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OUR DEVOTION

Pledge

**As members of this church, we pledge:
To devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching and
fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.**

Scripture

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

Acts 2:42

Lesson

“You’re probably wondering why I called this meeting.”

I’ve heard that joke (and, I must admit, have sometimes used it myself) to sprinkle a bit of humor into slightly awkward moments—for example, when a random assortment of people find themselves standing together for no apparent reason. The obligatory chuckles point to a reality we recognize intuitively: that groups of people, in order to stay together, must be united in a common purpose, devoted to the same cause.

The early Christian church was certainly not a random assortment of people who found themselves together for no apparent reason. They were united by a life-changing, world-transforming message. So when Luke described the

essential activities of the early church, he first talked about what they were *devoted to*, that is, the things that occupied their earnest attention and unified their focus: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

The Apostles' Teaching

At the top of the list is *the apostles' teaching*, which was simply the message that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified, was now risen from the dead, thus proving that he was the true Messiah who would save any who trusted in him.

But why is it so important to point out that this message was taught by *the apostles*? To answer this, we must have a clear understanding of who the apostles were. They were the ones who had personally seen Jesus after he had risen from the dead (Acts 1:15-26; 10:32; 2 Peter 1:16) They were the ones Jesus told to tell others what they saw (Acts 1:1-5). Because they were eyewitnesses of Jesus, their words carried unique, foundational authority that later preachers would not have. (For the “foundational” nature of this authority, see Ephesians 2:20.)

That the early believers were *devoted* to this teaching means that they were committed not only to believing it, but also to learning more and more about its implications for all of life.

The Fellowship

Second, they were devoted to “the fellowship” (*koinonia*), a word that refers to people's mutual participation in some activity or enterprise. It's easy to see why “the fellowship” follows “the apostles' teaching.” It is because the apostles' teaching—that is, the message about Jesus the Messiah—is not just a private experience to enjoy by oneself; instead, it links people to each other. Those who follow Jesus now have the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism, the same Holy Spirit, the same heavenly Father.

A church that is “devoted to fellowship” . . .

- Shares their resources. They are eager to share with each other, as the early church did (Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Philippians 1:5; Hebrews 13:16).
- Shares their presence. It means that we would be eager to be present with others (Acts 2:44). When the church was really thriving, you could hardly keep the believers away from each other!\

- Shares their burdens. It means that we would open up to others (2 Corinthians 6:13), bearing each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2) and even confessing sin to one another (James 5:16).

The Breaking of Bread

Third, they were devoted to “the breaking of bread.” This most likely refers to the church’s early practice of commemorating Jesus’ final meal with his disciples—a meal that reminded them of the sacrifice Jesus made on their behalf.

In “the breaking of bread” we have a beautiful picture of both the apostles’ doctrine and the fellowship. Bread is made from wheat that has been crushed and baked. Wine is made from grapes trodden in a winepress. When wheat is crushed and grapes are trodden, they can nourish all who receive them. So it is with Jesus and ourselves. Jesus was crushed to death to bring life and joy to all who receive him by faith. This is how the “breaking of bread” gives us a tangible picture of what the apostles preached. Yet it also gives us a tangible picture of “the fellowship” because the benefits of Christ’s life and death are like a meal that we enjoy *together*. The Apostle Paul put it this way: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

The Prayers

Finally, the early Christians were devoted to “the prayers.” This refers to the prayers the church offered up when they were together, for example, their prayer for boldness in the face of opposition (Acts 4:23-31). It is true that prayer should be an ongoing, private activity (Matthew 6:6), but it should also be an organized, public activity. Moreover, although Christians may share personal needs among themselves, a major focus of our prayers ought to be the coming of God’s kingdom to earth.

Putting the Pledge to Work

1. What is true about “the apostles’ teaching” that makes it worth devoting ourselves to?
2. How do you usually approach the Sundays we observe the Lord’s Supper? What can you do to make it more meaningful?
3. Which aspects of “fellowship” does our church do well with? Which does it struggle in? What might you do to contribute to the solution?

4. In what ways do our prayers tend to differ from the prayer we read about in the book of Acts? What could we change to align our prayers with these ones?