



# Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 6 – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH  
LESSON 97 – CHURCH LIFE

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# Distinctives of Church Life

- ▶ Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.
- ▶ We see the NT Church as they are Devoted to Christ, Scripture, One Another, the Lord's Table, and Prayer.

# Devoted to Christ

- ▶ According to Acts 2:41, about 3,000 people responded in saving faith to Peter's evangelistic preaching on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40). They were immediately baptized and incorporated into the church, and they demonstrated the genuineness of their profession of faith in their continual devotion to Christ.
- ▶ In Acts 2:42, the phrase "continued steadfastly" carries the idea of steadfast devotion or persevering affection.
- ▶ In the face of opposition, persecution, ridicule, and rejection these believers displayed a courageous love for the Lord Jesus and His church.
- ▶ This dedication is an evidence of saving faith – John 15:1-4; Matt. 13:3-9, 21; 1 John 2:19; John 8:31.

# Devoted to Christ

- ▶ It is important, even if seemingly obvious, to note that the first church was composed of saved individuals. Too many modern churches are dominated by unbelievers and even focus more attention on appealing to unbelievers than on caring for the redeemed.
- ▶ Following the biblical model, churches prove their devotion to the Lord Jesus by being characterized by purity in life and doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), often causing the world to resist and avoid them (Acts 5:13-14).
- ▶ Their priority will be to honor Christ, the Head of the church, by equipping their members both to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12) and to evangelize the lost as they go throughout their daily lives (Matt. 28:19).

# Devoted to Christ

- ▶ While unbelievers are welcome to attend church services, being exposed to God-honoring praise and biblical preaching in the hopes that they will be convicted, repent, and believe (1 Cor. 14:24-25), the purpose of a church service is to edify and equip the saints as they join together in corporate worship through congregational singing, the teaching and preaching of God's Word, and the observance of the Ordinances all with a focus on exalting God.
- ▶ Any form of membership or service in the church is restricted to believers. Those who are not part of the invisible, universal church can have no legitimate role of leadership or service in the visible, local church (2Cor. 6:14-15).

# Devoted to Christ

- ▶ The Thessalonian church was characterized by genuine faith, sacrificial love, and steadfast hope (1 Thess. 1:2-10).
- ▶ The same cannot be said about the churches at Pergamum or Sardis, which were so dominated by the influence of unbelievers that the Lord severely rebuked them (Rev. 2:14-16; 3:1-3). Their accommodation of the world allowed idolatry, immorality, and hypocrisy to run rampant.
- ▶ The church should demonstrate love and compassion toward unbelievers, but it must never embrace them as part of the fellowship until they repent and believe the gospel.
- ▶ By God's design, the church is an assembly of redeemed worshipers who together are growing in Christlike holiness.

# Devoted to Scripture

- ▶ In Acts 2:42, Luke explains that the believers in Jerusalem devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching. The content of that instruction included expositions of Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 6:4; Luke 24:44-49), teachings from the life and ministry of Jesus (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 11:23-26), and new revelation as it was given by the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and recorded as New Testament Scripture (John 16:12-15).
- ▶ A commitment to the Apostles teaching is essential to the spiritual development and well-being of all believers. Exposure to God's Word renews the mind (Rom. 12:2) through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-16) and produces spiritual growth (1 Tim. 4:6; 1 Peter 2:2).
- ▶ This is why it is important that the church reads and is taught the Word of God (1 Tim. 4:13). Pastors are charged to preach the Word faithfully and without compromise (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

# Devoted to Scripture

- ▶ Paul instructed the Colossian church, telling them, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Col. 3:16).
- ▶ Churches that neglect the preaching of God’s Word leave their people spiritually malnourished (Hos. 4:6) and susceptible to both temptation and error because they are ill-equipped to use the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17).
- ▶ Those who faithfully proclaim what Scripture teaches firmly establish their congregations in the truth (Psa. 1:1-3; 1 John 2:12-14).

