

Fellowship

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I recently read of a church, which hit upon a new method of outreach; it is mailing a videotaped message to every household in the county where it is located. That is certainly a modern way of approaching an old topic, and since most people have a VCR, it may just work for some people.

Perhaps, though, there is another way, one that is not as modern in a technological sense, but one that is tested and proven, and which will work in any age with or without technology. What if there was a model – somewhere in the Bible – that would provide a pattern for the conduct and growth of the church regardless of technological prowess? Moreover, what if that model would provide a blueprint for the operation of the church and the enhancement of the lives of believers on a daily basis, in addition to outlining the church's growth? Well, there is such a model presented in Acts 2:42-47.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and prayer. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (KJV)

A close look at these verses discloses the timeless truths that make them applicable in

any situation, in any society, at any time. To begin, verse 42 says that the believers continued steadfastly in several things. The words "continued steadfastly" are one word in the Greek and should perhaps be translated "were continuing". In other words, these believers were continuously doing certain things on an ongoing basis, rather than doing them only once, or sporadically, or occasionally. Verse 42 tells us specifically that they were continuing "*in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*"

These fourteen English words give us a wealth of information about the church at this time. The believers were dedicated to doctrine (the teaching of God's Word), fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. Before we zero in on the subject of "fellowship" notice how all these activities are presented. They are given in a list and are each connected to the others by the word "and." In normal speech, if we were to list these items we would typically separate the first three by commas (if we were writing) and would separate the last item from the others with the word "and." In other words, we would likely say "apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers." But here, they are each separated by the word "and."

Using "and" to connect these items is the figure of speech polysyndeton, meaning "many ands." This figure of speech is used when the author or speaker wants to place equal emphasis on each item in the list. God places equal emphasis on all of the activities listed in verse 42. These items are all equally important. Having said that we can now look at the specific item of "fellowship."

There several closely related words in Greek which are or could be translated "fellowship." These words are used in a variety of contexts, including some unlikely ones, such as what we might consider to be a business relationship (Luke 5:10 describes

James and John as Peter's partners in the fishing business. The word "partners" is the plural form of one of the words translated at other places as "fellowship." Interestingly, and unlike a common usage today, these words for "fellowship" are never used biblically of a meeting, a gathering, or the place where some sort of meeting is conducted. Rather, they have a much greater meaning, as Hebrews 2:14 shows.

In as much then as the children have partaken [koinoneo – one of the words translated as fellowship] of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared [metecho – to partake of, share in] in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil. (NKJV)

This verse states a very basic fact; that all children partake of flesh and blood, which is all that they, as natural persons can have. It is the sum total of all that is genetically available to a child from his or her father and mother. In a similar fashion, though God was his Father, Jesus shared in our full humanity. He was a real man, who suffered a real death, but who then experienced a real resurrection conquering death and the devil.

For purposes of this article, the significance of this verse is in what it tells us about fellowship. To be involved in fellowship means to take fully, to share fully in what is available. What it is that is being shared fully is indicated by the context. In this verse, for example, what is being shared fully is the nature of a natural person: flesh and blood. Luke 5:10 tells us that James and John shared fully with Peter in a business venture; in other words they shared fully in the profits, losses, assets, liabilities, opportunities, etc. that came with the fishing business.

In yet other verses, the context tells us that we can share fully in such diverse things as financial giving (Romans 15:26 - "contribution"

=koinonia –fellowship), other men's sins (1 Timothy 5:22), and Christ's sufferings (1 Peter 4:13). Thus, we must look at the context to see what is being fully shared.

In Acts 2:42-47 the believers shared fully in the apostles' teaching, breaking of bread, prayers, having fear or reverence of God. They were together, having all things in common, selling their possessions and goods and parting them to all who had a need. What a group of believers! They each laid aside their individual, personal differences and came together in all the significant facets of their lives, sharing with each other and living in accordance with what they understood of the Word of God. They shared the life of God in Christ that was in them with one another freely. This is fellowship; being involved in each others needs and joys, exhorting one another, encouraging one another, praying for one another, loving one another in word and deed. The result of this kind of fellowship was that "*the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved*" (vs. 47).

What a passage of Scripture Acts 2:42-47 is! What church or group of believers would not be thrilled to have this sort of closeness among it's believers and outreach to others? Perhaps the question should be asked another way: how many churches today have such closeness and outreach?

It might well be that at this threshold of the twenty first century, we should look back in time almost two thousand years, and return to this passage to again apply it in our day and time. Continuing in teaching, and sharing fully with one another, and breaking bread and prayers must work in the same way now that it did here in Acts 2. God has not changed. His Word is still true. Why not try it?