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# DEVELOPING APOSTOLIC VALUES IN COMMUNITY

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## Introduction

The church is a community of believers, set apart by the Holy Spirit, relating to one another as a family, pursuing New Testament doctrine and practice, engaging in the work of the Great Commission and anticipating both the season and event of our Lord's return.

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” -Heb.12:22-24

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” -Ac.2:42

- I. **A Studying Community-** For the early church it was the apostle's doctrine that was at the core of their beliefs and practices. In like manner, the Bible is our source of truth today. It provides all of the foundation for what we are to confess and obey. It is important that we are *Bible-literate*. We need to know what the Bible says and what it means if we are to understand and obey it. The word of God is to be a central element to Christian fellowship.
  - A. Jesus gives to His disciples the responsibilities for forming, leading and governing His church (Mt.18:18-19).
  - B. The theological and practical foundations for church belief were formed primarily from what the apostles taught (Ac.2:42).

- C. The New Testament communicates the formative values and doctrine for the church throughout its history and is to be the primary source for our doctrine and practice today.
- D. The apostles grew in wisdom and so must we. As we seek to apply the teachings of the New Testament, we must undertake to understand both the context and the intent of its authors.
- E. We study the scripture both for the sake of its practical and theological truth (Js.1:22).
  - i. We are to obey the voice of God through His word as disciples of Christ (2 Tim.3:16-17; 1 Pt.1:20-21).
  - ii. We are to grow up into the knowledge of Christ as His friends (Jn.15:10,14).
- F. The Bible is our standard for truth. It is where the Christian derives his or her moral, ethical and spiritual sense of right and wrong (Ps.19:7-8).
- G. The Christian has the obligation to study the scripture.
  - i. It is the medium through which we are equipped to both follow Christ in the example of His faithfulness to God and His ministry to others (2 Tim.3:16-17).
  - ii. It is the doorway to engagement with God. The truths of scripture are the primary means by which we encounter the beauty of Christ in this age. (Jn.6:68).
- II. **A Worshiping Community**- Often times, worship and music are viewed as synonymous. We say things like, “We really need to do more worship at church,” or “We should really have another worship night soon.” It’s ok to say these things but we also need to be clear on what worship really is if we’re going to be a worshiping people.
  - A. The English roots of the word worship, being -worth and -ship, denote the quality or the status of someone or something of great worth. To worship then, at least in the basest sense of our English word, is essentially the attributing of worth or value to something or someone.
  - B. We are exhorted in scripture to worship God. “Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.” -Ps.96:9 “Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” -Rev.19:10. (Ps.66:4?)
  - C. God is looking for worshipers. “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” -Jn.4:23

- i. 53.56 προσκυνέω<sup>a</sup> [proskyneō]: to express by attitude and possibly by position one’s allegiance to and regard for deity—‘to prostrate oneself in worship, to bow down and worship, to worship.’<sup>7</sup> εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἤλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ ‘for we saw his star in the east and we came to worship him’ Mt 2:2.<sup>1</sup>
  - a. This particular word emphasizes the expression of one’s devotion rather than the devotion itself. Therefore, we are left with the reality that worship can involve many expressions of love, or devotion, to God.
  - b. Let’s paraphrase this verse inserting our new understanding. “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will express their love for God through obedience to His Spirit with an understanding of what pleases God, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”
- D. Worship then is a varied expression of our love for God. This love is predicated upon a fascination with God that stems from prolonged encounter with Him. We encounter Him according to the word and the Spirit. His word contains the written expression of His truth while His Spirit within us provides the experience of those truths.
- E. A worshiping community then is a people who prioritize and pursue encounter with God through a knowledge of and obedience to His word and to the promptings of the Spirit.
- F. Singing is one of the most common forms of worship in the Bible, both in Heaven and on Earth. Interestingly God has made a unique promise to His church related to singing. “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” -Eph.5:18-19
- G. Biblically singing is demonstrated to be one of the foremost weapons in spiritual warfare (my dreams)
- H. In the early church singing (or hymning) was used as a means of teaching and declaring doctrine and creed.

