



## **Week 23: Understanding the New Testament: The Early Church**

**MV:** *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)*

### **ASK: Can you love Jesus and hate the church? Why or why not?**

Jesus never gave us an option for giving up on the church

The church was Jesus' idea and it is impossible to follow Him and shun His bride

When Jesus ascended into heaven He left one group to carry on His mission...THE CHURCH

The church is:

- The temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:19-22)
- The body of Christ (1 Cor. 12)
- The Bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-33)

*"if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Tim 3:15)*

*"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)*

As Acts begins there are about 120 Christ followers, with the 12 disciples/apostles leading

The Holy Spirit descends, Peter preaches and in one day 3,000 are added to the church

*"They **devoted** themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and to **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread** and to **prayer**. 43 Everyone was **filled with awe** at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were **together** and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They **broke bread** in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Act 2:42-47 NIV)*

This was a radical transformation over what the world had seen thus far

The church stood out because it was **devoted to the gospel (apostles teachings—Jesus teachings—the gospels before they were written)**

The church was devoted to **fellowship;-shared life with each other**—real people meeting real needs to fulfill a real mission

The church truly **loved each other**

*"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Heb 10:24-25)*

Fellowship will be critical to the church as the last days approach

They **ate together** and **celebrated communion together**

The early church was devoted to **PRAYER**. It was through prayer they received strength and guidance from the Lord

So many churches don't rely on prayer and aren't truly dependent on God

The church is those people who are called out of darkness into the Light

The early church was NOT individualistic as we are in the west

To identify with Christ was to identify with His church

The early church was a **generous community**. They gave for the welfare of other believers

The early church was **HOLY**-set apart, unique, different from the rest of the world

The early church was **fearless**—suffering was a real part of their lives

The early church was a **growing community**. The Lord added to their number daily

Persecution resulted in even more growth.

*"And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." (Act 8:1 NIV)*

The early church was NOT perfect:

- Church at Galatia was in danger of distorting the gospel
- Church at Corinth tolerated sexual sin
- Church at Jerusalem felt some widows were getting preferential treatment

Of the 100+ times "church" is mentioned in the NT, over 90 of the references are to the local church!!!