

A Place to Stand... Together

I. Introduction

- A. Suppose a new church opened near us that was radically different from us
1. They owned no building; they used facility of another faith group
 - a. Most of their worship, and teaching was in house churches (*cell groups*)
 - b. They had elders, but their key decisions were made by the whole group
 - c. Their teaching focused on Jesus, but many of their practices are strange
 - 1) They share their personal possessions to point of “*communal socialism*”
 - 2) They speak in tongues, have their own apostles, and read only OT
 - d. They don’t have a real name per se; they just call themselves “the church”
 2. Now suppose elders announced we’ll pattern our church after this church
 - a. Well, move them 2000 years and 6000 miles, and they are our pattern
 - 1) The church I was describing was the church in Jerusalem in Acts 2-4
 - 2) Funny, sounded more threatening when we had them down street!
 - b. For a people seeking to restore 1st century church, we look a lot different!
- B. One of the things that looks different today than in the NT church—fellowship
1. In fact, we have practically redefined fellowship to mean “potluck”
 - a. The church where I was youth minister (long ago) had visitation teams
 - 1) Teams met, had snacks or a meal, and were assigned visits to make
 - 2) **Announcement:** “*Team 1 will meet for assignments—no fellowship*”
 - 3) Everyone knew what that meant—no fellowship means no food
 - b. What would you expect if we said we’d have fellowship after church?
 - 1) Would you expect to sit around eating fried chicken and apple pie?
 - 2) Would you expect sit around discussing problems & confessing sins?
 - c. The first Christians did eat together, but their fellowship was more
 2. Word “*fellowship*” (κοινωνία) comes from κοινός, the word for “*common*”
 - a. Common as “*ordinary*” or “*vulgar, profane*” (**Rom 14:14**, **Heb 10:29**)
 - b. Fellowship came to mean “*be in common, share, participate*” (**2 Cor 8:4**)
 - c. It means was common people living in extraordinary love... together

C. It's hard for us to imagine how radically different was this fellowship in NT

1. Tim Woodruff suggests two typical, fictitious early Christian converts

Simon was an artisan from Antioch in Jerusalem for Pentecost and one of the 3000 baptized. For awhile, Simon stayed for awhile in Jerusalem to continue to learn from the apostles, and when did return to Antioch, Simon shocked his family and friends. When Gentiles were accepted into the church, Simon was finally disowned by his family and thrown out of his synagogue. His business suffered because Jews wouldn't buy from a "Gentile-lover." It hurt, but somehow not as much as he would have thought. He was surrounded by new friends, new family and a new commitment.

Junia was a Corinthian who lived like a Corinthian. She heard someone in the marketplace talking about Jesus, and she was impressed with how warmly they spoke; she was more impressed with the story they told. The idea of one God whose Son who died and was raised to life was new, but something about resonated. Faith stirred, and Junia was baptized. Her husband wasn't pleased with her new faith; he beat her and threw her out. Her new Christian friends consoled and comforted her and took her in. Soon she reached to others in need. The church became the family she'd never known. In a world of promiscuity, Christian love was unique in its purity. In the church, Junia found the love of God, a community and commitment of faith.

2. Simon and Junia are not real people, but their choice here was real enough

a. People like them had to choose between their world and God's world

1) When they chose God, they became disenfranchised from their world

2) Focus on fellowship wasn't just option for them; it was a necessity

b. Church was more than a place worship or study— it became their life

D. The word "church" means "assembly or gathering" ("called out" is etymology)

1. **Factoid:** Today church is a "service" while in the NT it was a "gathering"

a. There were large group gatherings- what we usually see as "church"

• **Jerusalem:** "Every day they continued to meet together in temple" ([Acts 2:46](#))

• **Antioch:** "On arriving there, they gathered the church together" ([Acts 14:27](#))

• **Troas:** "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread" ([20:7](#))

b. Most NT gathering were much more small & informal (like small groups)

• *Jerusalem church "broke bread in their homes and ate together..."* ([Acts 2:46](#))

• *Hospitality was frequently commanded of church* ([Rom 12:13,16:23](#), [1 Pet 4:9](#))

• *Leaders in the church must be men known for hospitality* ([1 Tim 3:2](#), [Titus 1:8](#))

2. With Simon and Junia, there was no discussion of whether to go to church

a. Church was their life and their life blood—their family and their friends

b. It was strength for week, service for strong and solace for the hurting.

