

How To Feel Better About Your Church

Acts 2:42-47

As a congregation let's repeat these words together: *"If every member...were just like me...what kind of church...would my church be?"*

That's a good question, isn't it? It's a question that all of us need to ask ourselves from time to time. Our church will never be anything more than we as the individual members make it. That can be frightening, but think of all the potential! In these early days of 2011, I think we all need to take a hard look at our church and our individual commitment to it: "If every member were just like me, what kind of church would my church be?"

The message today is entitled, *How To Feel Better About Your Church*. I don't mean to imply that we don't already feel good about our church, but we will have to admit that in anything there is usually some area for improvement. We are at the beginning of a year when we can discover and discern the will of God for our church and our individual lives. This is the year it can all come together! This is the year we can reach people for Jesus Christ! This is the year we can experience all that God has in store for us.

I sincerely believe that our church can do anything we are led by God's Spirit to do. But in the background there may still be some nagging doubts you may have about our church or about your membership here. How can you feel better about this church, enough to invest your life and energy here?

If every member were just like me, what kind of church would my church be?

It is refreshing to take a look at the early Christians, to scrutinize their love and fellowship together. When we read of the early Church, we find several exciting things about these first Christians. But as we compare our church with this first church, there is one factor which far outshines all the rest: these first Christians felt good about their church!

By the time we get to the end of Acts 2, a combination of Peter's preaching and the faithful, fearless witnessing of 120 Holy Spirit-anointed Christians has resulted in some three thousand people coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord so He could save them. These three thousand people discovered that the most natural thing for them to do was to meet together to worship God and be strengthened in their new life in

Christ. And they felt so good about their gatherings that everyone began to sit up and pay attention!

We may feel good about our church today, but I believe we can all feel even better. Because you see, it's not so much a matter of *feeling* as it is a matter of *being*. What are some things we can do in order to have the mental and spiritual attitude necessary to be so excited and enthused about our church that people around us begin to sit up and pay attention? God's Word gives us the principles.

1 Principle One: Devote yourself to your church, v. 42
"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

This was the most natural thing for them to do. The KJV reads that these new Christians "continued steadfastly," which comes from a word meaning "To be stout." These Christians were stout in their affiliation with one another and in their devotion to each other.

Can you imagine the difference if all those whose names were on our church roll, or even present this morning, began to consider their church membership as being more than just having their names on the roll? Can you imagine the difference if we began to devote ourselves to our church as did these early apostles?

This devotion expressed itself in two primary ways. First, it was demonstrated through *study*. These early Christians needed the kind of nurture which could not be provided by the kind of spasmodic attendance which satisfies far too many Christians in our day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching because they realized that not everyone was going to be happy about their new commitments to the Messiah. They were not going to receive encouragement and strength on their jobs, and most of them would not receive it at home. As young as they were in Christ, they still knew that they needed what the church had to offer, because they didn't know everything there was to know about living for Christ. And these long years later, neither do we.

Second, their devotion was demonstrated through *prayer*, as we see at the end of verse 42. It is perfectly within reason to believe that these Christians prayed for each other and for their church.

A man once got married. After the honeymoon, he disappeared. His wife heard nothing from him. One evening, fifteen months later, he walked in, kissed his wife

and sat down to be fed. She was incensed! Bewildered, the man asked, “What’s the matter? I married you, didn’t I? I told you I love you. What more do you want?”

A man volunteered for the Army, took the oath of allegiance, and was inducted. But he failed to report for duty. When the military police arrived, he said, “I’ve been shooting guns since I was a kid. I don’t have anything to learn from the Army. You just call me when you’re ready to fight.”

A child enrolled in school. For several days he was absent. When the principal called, his mother said, “Oh, we feel Jimmy can be as good a scholar at home as at school, so we let him play in the back yard. He can learn just as well from nature.”

And once upon a time, a family joined a church....

The ones who are busy helping around the church, the people who speak enthusiastically about their church, the people who hold their church in high esteem, are those who are devoted to their church, and that devotion is demonstrated by the way they have devoted themselves to studying God’s Word with other Christians and by the way they pray for their church. So paraphrase the question we asked earlier: What kind of church would my church be, if every member attended Bible Study or prayed like me? When you begin to be more faithful in your attendance, and when you begin to pray for your church and the individual members of it, then you will begin to feel better about your church.

2 Principle Two: Unite with your church, v. 44

2 “*All the believers were together and had everything in common.*” I don’t know if there has been another church in all the long years since of which it could be said that “*all the believers were together.*” They had united with each other.

No, I don’t believe they had a church roll, at least not in the beginning. As the church grew, those who had been given the spiritual gift of administration probably began to record the names of those who were members in order to make sure no one was overlooked. They were not members in the sense that their names were on a church roll. Their membership was deeper than that. They were ***united*** with their church! It was a matter of their hearts. Their identification with their church arose out of a sincere and deep desire to be so united with each other that they could be useful in the Kingdom of God. They were ***together*** when they were in the same geographical location, and they were ***together*** when they were separated.

Several years ago, a deacon and I were out visiting one evening, and we stopped by to see a young couple who had recently moved to our city and had been attending at our church. We had a very good visit, and then I said something that caused my deacon friend's jaw to drop, and I know he was thinking, "Has my pastor lost his mind?"

I don't know where it came from, unless it was the Holy Spirit. I hadn't planned on saying it, and I haven't said it since. It just came out, and when it did, I was even surprised a little bit myself. I looked at that young couple sitting across from us, and I said, "If you're looking for a church where you can just sit and fade into the background, find another church. If you're looking for a church that won't ask too much of you, find another church. We've got enough of those kinds of members already."

