

Everyone needs to live in real community, but it only exists when God loves, creates, builds, and sustains his chosen community according to his blueprint (true belief, true friendship, true recreation, and true worship), therefore we must whole-heartedly devote ourselves to living in God’s community—the Church.

Introduction –The Church is God’s Chosen People, the Flock in his Care, and Jesus’ Bride. It is the best community for believers to live in, and it is the model for the watching world of what ideal community should be.

I. The Ideal Community (vv. 42-47)

A. Common misconceptions about the Ideal Community

1. **Not communism, socialism, or a commune.** Communistic and socialistic societies enforce communal ownership of productive property and labor products. Communes are small communities whose members agree to commonly share interests and work, and even pool their income for the collective good. Participation in the early church was voluntary, and believers (those born again into new life by the Holy Spirit), were generous with each other, yet they retained ownership of private property (Acts 4:34a; 5:1-4).
2. **Not a house-church movement.** Many believers in recent years have left public institutional churches for small informal meetings in private homes—not intending to plant new growing churches but to remain small. The vast majority of these “house-churches” act like churches in many ways. Nevertheless, for all the good that happens in these gatherings, they do not model the structure of the early church, and lack the oversight and accountability that fosters ideal community.
3. **Not a religious organization of likeminded people.**

B. True Belief: Apostolic Teaching (vv. 42-43)

Not only Bible knowledge, but learning to follow Jesus together. Apostolic teaching includes a minimum set of doctrines to believe (Acts 2:23-24; 3:15; 4:10; 1 Cor 15:1-4), the way to read the whole Bible with Christ at the center (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47), and the command to love God by believing and obeying his Word (John 6:28-29; 14:15; 1 John 3:23-24). We can trust the apostles taught the truth because their signs and wonders give proof.

C. True Friendship: Christian Fellowship (vv. 42, 44-45)

Not only fellowship, but being a family together. The Greek word usually translated “fellowship” is *koinōnia*. Biblical fellowship is costly (even having financial overtones; cf. Phil 1:5). Biblical fellowship is devoted Christian friendship—devotion as committed (even more so) to what we give our families. *Koinōnia* expresses itself in sacrificial friendship, a willingness to share tangible resources with the needy in our Christian community.

D. True Recreation: Sharing Meals (vv. 42, 46)

Not only sharing a table, but sharing life and hope together. Sharing common meals together (in larger and smaller groups) is one way to jointly celebrate the joy of our salvation in Christ. Eating together binds our hearts as one. Eating together is an expression of (and can foster greater experience of) unity, harmony, joy, and sincerity of believers. These are the fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:8, 39; 13:48, 52; 15:3; 16:34)!

E. True Worship: Communal Prayers (vv. 42, 46-47a)

Not only mundane or crisis prayers, but kingdom prayers together. Early Christians worshiped daily. Every day your life should show some evidence of apostolic teaching, Christian friendship, sharing meals together, and prayer. The Christian life is not a once-a-week routine because the Spirit that saves us is at work in our lives every day of the week.

II. How to Participate in the Ideal Community—the Church

A. Recognize your desperate need for community, and that only God can meet your need

No man is an island to himself (Gen 2:18; Eccl 4:12). We all need to belong to others and be needed by others. No community (family, work, club, organization, team, circle of friends) can completely meet this need. Only God can provide true community where you can love and be loved according to your deepest needs (Ps 68:3-6a).

B. Believe the Church is a Jesus-created community, not man-created (v. 47b)

God saved people through the preaching of the gospel and then added them to his Church. Being a church member is the means whereby God continues to save. It is Jesus who continually builds his Church (Matt 16:13-19). Jesus takes converted sinners into his care though the care of his Church. We belong Jesus and his Church (Rom 7:4; 8:9; 1 Cor 6:19-20)!

C. Believe the Church is God's garden for believers' spiritual growth

God's will is your sanctification, i.e., your growth in holiness (Rom 15:15-16; 1 Thess 4:3a; 2 Thess 2:13-14). The Bible always addresses believers in community, not in isolation. Believers can only grow into Christlikeness by growing alongside other believers in the church. We suffer and shrivel as people to the degree we reject Christ's body—the Church (1 Cor 12:12-26).

D. Partner with a Church where Christians are striving for ideal community

It is not enough for a believer to be loosely connected to a church. God wants us to live life together as we strive after knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Rom 12). The Bible describes real people in real relationships with real difficulties and affections toward one another (Rom 16:1-16; 2 Cor 6:1-13; Phil 1:1-11). Yet believers are also instructed to avoid people who claim to believe the gospel but act contrary to it (Rom 16:17-19; 2 Cor 6:14-17; Eph 5:1-10).

E. Devote yourself to Church- and Kingdom-growth on earth, but yearn for heaven

Church-growth is the *spiritual* growth of Christians as they devote themselves to the means of grace (Acts 2:42). Kingdom-growth is *numerical* growth as God adds new believers (Acts 2:47b), and *geographical* growth as Christians spread the gospel to new communities (Acts 1:8; 8:1, 14; 9:31; 15:3), planting churches that will harvest new believers and nourish them in *spiritual* growth. It can be beautiful, satisfying, and joyful to live in ideal community during this lifetime (Acts 20:17-38; Phil 1:8, 21-26), but we must never lose sight of heaven, where ideal community will become reality (Rev 21:1-7).

Conclusion – Has this sermon changed your mind about church, despite all her warts, faults, and sins? Have you come to understand that your need for real, satisfying, loving community can only be met in the Triune God? Do you see that God has blessed just one community where you can grow in God's grace, know God and others, and serve and be served? Are you ready to take that next step to participate wholeheartedly in the ideal community—the Church of Jesus Christ?