# Devoted to One Another

- ▶ The account in Acts 2 continues by explaining that the members of the early church were devoted to fellowship (Acts 2:42).
- ▶ These early Christians were distinguished by a consistent devotion and sacrificial commitment to their fellow members of the body of Christ.
- ▶ The term fellowship refers to sharing or partnership. Every believer is in permanent fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ through faith in Him (John 17:21; 1 Cor. 1:9). As a result, believers are also in fellowship with one another (1 John 1:3).
- ▶ That fellowship is demonstrated by a loving commitment to serve fellow believers and encourage them to love and good works (Heb. 10:24-25).
- ▶ The Christian life cannot be lived in isolation, but must be lived in communion with Christ and His people.

# Devoted to the Lord's Table

- ▶ Going back to Acts 2:42, we see the early church devoted to “the breaking of bread.” This is a reference to the celebration of the Lord's Supper.
- ▶ Jesus commanded His followers to commemorate His death on a consistent basis (1 Cor. 11:24-29), continually reminding themselves of the salvation provided through His once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 Peter 3:18).
- ▶ Communion symbolizes the believer's union with Christ (Rom. 6:5) and the unity of believers with one another (Eph. 4:5).
- ▶ Paul explains in 1 Cor. 10:16-17, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.”

# Devoted to the Lord's Table

- ▶ Observing the Lord's Supper also allows believers to examine their hearts, confessing and repenting of any known sin. In that way, it operates as a purifying influence in the church, as believers reflect of the cross and forsake their sin.
- ▶ Those who participate in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner – either by not being a believer, or by not discerning the seriousness of sin and the need for examination, conviction, and confession – invite the Lord's chastening and even judgment.
- ▶ Some who partook in an unworthy manner in the church at Corinth became sick and died as a result (1 Cor. 11:30).

# Devoted to Prayer

- ▶ Acts 2:42 explains that the early church was also devoted to prayers.
- ▶ Recognizing the necessity of Divine wisdom and assistance (John 14:13-14; James 1:5), these believers were characterized by a relentless commitment to corporate prayer (Acts 1:14, 24; 4:24-31).
- ▶ That same priority ought to mark the church today, as believers rely on the providential care and sovereign power of God.
- ▶ Congregations that fail to commune with the Lord through prayer will inevitably be characterized by spiritual weakness and apathy.
- ▶ By contrast, the NT repeatedly calls believers to pray fervently and continually (Luke 18:1; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17).

# Results of Devotion

- ▶ The church of Acts 2 understood the vital importance of pursuing the right priorities. They were devoted to Christ, His Word, His people, the commemoration of His death, and the practice of prayer. These should be the hallmarks of any and every church today.
- ▶ In Acts 2:43-47, Luke details the results that followed out of devotion as exhibited by these first century believers.
- ▶ The church experienced a sense of holy awe as they witnessed the miraculous signs being performed by the Apostles.
- ▶ Their congregation was also characterized by sacrificial sharing and selfless generosity. It should be noted that although they were willing to sell their belongings to meet the needs of others, the early church did not practice communism or communal living.

# Results of Devotion

- ▶ The Scripture tells us that believers would respond as individual needs arose (1 Cor. 16:1-2). This was done on a voluntary basis with the prompting of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:24-26; 5:4; 2 Cor. 8:13-14).
- ▶ The early church also experienced supernatural joy (Acts 2:46).
- ▶ The generosity of their heartfelt love for one another produced an uncontrollable gladness that erupted into praise to God (Acts 2:47).
- ▶ Their witness was also expanded as unbelievers saw the transformation in the lives of believers and their love and devotion to one another.
- ▶ Unbelievers were being saved and added to the church daily.

# Results of Devotion

- ▶ A healthy church in any age will be characterized by the same spiritual pursuits as the church depicted in Acts 2:42-47.
- ▶ As believers devote themselves to the right priorities, the Spirit will produce Christlike character within them (Rom. 5:4; 2 Cor. 3:18). That in turn will provide a compelling testimony to the world of the transforming power of the gospel – a witness that God will use to reach unbelievers with the truth of salvation.
- ▶ Next week: The Unity and Purity of the Church.