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<sup>7</sup> προσκυνέω<sup>a</sup> appears to differ somewhat in meaning from σέβομαι [sebomai], σεβάζομαι [sebazomai], and εὐσεβέω<sup>a</sup> [eusebiō] ‘to worship’ (53.53) in emphasizing more the semantic component of position or attitude involved in worship.

<sup>1</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 539). New York: United Bible Societies.

### III. A Fellowshiping Community

“And they continued steadfastly [with intense effort] in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship [close association], in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”-Ac.2:42

#### Examining Four Aspects of Biblical Fellowship

##### A. A fellowshiping community is a gathering community

1. As we have mentioned in our introduction, the church is by definition an assembly, that is, a gathering (Heb.12:22). We must be careful not to confuse our understanding of the Bible’s definition of fellowship with simply “hanging out” together.

a. κοινωνία<sup>a</sup> [koinonia], ας f: an association involving close mutual relations and involvement—‘close association, fellowship.’ 1 Jn 1:3; 1 Cor 1:9.<sup>2</sup>

2. The early church community took great pains to make sure that relationship and association with one another was prioritized. In particular, this association was related to the doctrinal foundations of the apostles’ teaching. Many scholars have noted that the early church gatherings in homes during the first century were primarily times of teaching.

B. In the ancient near east, table fellowship was the symbol of inclusion and equality.<sup>3</sup> This is why there was trouble for many early Christians, particularly Christian businessmen in the first century (Rev.2:8-9).

1. For early Christians the corporate “fellowship” meal was a definitive marker of belonging to the Christian community.

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<sup>2</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, pp. 445–446). New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>3</sup> “Ancient meal customs placed a higher premium on the symbolic value of table fellowship than is common in the modern Western world. To the ancients, sharing a meal was imbued with ritual meaning and often signified the most solemn and intimate of social relationships.” -Smith, D. E. (1992). [Table Fellowship](#). In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 6, p. 302). New York: Doubleday.

2. For early Christians, the house, and more specifically the dinner table, was a central element of church life (1 Cor.11:17-22,33). It emphasized not only our belonging to the household (Gal.6:10; Eph.2:19) of Christ but also contributed to the building of friendships.

C. Table fellowship is reflective of the acceptance we have in Christ

1. The promotion of equality and acceptance is a defining trait in our culture today. The general presupposition suggests that not only the life but the lifestyles and expressions of one's inherent desires and preferences are to be accepted, often without question, and celebrated by all others.
2. The scripture declares that while all human life is sacred and of equal worth Christians have been accepted in Christ. *"Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved."* -Eph.1:6
3. To be in Christ means that we have accepted the work of His substitutionary atonement on the cross by means of repentance from sin and evidenced by a life of faithful obedience to His word., (Jn.15:4, 10)
  - a. The distinction of social classes in the Roman Empire as well as in Greek and Jewish culture<sup>4</sup> limited the ability for people to engage one another and indeed presented one of the primary obstacles to the unity of the early church, particularly with Jewish believers accepting gentiles into their assemblies (Ac.10:28, 11:1, 15:1-2).
  - b. The New Testament shouts the abolition of the human standard of evaluation leading to social hierarchy, racial prejudice and gender (male and female) supremacy<sup>5</sup>. (Gal.3:28; 1 Cor.1:26-29,12:13; Col.3:11; Phil.16)

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<sup>4</sup> *"In the first century, distinctions existed along national, social, and gender lines. Those who had a common nationality and were free, male, and Roman citizens possessed definite privileges."* - Banks, R. J. (2020). [\*Paul's Idea of Community: Spirit and Culture in Early House Churches\*](#) (Third Edition, p. 95). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group.

