:48, Romans 8:30, and Titus 3:5-6.

We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, for eternity.¹³

2. *We should look for the glory of the Lord in it.* The Lord is doing all kinds of things to put His glory on display in His church, to this very day. But you won't see it if you're casually connected to the church.

Let's be honest. We live in a community where many people say they believe in Jesus, but have no meaningful connection with Jesus' body, the church. How can this be? Ask the person why they're not in a church and you'll probably here something like, "Because I got hurt by the church," or "Because there are so many problems in the church."

Bonhoeffer has something to say to such a person. He says that being disillusioned with the church may actually be a good thing for it forces him to stop living in what he calls "a dream world." Though somewhat lengthy, listen to Bonhoeffer's counsel to those who say they're disappointed with the church:

Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves.

By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it.

The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community, the better for both. A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community. Sooner or later it will collapse. Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own laws, and judges the brethren and God himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of the brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together.

When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*

common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by his call, by his forgiveness, and his promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what he does give us daily.

And is not what has been given us enough: brothers, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of his grace? Is the divine gift of Christian fellowship anything less than this, any day, even the most difficult and distressing day?

Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Christ Jesus? Thus, the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by the one Word and Deed which really binds us together--the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship . . .¹⁴

Well said. Let's not let some dream world notion of the church keep us from loving the church as it is and as the Lord Himself does. If we learn to do that, we will see the glory of Christ on display again and again and again.

3. *We should contribute to the Lord's purposes for it.* One of the purposes is burden-bearing. Listen to Bonhoeffer:

The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated. The burden of men was so heavy for God Himself that He had to endure the Cross. God verily bore the burden of men in the body of Jesus Christ. But He bore them as a mother carries her child, as a shepherd enfolds the lost lamb that has been found. God took men upon Himself and they weighted Him to the ground, but God remained with them and they with God. In bearing with men God maintained fellowship with them. It was the law of Christ that was fulfilled in the Cross. And Christians must share in this law.¹⁵

4. *We should enjoy the Lord's intended blessings from it.* There are many blessings, like encouragement and support and even loving rebuke, but to experience them, we must prioritize our redeemed community. One more time from Bonhoeffer:

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... Each by itself has profound perils and pitfalls. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair.¹⁶

5. *We should live for the Lord in vital connection to it.*

¹⁴ Taken from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Life Together*. Quote obtained at <http://www.hiswayministries.org/fddisillusion.htm>

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*