

THE CHURCH
Faithful or Being Redefined
Acts 2:37-47

The New Testament *molded the doctrine* for the life of the church. The **Book of Acts** traces the *application* of that *doctrine* as the *foundation* in the history of the early church.

The new-born church in Acts possessed a *purity of devotion* to the risen Lord unmatched in succeeding generations. The life of this first church was *completely defined* by its unique *identity to Christ*.

Today, still nothing outside the *living Lord, the Spirit, and the Word* can define *life* for the church.

I. THE CHURCH HAS AND IS CHANGING:

“What did you have or do in your church ten years ago that you don’t have or do today?”

Some examples are:

1. **Sunday evening services.** It is amazing how quickly these services have disappeared. Except for Sunday evening services that are an *alternative to* and *replica of* the Sunday morning services, there are fewer and fewer churches meeting on Sunday evening.
2. **Saturday evening services.** As an alternative to Sunday morning services, Saturday evening services have become available...especially for the younger generation.
3. **The stand-and-greet time.** In many churches, this practice has clearly fallen out of favor.
4. **Suit and ties.** Ten years ago, church members expected the males on the platform to wear a suit and tie. Casual dress is now the norm in most churches.

5. **The organ.** This instrument was a standard in many churches ten years ago. It is now unusual to see an organ still played in worship services.
6. **Printed newsletters.** The digital world has come to churches. Most church members *prefer* receiving information digitally today.
7. **Prolonged and frequent business meetings.** Many churches decided to limit the amount of time for business meetings because they became a platform for the most negative and contentious members. One church leader called it their *“monthly fist fight.”*
8. **The name “Sunday School” for Bible study groups in the church.** As the traditional name has fallen out of favor, it has been replaced with *community groups, life groups, home groups, cell groups*, and many other names typically ending in *“groups.”*
9. **Choirs.** Many churches have moved from choirs to praise teams and instrumentalists.
10. **Choir robes.** Even churches that have choirs, the use of choir robes is rare.
11. **A “formal room” or “parlor”.** The parlor is typically a formal room in the church used for special occasions, such as receptions or a bride’s dressing room. In many churches, it became *“the most unused sacred cow in the church.”*
12. **Weekly visitation in homes.** Uninvited guests are no longer as welcome in homes as they once were. Typically today, home visitation programs do more harm than good.
13. **Hymnals.** Hymnals have been replaced with projected words on a screen by many churches.

14. **Wednesday night fellowship meals.** Whether they were cooked and people would pay a nominal amount, or it was a pot-luck meal, but most churches had a meal.
15. **An unintentional approach to recruiting children's workers.** Today most churches do fairly extensive background checks before they allow someone to work in the children's ministry.
16. **Denominational program-driven philosophy of ministry.** In the past, many churches determined most of their entire schedule by programs resourced by their denomination and/or other providers. The programs and materials drove the ministries and the schedule. (RA's...GA's...WMU...Sunday School quarterlies).
17. **Large pulpits.** The big pulpit has been replaced with smaller pulpits or stands. Many pastors even sit while delivering sermons.
18. **Special music/anthems.**
19. **Food pantry.** Many churches have disbanded their food pantries and, instead, contribute to a community food bank. The local church leaders simply did not have the expertise to discern if needs were real.
20. **King James Version.** There have been very few *KJV only* churches the past 25 years.
21. **Regular office hours for ministry staff.** If someone wants to meet with a pastor or other staff member, he or she is likely to make an appointment rather than just drop by during given office hours.
22. **Land lines (phones).** Some churches have done away with them altogether.
23. **Multi-site campuses.**

24. **Smaller worship centers...and facilities.** Where 3,500 up to 10,000 seat worship centers were being built in the 1980's until the early 2,000's...now, most worship centers are typically no larger than 1,500 seats with most in the 500-800 seat capacity.
25. **Singing of the doxology.** At the beginning or end of every service.
26. **Average attendance and participation.** Where the *actively engaged* family would attend on average *three times a week*...today, an *active family* will attend *three times per month*.
27. **Specific ministry facilities.** Family Life Centers... Youth buildings (separated from the main church buildings).

II. THE CHURCH IS BEING REDEFINED:

Culture is not causing churches and denominations to compromise. Churches and denominations are compromising and culture is saying it's okay.

When our *behavior doesn't measure up to our stated values*, we must *either change our behavior*, or *redefine our values...either change our behavior*, or *change the definition of our values*. We redefine our values to *remove the tension* of the conflict...to *make us feel good* about our situation...to *remove guilt*.