You could have heard a pin drop on the carpet in their little apartment. It was probably only a few seconds, but it felt like a long, long time until they looked at each other, and then said to me...well, I'll tell you that later.

You may or may not be a member of this church in the sense that your name may or may not be on this church's roll of members. Your name may have been written on the church roll years and years ago. But have you ever united with this church in your spirit and heart, where it really counts? You look around—you'll discover that those who spend a great deal of their time criticizing the church and the people in it are those who for one reason or another, have never fully, completely, wholeheartedly, united their spirits with this church.

But what a marvelous transformation occurs in that person's attitude when he or she finally decides to "*be together*" with everyone else! He doesn't always have to agree with everything the church does, but even when he disagrees, his attitude is that of one who is "*together*" with everyone else in the church.

3 Principle Three: Give through your church, v. 45

"Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need."

There is no record of a stewardship drive here. There wasn't even time for one! The people felt good about their church and their identification with it, so they gave to others through their church. Later, we find that believers in other churches in other cities gave to them when they were going through a rough spell because of

persecution. But they were doing what was the most natural thing to do, and they did it because they felt good about their church!

Imagine a scale before you, and on one side of the scale place your attitudes and feelings about this church. On the other side of the scale, place the record of contributions which our church keeps for every person who contributes even the smallest amount in a year's time. How do they balance? Mark it down: those who feel best about their church are those who systematically, regularly give to the work of the Lord through their church. Those who are the unhappiest are usually those who give little or nothing.

Just suppose that tomorrow you hear that the bank where you do business, God forbid, has been robbed. Naturally, you would be very concerned. Think of how carefully you would listen to the news reports! But if it happened to be a bank in another part of our state, your interest probably wouldn't be as great. Why is that? It would probably happen that way because it is our human nature to be interested in and believe in that bank or that church or that hobby or that school in which we have put our money. Jesus said, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

And quite frankly, there are some people who will never be any happier about their church or their involvement in it, who will always be critical of decisions which are made, or the way we worship, because their hearts are not here. And because their hearts are not here, they do not regularly give to the work of the Lord through this church.

4 **Principle Four: Worship with your church, v. 46a** *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts...."*

This was no once-a-week brand of Christianity. This was not the kind of Christianity many people practice in attending worship when it is convenient, or on Easter, Mother's Day and Christmas. Every day they met for worship. You say, "Well, how did they live?" That's a good question—what *about* their jobs and other responsibilities? They didn't meet all day long, but neither did they work all day long either. Those who didn't work gathered together, and those who did work joined them later. It was a matter of priority to them. It was a matter of what was most important to them.

Should we meet every day? I don't believe it would be possible in our day and age. But many cannot say that they meet with others of this church to worship God even

weekly, even monthly. That would be an excellent start. But there is more to it than merely occupying a place on a pew. Spending an hour inside this church building once or twice a week will not in and of itself make you feel better about this church, unless you have truly worshipped God. That is the key to it.

I believe that those who talk about this church or any other, who say that the church does not meet this need or that need in their lives, who criticize what the church does or doesn't do, are those who find one excuse after another *not* to be here when the church gathers for worship. If you really want to feel better about your church, then make a personal commitment to the Lord this morning to be at God's House at the appointed hour for worship.

5 Principle Five: Fellowship with your church, v. 46b *"They broke bread together in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."*

How appropriate it was for them to fellowship together! They shared a common life in Christ that others could not know except they come to know Jesus. When these Christians came together in this way, it was to strengthen their friendships and to celebrate their oneness in Christ!

You don't have to attend the fellowships of this church in order to be a good member of this church. But if you really want to feel better about your church, then when there is a church-wide fellowship, or your Sunday School class sponsors a fellowship or a gathering, or any other group with which you may be involved has a fellowship, then as much as possible you ought to be there. If you really want to feel better about your church, then you will see these gatherings as opportunities to strengthen your friendships and to celebrate your togetherness in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There may be some very good reasons why we might miss something: sickness, or work, or trips out of town, and so on. But sooner or later, if we allow it to continue, it begins to take its toll in the form of isolation from the rest of the church body.

One young man made a recommitment of his life to the Lord at the end of a service in a church I pastored years ago. He came to me after the service and said, "I don't really have any friends in this church. But it's not the church's fault. These people my age have always been here. I'm the one who has been away." He saw in a very mature burst of insight that the key to feeling better about his involvement in that

church was for him to begin to fellowship with others, building relationships and friendships, and cementing them with the love of Christ.

God's Word gives us the principles for feeling better about our church:

Devote yourself to your church

Unite with your church

Give through your church

Worship with your church

Fellowship with your church

If you and I will obey the principles, we will find ourselves so excited and enthusiastic about the work and ministry of our church that others will begin to pay attention. And as they see us, we will point them faithfully to the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ. They will see that it's all about Him.

Remember the story I told you about the couple that I told to look for another church if they were just looking for a place where they could sit and be comfortable and never be asked to do anything? Remember that I said to them, "If you're looking for a church where you can just sit and fade into the background, find another church. If you're looking for a church that won't ask too much of you, find another church. We've got enough of those kinds of members already."

What was their reaction? They looked at each other, and then the husband said, "That's just the kind of church we're looking for. We don't believe in joining a church. We believe in uniting with a church to become all God wants us to be. We believe in serving."

At the beginning of the message today, we asked ourselves a question. Let's ask it again, but this time, let's ask it as if in the very presence of Almighty God:

***What kind of church would my church be
If every member were just like me?***