

“Re-Calibration: The Gospel & Community Devotion”

Acts 2:42-47, Eph. 2:11-22, Heb. 10:19-25 | Week of December 11-17, 2011 | MaranathaGrace.org

Christian life was never meant to be lived out alone. One’s faith in Christ is certainly a personal matter—yes, salvation is experienced individually, personally—no argument there. But life in Christ is not meant to be a solitary, private affair between you & God because when you’re born again, you’re born into a family made up of family members who have been saved by grace through faith in a common experience of gospel power. And it’s in this family, where we find deep fellowship (Gk. *koinonia*) and shared community with others.

Life in Christ involves being saved from sin & condemnation, but it also means being saved from isolation & alienation. In Christ we are brought from isolation into relationship—relationship with God and relationship with others. In the OT, God declares, “I will be your God and you shall be my people” (Lev. 26:12, Jer. 30:22). In the NT, Jesus teaches His disciples to direct their prayers toward “Our Father.” Jesus still intends for His disciples to gather in local communities (churches) where we can learn, live, grow, and work together on a shared mission. Remember, the gospel re-humanizes us in that it restores us to our true humanity—our true humanness that was meant to reflect God’s image, His likeness. And the essence of our Triune God’s nature is marked by intimate relationship and close community. The Triune God who created (Gen. 1:26-27) is the same God who redeems and re-creates us into His people (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

The 3 points of last Sunday’s message:

- I. ***Our*** Community Devotion
- II. Our ***Community’s*** Devotion
- III. ***Jesus’*** Community Devotion

Our Community Devotion

Acts 2:45 & Heb.10:24-25 provide those who identify ultimately in Christ with some imperatives on how we are to be a people who deliberately share life together, with one another. We are to consider, not neglect, encourage, and provide practically for one another.

This means we are called to congregate and have our lives touch on many levels. The New Testament churches met (congregated) on the Lord’s Day, but they also met on many other occasions in a variety of places. They came to be engaged and devoted to one another by providing mutuality. There was intimate spiritual friendships and relationships where God’s people interacted on deeper levels and planes. Hurts, problems, joys, struggles, needs, victories, sins, weaknesses, strengths, addictions... these are what they brought to the table of fellowship and relationships and these are the things they dealt with together.

- » What are some things that keep you from fearlessly pursuing such devotion to community?
- » How has God used His community to work in your life?
- » One can find food, fun & relationships in your biological family or within a fraternity or sorority or at the local pub or even a gang. What distinguishes Christian community from these?

Western Society has placed a high premium on the values of hyper, expressive individualism and autonomous, self-determination within western mindsets that are entirely consumeristic. Consumption (intake) isn’t wrong, but we’ve taken it to levels of consumerism that dishonor & displease God. We must repent of our “Black Friday” / “Cyber Monday” mindsets regarding the local church and relationships within these local communities. In our sin, we live self-absorbed lives with a proud, self-sufficiency and self-centeredness that ultimately seeks self-salvation. We struggle with our anxieties and insecurities and fears of losing control. We are inclined to conceal and shelter our lives from each other rather than engaging in true biblical fellowship because the last thing we want is to look weak, or bad, or wrong, or ashamed. But thanks be to God, that in His infinite wisdom, mercy, and love, He does not call us to follow Him alone, but rather with a particular people, a particular local church embracing *gospel* values. So imagine this... a local community horribly flawed and yet empowered by the Holy Spirit that

thinks of and puts others before ourselves... a community comprised of devotees that desire to serve rather than be served... a community of Christ-followers who are compelled by a love & hope that is outside of us that provides us with immeasurable riches of grace.

Our community devotion should be embracing these gospel values. It may look differently on the outside depending upon season of life, depending on circumstance, but inwardly, devotion to community life, devotion to the body of Christ that we are integrally linked to looks no different.

Listen to how Dr. Tim Keller puts it in *The Reason for God*:

“We believe the world was made by a God who is a community of persons who have loved each other for all eternity. You were made for mutually self-giving, other directed love. Self-centeredness destroys the fabric of what God has made.”

Our Community's Devotion

Acts 2:42 reveals to us what the community was devoted to: God's word, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. This is more than a *good* blueprint to imitate for any local community of faith—it is the only blueprint to emulate.

God's word must be our foundation for life & faith. We must teach it and preach it and live by its wisdom & power by putting ourselves under it and not above it. We will be devoted to His word for doctrine and the application of this doctrine to life. We should not care so much what we think or feel about God's word but more so of what God's word declares about us and most importantly God.

Our community will also partake in the Lord's Supper regularly and also meet for table fellowship whenever and wherever we can. And we will also be devoted to prayer both corporately and individually with the understanding that this leads us to a humble reliance on God.

» How can we be more centered around these 4 vital components of church community life?

Jesus' Community Devotion

All three passages contain within them the good news of Jesus Christ. Yes, there is much application for us because of this great atonement, but it pales in comparison to His accomplishment through the atonement. We have confidence by the blood of Jesus! There is no condemnation for us! We are in with Jesus and should have no fear with ever being put out. Therefore we should have no apprehensions or insecurities about our place within the community of faith because in Christ we can draw near just as we are knowing that He loves us way too much to leave us just as we are...

The other week I met up with someone who said they were just doing what they could to engage in the bare minimum on Sundays because "...life was just waaaay too busy with studies and work and so much more." My simple response to this person was to deeply consider the gospel of grace—what had he received in Christ Jesus? What 'caliber' of grace was it? Did Jesus give a bare minimum of sacrifice to purchase his soul? And if we are called to Christlikeness, how does 'bare minimum' even enter the conversation?

As we engage in Christ-centered 'one anothers' together, some will be more devoted, and others less devoted, but Jesus remains wholly devoted to us, His Bride, and her mission. He is faithful and He is building us and forming us into what He desire us to be.

- » Does this depth of relationship & fellowship within community sound realistic?
- » What do we do if/when some in our community let us down or sin against us?
- » How can we introduce others (unbelievers) to our community?
- » Are there ways that you are rejecting or fleeing from community now?