

The Vital Signs of a Healthy Church

“The church has been subnormal for so long that when we see what is normal, we think it is abnormal.” This statement is important as we come to Acts 2:42-47. Here we see what is normal when a church is healthy. The essence of what we read about in these verses, though some details are historically unique, is a record of what should be the norm in the church. The characteristics of the early church we see in this text shouldn’t be considered extraordinary, but healthy Christianity.

The first vital sign of church health demonstrated in the early church is intensive discipleship. We are told that these believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. They were motivated and committed to learn all that they could from the apostles about Jesus. The believers eagerly listened to them share from first-hand experience what Jesus had said and done and what it all meant. In one sense, what they had was historically unique. They had the apostles, who had been with Jesus throughout his ministry, death, appearances after his resurrection and ascension, teaching them in person. Though we do not have the apostles’ teaching in person, we do have it in print. The New Testament is the divinely inspired and preserved record of what the apostles taught. Are you thirsty to be taught the truth about Jesus found in the New Testament? Is our church full of people who are motivated and committed to learn and live the good news of Jesus and its implications for our lives?

The second vital sign of church health shown here is intimate fellowship. These disciples were devoted to the fellowship and had all things in common, even selling their possessions and sharing in order to meet the needs of others among them. Their fellowship involved being together often and long when attending the temple together and eating meals together in their homes. This kind of fellowship involved hospitality and generosity. This was not communism because it was clearly voluntary and probably temporary. Is there this kind of involvement among the members of our church? Do we spend this kind of time together and bond with other believers in our church because of the gospel we love, as they did?

The next vital sign of a healthy church seen here is inspired worship. We are told they were overcome with awe and characterized by joy, which inspired them to worship God through Christ. Their worship involved three things: communion, prayers and praise when they were together. They were devoted to the breaking of bread. This almost certainly refers to receiving bread and wine as instructed by Jesus to remember and participate by faith in his death. Though this act, they gloried in the death of Christ as their own and their only hope of salvation from the penalty and power of sin. They also prayed and praised God together, inspired by awe and joy.

Increasing membership is the final vital sign we observe among these first believers. These disciples had favor with all the people and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. The membership of this church was growing in number on a daily basis because people were being saved each day. This suggests that salvation and church membership go together. It is also Jesus beginning to build his church, as he had promised. He is building it not only in strength, but also in size. Are we winsome witnesses for Christ, like these disciples? Are we telling people they can be saved by God’s grace, from God’s wrath, and for God’s glory? And do our lives admirably commend the gospel we proclaim? Are we regularly seeing more people glorify God through trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior?

This record of the corporate life of those who became disciples of Jesus on the day of Pentecost gives us a vision of what a healthy church looks like that is compelling and convicting. Lord, do it again!