

# State of the Church

Acts 2:46-47, 1 Peter 4:8-9, Romans 12:9-13

We live in a time of societal breakdown. Our institutions, authorities, and trusted figures have failed and crumbled in astonishing ways, making it obvious that we need a savior. David asks if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do (Ps. 11:3)? Because the Lord is on the throne in His holy temple, we can look to Him. He has given us His word through the Lord Jesus Christ and so we have something to believe, something to stand on, and something to do. In a culture of increasing alienation and hostility, we are to show the world the love of God by our love for one another.

## Summary of the Texts

The example and exhortation of hospitality ties these texts together. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church, miraculously empowering the preaching of the gospel in many languages (dialektos, Acts 2:6). Three thousand people repented of their sins and were baptized, and they continued meeting daily in the temple and breaking bread from house to house (Acts 2:46). Corporate worship and then fellowship over a meal have always characterized the faithful church. We don't sentimentalize the life of the early church, but we want to mark and imitate these signs of health. Peter writes to the "pilgrims of the diaspora" who are grieved by all kinds of trials, including the "end of all things" in the destruction of the temple soon to take place (1 Pet. 1:1, 6, 4:7). During this chaos, he tells them, "*Above all, have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.' Be hospitable without complaining*" (1 Pet. 4:8-9). Fervent love covers a multitude of offenses. Covering does mean pretending it didn't happen; it's showing mercy by forgiving the same way God has forgiven you. Fervent love is both earnest, sincerely wanting the Lord to bless someone else in part through your action, and enduring. Peter's command to be hospitable without complaining is an example of fervent love. You have a reason to complain but choose not to. Paul tells the believers in Rome to love without hypocrisy, hate evil, and cling to what is good (v. 9). Kindness should be exhibited in brotherly love, showing honor to each other (v. 10). This requires effort, and it's an effort to serve the Lord, joyful in hope, patient in trouble, continuing in prayer, generous to meet the needs of the saints, and given to hospitality (vv. 11-13). "Given" could be translated seeking or pursuing, something sought in an intentional way.

## All Things Consist in Christ

These passages describe the kind of community that results from being in communion with Christ: "*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 Jn. 1:7). Outside of Christ there is no lasting community. People created in God's image who have no saving knowledge of Christ still enjoy friendship, family, marriage, and so on by common grace, by the fact that God in His kindness gives it to them. But because all things consist in Christ (Col. 1:17) and are designed to function in glad submission to Him, the further people and cultures get from Him the more these things fall apart. This is what we are witnessing today. Jesus describes those who depart from Him as weeping and gnashing their teeth (Matt. 8:12, 13:28). Paul describes unbelief this way: "*For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another*" (Tit. 3:3). Before 1994 our nation was positive toward Christianity, and we once repented of judging people by the color of their skin rather than by the content of their character. That is a biblical standard. But now Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies require colleges and companies to do the opposite. Sin is identified in "whiteness" or "maleness" or "patriarchy" and Asian minorities are simply ignored and discriminated against. The president of Harvard won't condemn and stop antisemitism at her school and hasn't been fired. Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and other historically great cities—our centers of wealth and industry—are experiencing record murders, thefts, overdoses, and homelessness not

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due to foreign invasion but because of our own laws and policies. There are people working at Children's Hospital in Seattle who just a few years ago would have loudly condemned "gender-affirming" services on children as young as nine years old who now advocate for it. Jesus says the church is the salt of the world. We preserve stuff as the gospel goes forward, or we don't and are trampled by men. It's a fundamental hypocrisy for the teaching ministry of the church not to discern the times and speak the truth in love (Lk. 12:56; cf. 1 Chron. 12:32).

## The Practice of Hospitality

It's easy to be overwhelmed and made cynical by what is going on, and easy in a different way to choose the false and temporary bliss of ignorance. Scripture tells us to think like mature disciples and to take deliberate action. Hospitality is literally "love of stranger", and it means opening your home and life to those you don't know well or at all. God showed us this hospitality when He first called us to Himself, through the waters of baptism, into His house, to eat at His table in communion through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father's Son went into the exile of death so that we could come back to life, be adopted as His children, and dwell in His house forever. Showing hospitality is not trying to impress your guest. The author of Hebrews says, "*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels*" (13:2), referring to Abraham (Gen. 18:2). He didn't have time to clean the house, only hustle get some food ready for the men who turned out to be angels with great news. The goal of hospitality is simply to bless someone else with what you have, to love them in a small way. It might be nice to clean the house but the main thing you are giving is yourself, so it's far more important to clean your spiritual house. You want to live in such a way that if Christ knocks on the door you don't have to tell Him it's not a good time to come in because everyone is out of fellowship.

## The Power of Hospitality

We might think of hospitality as a gifting or strength, and surely it is. But it's also a duty for all believers. Similarly, some people are called and gifted evangelists (Eph. 4:11), but everyone has to be ready to give reason for the hope that is in them (1 Pet. 3:15). Not everyone has the same ability or time to host others, but everyone can greet and welcome people, ask about life and health, find opportunities to serve, and so on. If you're a student you can befriend your classmates and make them know you're glad to be with them. Wherever you are, you can "host" your neighbor by taking an interest in them. At huge churches it's hard to know anyone, and at small churches it's awkward to talk to people you feel like you should know. Love overcomes all of this which is why we Jesus blessing massive crowds, small groups of disciples, and individuals. He asks questions, figures out needs, gives, and speaks the truth in love. Jesus lived and died for us so that He could be with us through the person of the Holy Spirit and eventually face to face. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Hospitality, community, and fellowship flow directly from the loving presence of God. By it He says, "I am with you and glad to be." From this fellowship we are sent out into an estranged world with the power of the gospel of reconciliation.