

If you wanted to show your devotion to your wife on Valentine's Day, what would you do? Four things: of course, a Valentine's day card, and also flowers, chocolate, and a romantic dinner. I'm sorry if that valuable information just came too late for some of you! Others of you hate Hallmark holidays and couldn't care less, and that's okay, but here's the point: *devotion is displayed by your actions*. Love doesn't just *think* things, it *does* things.

And if you think cards and flowers and chocolate are over the top, just wait until you hear what Shahab-ud-din Muhammad Khurram did to show his devotion for his favorite wife. After Mumtaz Mahal died in 1631, her husband the Shah commissioned a mausoleum in her memory that became known as the Taj Mahal, one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. The Shah employed over 22,000 people and more than a thousand elephants over the course of a dozen years, and spent the equivalent of nearly a billion dollars to do it.

But in some circumstances, and I'd say most circumstances, building a billion dollar tomb isn't the best way to show your devotion. In Luke 11:47-48, Jesus speaks to a crowd of lawyers and says "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs." And Jesus promised to bring judgment against this *hypocritical* devotion.

Because if you were a prophet who spoke the Word of God to the people, what sort of devotion would you want? What would you be looking for? The prophets came to deliver God's message, and the ones who were devoted to God were the ones who *heard and obeyed*. Don't build me a fancy tomb; repent and follow God! So what kind of devotion does God want?

Our text today is a gift from God to the Church, because in this passage we see what it looks like when the Church is devoted to God. We have in this short verse (42) an outline of what the Church does when she gathers together, and then in v. 43, we see the *impact* that this devotion had on the souls of the people who gathered.

We've been looking at what the Church's mission and message is, and today we're looking at the life of the Church to see *how she carries out* her mission and proclaims her message. What does a Church that is devoted to Jesus *do*? And we see four things: 1) she hears the apostle's teaching; 2) she shares fellowship; 3) she breaks bread together; and 4) she prays and worships.

Let's look briefly at each one of these four items that the Church devoted herself to. "The apostles' teaching" involves explaining the OT in light of Jesus, and Jesus in light of the OT. It took place at synagogues, in the marketplaces, and in private homes. Sermons, discussions, Bible studies, letters and books – teaching everything that Jesus commanded.

Although we usually use "fellowship" to refer more generally to all sorts of Christian social interaction, here it more likely means *meeting as a distinct group to pursue Christian discipleship*.

"Breaking bread" speaks both of a shared fellowship meal and of the Lord's Supper, which is how they normally concluded those meals. If we had Fellowship Dinner followed by the Lord's Supper not just weekly or monthly but each time we met, that would pretty much capture "the breaking of bread."

Finally, not just "prayer" but "the prayers", indicating something of a liturgy or pattern of worship, which included not just prayers addressed to God, but also devotional type exhortations and singing. Taken together, the four elements in v.42 form the basis for our worship service today, and the early Church *devoted* herself to this worship, and the result was a wave of *awe* washing over the people of God. They were *overwhelmed* by the power of this fellowship, and by the way it knit them together into one body. They *knew* they were sharing in something special.

So let's think about this. You've all heard me summarize the life of the Church as worship, community, and mission, and everything in vs. 42 sounds like worship. Where do community and mission fit in? Take a look at the next few verses: 44-46 tell us that all who believed were *together*, and they all started to take care of each other, to live together, and *enjoy* that life together. (Don't miss the gladness in v. 46!) That's community! It wasn't a separate bullet point or strategic emphasis; shared devotion to the worship described in v. 42 *created* community!

And then what happened? Look at vv. 47: this lifestyle won favor with all the people, not just this new community, but with those *outside* as well. Their worship and community were *visible*, and this vision of a new way of life was *attractive* and *compelling* to those around them, so that the second half of v. 47 says this: "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." The worshipping community's glad devotion to God was how they carried out God's mission! ***The Church being the Church is an act of mission.***

If we're not careful, we can fall into the trap of thinking that mission is an extra add-on to the Church's life, or that only specially called people with special jobs do mission, and that most Christians aren't involved in the mission of the Church. What we see in this text is that by participating in the normal life of the Church, gladly worshiping God and generously living in community, you are embodying the mission of Jesus, even if you never become a preacher or a missionary!