<sup>5</sup> *"Paul's thinking does not begin with differences that separate people from one another but with those that divide all people from God. He describes the Christian community as uniting all who acknowledge they believe in and live by the gospel, irrespective of nationality, social position, or gender. In this respect no distinctions between Christians can be made. What they now have in common has been freely given by God to all."* - Banks, R. J. (2020). [\*Paul's Idea of\*](#)

*“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,” -Eph.1:14*

- D. God sets the broken into families. The house, and more specifically, the dinner table, was a central element of early church life (1 Cor.11:17-22).
1. *“To the fatherless He is a Father, to the widow He is a champion friend, to the lonely He makes them part of a family.” -Ps.68:5*
  2. *“Even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off.” -Is.56:5*

#### **IV. A Praying Community<sup>6</sup>**

*“but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*  
-Acts 6:4

- A. We have no record of Jesus’ disciples asking Him to teach them to preach or prophesy or work miracles, but they did ask Him to teach them to pray (Lk.11:1). For them it was His dedication to prayer that was seen as the bedrock of His life and ministry.
- B. The apostles embraced Jesus’ commitment to prayer, and it became one of the chief values of the early church. As they waited in the upper room for the promise of the Father, they prayed (Ac.1:14). As the pressure of leading a mega-church grew, they prayed. The New Testament provides us with a wonderful treasure trove of apostolic prayers.<sup>7</sup>
- C. Prayer is both practical and profoundly relational. It’s practical in the sense that “it gets things done” in the Kingdom but it is ultimately an expression of God’s deep desire to be connected to us.

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*Community: Spirit and Culture in Early House Churches* (Third Edition, p. 96). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group.

<sup>6</sup> For more resources on prayer visit [riversoffire.net/articles](http://riversoffire.net/articles)  
-Apostolic Foundations -Prayer  
-Prevailing in Prayer  
-Why A Culture of Prayer?  
-Beginning My Personal Prayer Journey

<sup>7</sup> For a list of apostolic prayers visit [riversoffire.net/prayer-room/resources/apostolic-prayers](http://riversoffire.net/prayer-room/resources/apostolic-prayers)

D. The New Testament exhorts the church to pray.

*“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.” -Rom.12:9-13*

*“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” -Eph.6:17-18*

E. The building of spiritual community is to be centered around a praying people.

*“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.” -2 Tim.2:22*

F. Prayer is an integral part of how the power of the Holy Spirit is released within the family of God.

*“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” -James 5:16*

1. Repentance brings forgiveness and confession brings healing.

## **V. An Outreach Community**

*“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. -Mt.28:18-20*

*“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me.’” -Ac.1:4*

A. Living letters of recommendation- We represent Jesus to a broken and hurting world. We are literal letters of recommendation from God concerning His character, power and love.

1. *“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?” -2 Cor.2:15*
  2. *“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.” -2 Cor.3:2-3*
- B. God opens doors- Asking God to create opportunities for the message of the gospel to go forward in power is essential if we are to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.
1. *“For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” -1 Cor.16:8*
  2. *“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word...” -Col.4:2-3*
- C. God supplies boldness- One of the chief manifestations of the Holy Spirit on the New Testament Church is boldness. It takes God to do the will of God. God is not asking us to reach our families, communities and nation apart from His power and plan. Even Jesus, the premier evangelist, said, *“Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” -Jn.15:19*
1. *“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” -Ac.4:29-31*
  2. *“And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” -Eph.4:19-20 (Col.4:2-3)*
- D. God gives language (Eph.4:19)- God not only opens doors of opportunity and provides the boldness to walk through those doors, but He is also responsible for giving us the language to articulate the hidden dimension of His beauty and truth.
- E. God causes the growth- Ultimately, it is God who is responsible to both draw people to Himself and to bring the obedient to maturity. We cannot do God’s part in outreach and

He will not do our part. We have a role to play in outreach and we are to be diligent in it. God uses even our short conversations and small acts of service to create maximum impact for His sake -especially when we combine them with our prayers.

1. *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” -Jn.6:44*
2. *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”  
-1 Cor.3:6-8*