3. So if we will restore first century church, we must restore this fellowship.

II. Identity: How Do We See Ourselves?

- A. Why does it seem that church was so different for people like Simon and Junia?
1. Perhaps it was because they more clearly saw a difference in their **identity**.
 - a. Their world was **antithetical** to faith— had to choose faith or world
 - 1) For them to accept Christ meant for to turn their backs on their world
 - 2) And their world came down on them hard— so they **needed** church
 - b. Thus their identity as Christians and identification with church was vital.
 2. Is that our problem with fellowship; we are unclear on our identity
 - a. We compartmentalize to point that church really isn't our main identity
 - 1) We spend so much time at work! *Many early Christians were slaves*
 - 2) We have our work at home! *Women spent about 6 hrs day on food*
 - 3) Of course, they didn't have shopping malls or cable TV. *Bingo!*
 - b. The first Christians were forced by a hostile world to flock in fellowship
 - 1) They didn't twiddle their thumbs waiting for Wednesday—had lives
 - 2) They saw the world more clearly for what it was—**enemy & mission**
 - c. And they needed one another to face that world; they needed fellowship!
- B. The NT portrays Jesus disciples as people who don't quite fit into their world
1. Heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 are round pegs in the square hole of world
 - a. Abraham lived his life of faith as “*stranger in a foreign country*” (**11:9**)
 - b. Moses found identity in God, not as “*son of Pharaoh's daughter*” (**11:24**)
 - c. They shared two things—identity in God & being out of step (**11:13-16**)
 2. To live for God in a pagan world means seeing ourselves as exiles on earth.
 - a. Peter tells us to live lives here as strangers in reverent fear (**1 Pet 1:17**)
 - b. We are aliens and strangers in the world that live that way (**1 Pet 2:11**)
 3. At youth rallies, they stressed **peer pressure** (“peer” was where I fished)
 - a. As it turns out, peer pressure is the main pressure that adults face
 - 1) Not peer pressure like teens (*dressing weird or listening to bad music*)
 - 2) Peer pressure like trying desperately to fit into the world around us
 - b. NT assures that the one thing disciples will never do is fit into the world
 - c. If we live as strangers in our world, we'll need to flock w/ other strangers

III. Conclusion

- A. David Lipscomb may be familiar name because of school that bears his name
1. Lipscomb was most prominent leader among us in last part of 19th century
 - a. He was the editor of *Gospel Advocate* at a time when everyone read it
 - b. Some refer to Lipscomb as an “*Editor Bishop*.” He was very influential
 2. Lipscomb lived 1831-1917; his world was shaped by tragedy of Civil War
 - a. Lipscomb was a pacifist & urged Christian neutrality (*very hard to do*)
 - b. Lipscomb later explained his views in his little book ***Civil Government***.
 - 1) He believed Christians shouldn’t vote, hold office or be in military.
 - 2) He saw all human government existing due to rebellion against God
So long as men refuse the rule of God, God ordains they shall be ruled by their own governments and eat the fruit of their own ways and be filled with their own devices. Showing clearly that when men turn from the government of God to their own inventions and governments, then God ordains these governments as means of punishing them for their rebellion
 - c. Governments were ordained only to rule over people not ruled by God
 - d. Those who ruled by God will look radically different from who are not
 3. For Lipscomb, God’s kingdom demands our full attention and allegiance
 - a. We can serve the kingdom of God or the kingdom of man, but NOT both
 - b. I don’t bring this up because all Lipscomb’s applications are right
 - 1) But his view that kingdom of God demands full attention is spot on!
 - 2) More attention we give God’s kingdom, the less we fit into our world
- B. We started out with fellowship and ended with exiles, strangers and Lipscomb
1. What’s the connection? The first Christians gave up everything for Christ
 - a. Their world turned against them, and they were driven together
 - b. More we seek God, less we’re like world, the more we stress fellowship
 - 1) **Old Joke:** Lone Ranger and Tonto surrounded by entire Sioux nation
 - 2) **Lone Ranger:** “*We’re done for*” **Tonto:** “*What mean we, paleface*”
 2. Without one another, there is no way we can live as stranger and pilgrims
 - a. “*Carry each other’s burdens*” (**Ga 6:2**). “*Pray for each other*” (**Ja 5:16**)
 - b. “*Encourage one another*” (**1 Th 5:11**). “*Love each other as...*” (**Jn 15:12**)
 3. **Ponder:** If fail to have this deep, desperate fellowship, might not that mean that, at least to a degree, we have to give God’s kingdom our full attention?