

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

By John Richardson

SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:42–47

[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

OBSERVATION

Online worship services are a must amidst coronavirus concerns. Let's be careful how we speak about online worship services. Gathering around the TV is not "having church" as if the church is an event we attend. When we gather back together, we will arrive at a building to worship, but we do not go to church; we—those believing and following Jesus—are the church. A basketball team does not travel to a location to play and call the location "the team," nor do they watch basketball on TV and call it "the team." A basketball team is still the team whether they are with other teammates or not. A basketball team is a team when they are playing a game and practicing, and they remain a team even when they do not do those things. Also, the coach of the team is part of the team but is not the team. The same can be said about the pastors/leaders of the church. The church is not its pastors exclusively. A church is a local body of believers who have trusted Christ and covenanted together to walk toward Christ. The church is always the group of believers who at times gather to worship and other times cannot. You are part of Harmony Hill Baptist Church if you are a follower of Christ and have joined through membership to covenant together and walk toward Christ. One may ask, "Why explain it?" Right language informs right understanding which leads to right action. If church is a building alone, then many "churches" in Acts (without buildings) were not churches. If church was a service alone, then why was Jesus talking about making disciples? Church is people who gather together to hear God's Word, encourage each other, and leave to share the gospel.

- "They" in our text is the church that formed after the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the repentance of those who committed to follow Christ and were baptized. 3000 people were added to the church, which is monumental. What did the church do? The church gathered together to hear the Word taught, to fellowship,

to break bread (Lord's Supper) and pray (baptism had already happened). The church (already defined as church) gathered, which points to the fact that a service is not the church (v. 42).

- The apostles did many signs as a means to strengthen the church in its infancy. Wonder fell on all the souls before the signs; therefore, the signs were not the point. The gathering of the church was changing lives (v. 43).
- The church had all things in common, not that personal possessions were absent, but the possessions they had were freely shared with all. The response to gathering together was a love that pushed beyond the bounds of self. Hearing God's Word moved people to care for brothers and sisters in Christ. Needs met among members is not based only on the love we have for one another; it's actually propelled by how much we love God, understanding how He has loved us (vv. 44-45).
- The church attended the temple daily as a gathered body of believers. The temple was possibly the only place large enough to gather together as a body of believers (church). The temple was not the church any more than the apostles were the church; the church was the people who were submitting to the leadership of the apostles and gathering together in worship. Would you like to gather daily with the church? If not, maybe it's time to think more deeply about eternity with Christ and the saints (v. 46).
- Glad and generous hearts are marks of the church... glad to eat together, glad to have a faith family, generous with each other. The scattered church ate meals together, praised God together, and shared everything. The life of the church gathering both in corporate worship and in homes had changed those who were not a part of the church. People saw the life of the church and asked questions about why they had glad and generous hearts. The church—not service/building but God's people—gathering and scattering brought many sons and daughters into the kingdom by means of the Holy Spirit (vv. 46-47).

OBEDIENCE

When you "miss" church, what immediately comes to mind? If seeing brothers and sisters in Christ is not on your mind, then it is possible that church needs to be redefined in your life. People miss singing, hearing God's Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, but we must miss doing that with one another.

- Reach out to people, the church, and share words of encouragement, asking them how you can pray.

- Be careful to not say church is an online service or church is when we gather back an hour a week. This view will lead to the end of church and life lived apart from things detailed in Acts 2.
- Thank God for your church, not just the leaders, resources, buildings, but the people whom God has sovereignly placed in your life to help you pursue Christ. Seek a way to share a meal with another member via Zoom or deliver a meal.
- Seek to care for those who are part of your church by asking if anyone needs anything. With a glad and generous heart, meet that need.

PRAYER

Ask God to give you a bigger passion and burden for those who are part of the church. Request that God would open your eyes to the needs of others. Praise God for saving you and those who are part of Harmony Hill.