I hope this encourages those of you who want to be a part of the mission, but who aren't able or called to serve in a special role. Those special roles are good and glorious, but what you can do to advance God's mission *right where you are* is to devote yourself to the kind of life described in vv. 42-43, and to do it so gladly and joyfully that the people around you want what you've got. If all you've got is a vague sense of guilt for not doing more for God, and if following God is just a hobby or a duty for you rather than a devotion, then no, you aren't advancing the mission. But if you share in the gladness and devotion we see in these verses, then God is working through your witness to draw others to salvation.

And by way of application, I want you to consider two words: "devoted" and "together", and I want to ask you if these two words characterize your Christian life. Are you *devoted* to these things, and are you doing these things primarily individually, or *together* with the Church?

Here's what I mean: devotion is more than just participation. *Attending* Church doesn't make you *devoted* to the Church. Devotion is loving enthusiasm that makes the object of your devotion *primary* in your affections. In the marriage vows, we see this expressed by the phrase "forsaking all others". This doesn't mean that you never *interact* with anyone other than your spouse, but it does mean that you make your spouse the primary object of your affection, attention, provision, time, and love. In other words, you are *devoted* to your spouse.

And realize this: you are already devoted to *something*; maybe to several things. *Something* has captured your heart and mind. *Something* fills your thoughts and your moments. *Something* receives your energy and attention. Is it *this*? Is it what we see in God's Word, or is it something else? You need to ask yourself this question, and you need to answer honestly!

So are you *devoted* to the things the disciples were devoted to in Acts 2? Are you regularly turning down other opportunities in order to gladly gather for teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and the prayers of the Church? And notice that these verses don't mention anything about restricting this to Sunday! Clearing out a couple hours in your schedule on the day that God has *already* claimed and set apart isn't devotion, just like showing love to your spouse only on your anniversary and on Valentines' Day isn't devotion! **Devotion to God is expressed by devoting yourself to the life of the Church as disciples of Jesus.**

The other word I want you to consider is implied in vv. 42-43, and shows up explicitly in vv. 44 and 46. And here's the point: when you read a good book or listen to a good podcast or sermon that's teaching you the apostles' doctrine, that's good. When you have another Christian family over to fellowship or share a meal, that's good. And when you spend time praying in your prayer closet by yourself, that's good too. But *none of that* is what vv. 42-43 are talking about, because these verses are focused on what the Church does *together*. You *must* be devoted to God individually; of course. But God's priority is that you devote yourself to Him *together*, as the Church, as the body. It's *easier* to have "devotions" alone. It's *better* to have them together.

So does this describe you? Are you working over your schedule and making sacrifices in other areas in order to hear teaching, to enjoy fellowship, to break bread, and to pray together? Are you *devoted* to prioritizing the Church? Don't shrug off the question because you are afraid of what it might say about you, or what you might have to change. God gave us this Word because He knows our devotion sometimes wanes. Devote yourself to the life of the Church together.

What does this look like, practically speaking? Next time the Church offers teaching, *be there*. When the Church gathers to pray, *be there*. Be more devoted to these things than to your hobbies, your entertainment, your projects. If you can't convince yourself to gladly believe that Jesus' Church is worth devoting yourself to, you sure won't be able to convince your neighbors.

I'm challenging you because these verses are challenging. This devotion does not come naturally to individualistic, busy, selfish, and sinful people, which is what we all are by nature, and which is what Jesus gloriously delivers us from when we repent and believe in Him! What sparks this devotion is not being guilt-tripped by a preacher, so don't do this in order to make me happy.

What creates this devotion is seeing Jesus in the verses just before the ones we read. Earlier in Acts 2, Peter has just preached a powerful sermon glorifying Jesus Christ as Lord, and he called on the crowd to repent and believe the good news that Jesus lived and died and rose again so that sinners could be set free from their slavery to sin, and so that we can replace our devotion to death with devotion to Jesus by living as His Church. If your heart doesn't have at least a *desire* for this devotion, then go back and preach the gospel to yourself again until love for Jesus fills your heart to overflowing!

That's the motivation for this devoted life: Jesus loves you, Jesus paid your debt, Jesus forgives your sin, and Jesus gives you life. Devote that life to Jesus by constantly seeking out the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and praying together as His Church, praising God with glad hearts, and trusting Him to use your glad-hearted devotion to add to His Church.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*