

Christian Community

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House of David
MINISTRIES

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

I hear a lot these days about what our Christian Community should look like. The book of Acts is often cited as the Biblical model of what the early Christian church resembled. It is written, *"And they [the church] continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:43-45 NKJV).*¹ Now, this would have been a Christian community to behold. The church members prayed, took communion, and studied the word of God together as one family.

The church walked in the power of the Holy Spirit with signs, wonders, and miraculous healings, and the church members shared their material and financial resources with each other so that each could fulfill their God-given calling. Thus, the narrative in the book of Acts continues:

"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47). The early church was truly reflecting God's light in the world, and people took notice. And the church offered something the world could never provide, and for this reason, many gave their lives to the Lord. I believe people today are also desperately searching for something more from this world, and that something is the love of God.

Yeshua gave the church His model for the Christian community when He said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). "And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23). "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).*

Paul said it like this, *"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3).*

The first-century church operated in the residual outpouring of the Holy Spirit that fell on the Day of Pentecost. But what did the church look like one hundred years later?

There is an epistle from the second-century church called *The Manner of Christians*.ⁱⁱ It describes what the Christian community looked like as the church grew and expanded throughout the Roman empire. We read in part:

"For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity."

"The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines."

"But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life."

"They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers."

"They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven."

"They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all."

"They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified."

"They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers."

"When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred."

I believe the narrative speaks for itself, but I want to highlight a few points. First, there was something unique about these Christian men and women that set them apart from the world they lived in. Second, they were ordinary people, yet they were seen as above reproach in their conduct and mannerism. It reminds me of what the Lord said to Abraham, *"I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless"* (Genesis 17:1). Third, their allegiance was clearly to the Kingdom of Heaven. Still, they did not despise, nor were they persuaded by this earthly realm and its fallen condition. And fourth, lastly, persecution was expected.

Tertullian, an early Christian author, gives us another picture of the Christian community in his second-century writing called *The Apology*. It reads in part:

"We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope. We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications. This violence God delights in. We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation."

"We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful. However it be in that respect, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and no less by inculcations of God's precepts we confirm good habits."

"In the same place also exhortations are made, rebukes and sacred censures are administered. For with a great gravity is the work of judging carried on among us, as befits those who feel assured that they are in the sight of God; and you have the most notable example of judgment to come when any one has sinned so grievously as to require his severance from us in prayer, in the congregation and in all sacred intercourse. The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honor not by purchase, but by established character."

"There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund."

"For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession."

"But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death."^{iv}

After reading these two epistles from the early church, we can see a difference from the Christianity of our modern Western culture. Are we ordinary people who seek first the Kingdom of God? Or are we comfortable, complacent, and isolated from the world around us, thinking of

ourselves more highly than our neighbor because we are assured of our salvation or have attained a certain level of financial prosperity?

Has Western Christianity been focused on building a Biblical Christian community, or have we become preoccupied with fulfilling our selfish ambitions and personal gains? And, has the Western church been more attentive to informing people about Christ rather than introducing them to Him?

I believe we have, maybe unintentionally, implemented a Greek model for knowledge-based instruction rather than the Hebraic model designed to impart skills for serving God. The Greek model says, "To each his own." The Hebrew model says, "Love one another and deny thyself."^{iv}

The Greek model says, "believe in Jesus, who you have just learned about." The Hebrew model says "know your Savior who knows you and loves you," for it is written, "*Now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine*" (Isaiah 43:1).

We know from scripture that God is not looking for people to know about Him. God is looking for people to *know* Him, and knowing Him requires us to encounter His love and then model His character and imitate His behavior. This characteristic is developed through discipleship—which again is a Hebrew model. It is written, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*" (1 John 4:7-8).

God's standard for our Christian community is love, and love is never about the self but always about serving and giving selflessly. As it is written, "*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up*" (1 Corinthians 13:4). From this verse, it is evident that pride is the greatest obstacle to the church of receiving and displaying the love of God.

Many in the church are crying for revival to break out in the world. They are asking God to fix the lost and save our nation. I am not. Instead, I am praying for an awakening in the church to the love of Christ because only then will the church display the manner of Christlikeness the world is desperately seeking. When the world sees Christ in us, the lost will be saved. And when the lost get saved, then maybe God will use these men and women to transform our nation.

Yeshua said, "*By this [demonstration of my love] all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 15:8). "*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself*" (John 12:32). And how are we to lift up Christ? By loving each other as He has loved us.

Yes, we are called to worship and praise the Lord. But in moving away from the individualistic and self-focused western model, where I become my own Temple, we need to surrender to the Hebrew model that teaches us that we are a community of believers and the family of God who

collectively are the Temple. Family members love each other unconditionally, despite our differences and petty disagreements.

Paul said, *"Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building... Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3:8-16). Notice the plurality. The workers labor as one unit, and the field comprises many plants that make one crop.

Additionally, the Temple itself was assembled from many uniquely carved stones. It is written, *"Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit"* (Ephesians 2:20-22). Here again, Paul spoke about the Christian community being the house and Temple of God, and not the individual church members living in their own home.

In Judaism, it is prohibited for a Jew to enter a church, even to attend a friend's wedding or funeral. Why? The rabbis say that "Because Judaism sees faith and worship as something very powerful and palpable. You cannot enter a church without some aspect of the church's religious experience entering you. To argue that a church is nothing more than a building is to trivialize the potent atmosphere of a house of worship."^v If the Jewish people hold such high regard for church buildings, how much more should they revere and esteem the earthly vessels that collectively house the manifest presence of God Himself? We, the church, are that Temple and community of the living God.

It is difficult to preach that tribulation is the only thing required to bring about humility within God's people. Nevertheless, I believe we can choose to humble ourselves, for it is written, *"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves..."* (2 Chronicles 7:14). The church in America is in desperate need of such repentance and humbling. We need to implement a restored Hebraic model that does not exclusively focus on the Greek method of educating God's people but disciple the church in Godly instruction necessary to live peacefully and lovingly in a community of believers. What I call "Christian community." Even more so, we need the love of God to Divinely unite the church through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, let us pray, *"When the [the church is] as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when [we] lifted up [our] voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and [praise] the Lord, saying: For He is good, For His mercy endures forever, [then] the house, the [Temple] of the Lord, [will be] filled with a cloud"* (2 Chronicles 5:13).

Christianity is all about us, the church, becoming a community of God's people, joining together in prayer, bible study, communion, evangelism, and just about every facet of daily life, including the obligation to care for widows, orphans, and the poor amongst us.^{vi} In the words of John Fenn from Church Without Walls International, he said, "See what I see, many small churches and ministries investing in relationships, walking in love, pouring their lives into each other; this

is where the Spirit is moving today. There is a revolution taking place in my body, a revolution of relationships, discipleship, and love. This will affect whole communities and economies."^{vii} And I believe this revolution of love will bring about the greatest harvest of souls the world has ever seen.

Amen!

ⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱ Excerpts from The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus - Chapter V. Approx. 130-200 A.D.

ⁱⁱⁱ Excerpts from Tertullian. The Apology. Approx. 197-220 A.D.

^{iv} Greek vs. Hebrew Education. HeartofWisdom.com.

^v Shurpin, Yehuda. *Why Can't Jews Attend Church Funerals?* Chabad.org.

^{vi} Proverbs 22:9, Matthew 19:21, Galatians 2:10, James 1:27.

^{vii} Farias, Bert. *May God's Underground Church in America Arise.* CharismaNews.com.