

DEVOTED TO THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE

A SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION (5 JULY 2020)

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Call your family together for a Family Devotion. (The time you would have gone to church) Set 60-90 minutes aside for Praise and Worship, Word Reading and Study, Prayer and Breaking of Bread. Encourage the involvement of every family member. The outline below will assist you.

Acts 2:41-47

"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (ESV).

This shows what the people of God were committed to at the beginning; what they devoted themselves to.

I do not believe there is a better passage to begin with than this one if we want to see what the early church was devoted to...

We see the "birth" of the New Testament church here, and how the hearts of people were changed by the Gospel to live for their new ruler - King Jesus. In verse 42, after becoming Christians, these were the things they were devoted to... the Apostles' teaching/doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer...

For all these things the Christians were doing, we are told that they were "devoted to" them. Your translation may have said something different... The NASB says they were "continually devoting themselves" to these things... The NKJV says "they continued steadfastly" in these things. The Greek word used here means to adhere oneself to, to be steadfastly attentive to, to persevere in... No matter how this word is translated, you see the same kind of idea... They gave their lives entirely to the cause of their Messiah - which included the things referred to in this passage. These are things that characterised the lives of the earliest Christians... If you met them or saw them, you could see that they had devoted their lives to do these things.

I would like to focus on the first of these things, the *Apostles Doctrine*, as our devotion for today.

The church in Jerusalem devoted themselves to continue in the Apostle's doctrine, because they are the ones (the Apostles) who Jesus said would give His instructions to His disciples. Let us look at a few passages that show this.

John 16:12-13 - *"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."*

John 14:26 *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."*

Matthew 28: 18-20 *"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

This mission was given first to the Apostles. They are the ones Jesus is talking to here. Their mission was to go and make disciples of Christ through baptism and then teaching Christians the commandments of Christ which would be given to them by the Spirit. This mission is also for us since we have the writings of the Apostles that include what Jesus wanted His people to learn.

It is important to understand that when we refer to the Apostles' doctrine/teaching that it is in fact Jesus' teachings that they are commissioned to pass on.

Acts 1:1-3 NLT *In my first book (Luke) I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach (2) until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. (3) During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.*

Note it says: *"Jesus began to do and teach..."* In other words what the Apostles did and teach and the church should do and teach is a continuation of what Jesus started (began).

One more passage:

Ephesians 2:19-20 *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone..."*

The foundation of the church includes the Apostles. I believe this is implying their teaching is the foundation that the church is built upon. They are the authority that Christ put into place, by the Spirit, to teach His will and to build His church. Jesus is King and the Apostles are His ambassadors and representatives.

Whenever there were questions about what to believe and practice among the churches, Christians went to the Apostles and their writings. No matter what the discussion was, whether it be the content of the Gospel, administering discipline in the church, taking care of needs among the brethren, what to do during worship, or how to organise worship, they looked to the Apostles. They received the teachings of the Apostles in all these areas, and they devoted themselves to these teachings. This is what we see in the New Testament and the years following the Apostles' deaths. Their writings were the standard for doctrine and practice. And the same must be the case today.

It cannot be stressed enough that if we want to be pleasing to God today as Christians, we must devote ourselves to reading and studying scripture. If we want to be Christians like they were and work and worship as churches in the New Testament did and to live our lives as they did, we need to go to the writings of those who gave the commandments of Jesus Christ for His people. This is so important to stress because there are so many who claim they believe in Christ out there that do not devote themselves to the Apostles doctrine, but instead base many of their beliefs and practices on other things.

Some examples:

- Feelings. No matter where we believe these feelings are coming from, they are not our source of authority. Some believe that the Holy Spirit gives them certain feelings to show God's will for their lives.

Trusting our emotions to guide us, even if we believe the Spirit is putting them there, is dangerous. Our emotions can lead us in the wrong direction and cannot be trusted.

- Other people - family members, preachers, elders/pastors... No matter who it is, what we are taught needs to be compared to what the Apostles taught before it is accepted.
- What the Old Testament writers commanded Israel to do. The Old Testament is important. It teaches us a lot about God and how He interacts with His people, and there are many great principles within its pages that we can apply to our lives. The Old Testament also must be submitted to the teachings of the Apostles. Jesus points us to them to tell us what He commands us to do under the New Covenant that the church is a part of.
- What is not said by the Apostles. This point probably seems strange, but it is the case that so many arguments that are made today are made based on the silence of the Apostles on a certain matter. You may have heard such arguments before, arguments such as, "They didn't say NOT to," or, "The Apostles didn't say it is a sin to do ____." It may be the case that the Apostles did not condemn a certain practice or did not say something is a sin... But this does not make that thing pleasing to God!

The Apostles show us what is pleasing to God under the New Covenant. They give the commandments of Christ that His disciples need to follow, and the Apostles show in their examples what kind of mindset and lifestyle are pleasing to the Lord. Only when we look to their teachings for our guidance for our lives as individuals and for our work and worship together as a church family can we say that we are a New Testament Church, a church without man-made additives or changes, like the church that was founded on the day of Pentecost.

CONCLUSION

My question for you as we bring this lesson to a close is this: (Discuss as a family)

1. Are you devoted to the Apostles' doctrine as our earliest brothers and sisters were? Do you determine in your heart to continue steadfastly in what they command you and teach you, no matter how difficult the demands Christ makes on your life are? Could you say that you have given your life to their teachings and that their teachings are where you look to know what is pleasing to God in your life today?
2. This will often show in how much time we spend within their writings. How much time are you spending in God's Word, and what kind of noticeable impact is it really making in your life?
3. On the day of Pentecost, Peter used the keys that Jesus gave him to open the door to the kingdom of God. Acts 2:36-37 ESV *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* (37) *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

In Peter's sermon, he tells them, and us what we must do to be saved. ***"Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*** Three thousand people responded that day.

Share your testimonies on how you became a believer with each other. Give an opportunity for those who would like to surrender their lives to Christ.