



What makes a church a church? I suppose if you look at it from the western mindset you'll want a well produced worship service; some rocking worship music; a teacher who is occasionally deep, but mostly entertaining; a great children's program and an exciting student ministry. Throw in a few small groups and a vibrant missions program for good measure and the picture is pretty much complete.

From the New Testament perspective, however, church is much more basic and far more elusive. Church is not a place we go, but something we are. Church happens when God is actively present in His people transforming them by His Spirit through the gospel into a vibrant and caring community that are deeply devoted to one another and actively involved as agents of redemption and reconciliation in the world.

The church was designed to be an "uncommon community." In Acts 2:42-47, Luke gives us a model he hopes we will come back to every time things get a little too complicated and we lose our way.

#### TWO CORE COMMITMENTS (v 42)

Most of the time when we read Acts 2:42 we view it as a list of four activities the early church devoted themselves to, but there is more to this verse than meets the eye. This is poetry not prose. If Luke were giving us a list he would have separated each activity with "and." They did this, and they did this, and they did this. But the "ands" come in the middle of the phrases, which means he has given us two couplets rather than four activities. More than that in typical Hebraic fashion the first and last items in the couplets correspond to one another and the middle two items correspond to one another. So that if it came to us in Hebraic meter it would look something like this.

*And they devoted themselves to:*

- A. *The apostles teaching*
- B. *And to the fellowship*
- B. *To the breaking of bread*
- A. *And to prayer*

In other words: The apostles' teaching is to prayer what the fellowship is to the breaking of bread.

Luke is highlighting two core commitments rather than four different activities: They demonstrated an undying commitment to God by devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and prayer; and the demonstrated

and undying commitment to one another by devoting themselves to the fellowship and the breaking of bread.

In effect, they are living out the great commandment by loving God (as demonstrated by their devotion to word and prayer) and their neighbor (as demonstrated by their devotion to each other expressed through table fellowship).

1. How does viewing these as two core commitments rather than four practices change the way you think about the foundational elements of the church?
2. When you think of someone who is "devoted to" something what comes to mind?
3. What would it look like to be devoted to "the apostles' teaching" and "prayer"?
4. What would it look like to be devoted to "the fellowship" and "the breaking of bread"?
5. What happens in the church (and in us) when we lose touch with these two core convictions?

#### THE DYNAMICS OF BIBLICAL COMMUNITY (vv. 43-47)

1. Verses 43-47 describe the community life that flowed out of the early churches undying devotion to God and one another. Take time to list the outstanding features of their life together.
2. Which of these are practices (things they did) and which are results (things that happened as a result of what they were doing)?
3. Which of these dynamics is most attractive to you? Why?
4. Which of these features is most often missing from our community life?
5. How can we recover and maintain the vibrancy God intended for His church?



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