In the church today, we have redefined our values to help *relieve the tension between what is...and what we know ought to be*. "*Does God's Word really say that...*"

- **A standard of holiness (I Corinthians 5).**
- **The standard for pastors and ministry leaders (I Timothy 3; Titus 1:6-9; Titus 2:1-2).**
- **Redefining the family.**

- Redefining marriage (**Genesis 2; Ephesians 5**).
 - Membership is no longer important (**The Body of Christ; The Bride of Christ**).
1. It is extremely difficult to make disciples of church members if you don't know where they are.
 2. The way people are brought into a church will show them the expected commitment level for the future.
 3. Those who are leaders in the church set the example of commitment for the rest of the church.
 4. If leaders in the church sporadically show up, the rest of the members will see that and follow suit.
 5. Unfortunately, there are a significant number of Christians who don't see church membership or attendance as important.

III. THE FAITHFUL CHURCH:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved (vs. 42, 44-47)...

The purpose of the church is the same today as it was when the first church was established in the book of Acts:

- **Worship**

- **Discipleship**
- **Missions/Evangelism**
- **Ministry/Service**
- **Fellowship**
- **Prayer.**

Seven Churches in Revelation:

Of the seven churches...six of the seven received commendation and praise...but eventually, five were rebuked. Two were praised without receiving any condemnation for their faithfulness.

- **The message to Ephesus...*The Preoccupied Church*...the church that lost its first love.**

Commendation...

- *Deeds*...a serving and working church.
- *Toil*...a laboring, hard-working church.
- *Perseverance*...a determined and enduring church.
- *You cannot tolerate evil men*...a disciplining church.
- *You put to the test those who call themselves apostles*...a discerning church.

Condemnation...

- They *left their first love*. This implies an intentional, not accidental act of abandonment. (**Ephesians 1:15-16**...love is what Paul praised them for earlier)
- **The message to Smyrna...*The Persecuted Church*...the suffering church.**

Commendation...

- *Tribulation*...pressure...the kind of pressure that a person would feel if a boulder was put on their chest

and the rock was allowed to press down on the chest until one suffocates.

- **Poverty**...means absolute poverty...a beggar's poverty.
- **Blasphemy**...slandered by others.

Condemnation...

- *There is no condemnation to this church...only encouragement.*
- **The message to Pergamum...*The Politically Correct Church*...**the church of compromise.

Commendation...

- *Hold fast to My name*...had conviction.
- *Did not deny My faith*...had courage.
- *My witness*...
- *My faithful one*...

Condemnation...

- *Hold to the teaching of Balaam*...would compromise.
- *Hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans*...perverted grace.
- **The message to Thyatira...*The Prosperous church*...**the church that tolerated Jezebel.

Commendation...

- *Deeds*...a laboring church.
- *Love*...a loving church...but with no discernment.
- *Faith*...a loyal and dependable church.
- *Service*...ministering to others.
- *Perseverance*...long-suffering.
- *Your deeds of late are greater than at first*...endurance.

Condemnation...

- *You tolerate the woman Jezebel*...moral evil (**I Kings 21**)...embraced false teaching...taught that acts of immorality were acceptable in the church.
- **The message to Sardis...*The Powerless Church*...**the church with a name...but dead.

Commendation...

- *They had a name that they were alive*...outward performance.
- *You have a few people who have not soiled their garments*...

Condemnation...

- *You are dead*...they were a dead church.
- *I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God*...
- **The message to Philadelphia...*The Persevering Church*...** the church of the open door.

Commendation...

- *Holy*...(**I Peter 1:15**)
- *True*...
- *Who has the key of David*...(Isaiah 22:22)
- *Deeds*...
- *An open door*...
- *Kept My word*...
- *Have not denied My name*...
- *Kept the word of My perseverance*...

Condemnation...

- *This is the second church where there was no condemnation...only encouragement.*

- **The message to Laodicea...*The Putrid Church*...**the luke-warm church.

Commendation...

- *Nothing good is said about the church at Laodicea...*the only church of the seven that not one single good thing is said about it.

Condemnation...

- *Neither hot nor cold...*lukewarm.
- *Spit you out of My mouth...*

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- Worship styles have changed from the early church...and as long as the Lord tarries, they will continue to change. **Worship is from the heart.** It's not *facilities, programs, or legalistic rituals or performance.*
- **How one affirms and responds to the Word of God will determine their beliefs. One's beliefs determine one's values. And one's values determine their behavior and actions...what they do.** When one's actions are in conflict with what one truly believes...they must either change their behavior or redefine what they believe.
- **Faithfulness is the key to one's continuing relationship and walk with God.** May we be faithful until the day that we stand before Him. It's one thing to know the Savior...*to be saved.* It's something else to come under the *Lordship of Christ.* ([John 14](#)...*heaven.* [John 15](#)...*lordship*).