

# Restoration Revisited (3): What Is the Point of Church?

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## I. Introduction

- A. Francis Chan (*Letters to the Church*) tells of talking to his youngest child
1. He asked her about her upcoming birthday and her birthday party
    - a. He asked, “*What if for your birthday party, all that was was a little cake*”
      - 1) We’d have no games, no prizes, no entertainment, no fancy food
      - 2) If it was about hanging out with you, how many would come? 2-3
    - b. Then he asked, “*What if I rented out Dave & Busters for a night?*”
    - c. Unlimited game tokens, food and prizes? How many would come?
  2. What if he rent out the restaurant/arcade and whole school came?
    - a. He says to his daughter, “*Look at all these here to enjoy/honor you*”
    - b. That would be almost insulting; they aren’t here for her but the party
- B. Who have we come here today to honor? Or are we just here for the party?
1. Art recently told me of driving past a church that had clowns out front!
    - a. I started to say. “*They were having an elders meeting.*” I didn’t!
    - b. Why would a church have clowns... smoke machines, T-shirt cannon
      - 1) Why? They’re trying to attract families (we could do better, right?)
      - 2) They want people to come to the party but then meet God in process
  2. But then the kingdom of God is not a party, right? (**Matt 22:2-3**)
    - a. Do we think that a somber, subdued church equals a spiritual one?
      - 1) Tony Campolo tells of visiting a old church with kids from retreat
      - 2) Pastor, “*Make a joyful noise...*” One kids let out a whoop! (*Troy?*)
    - b. The kingdom is a party, but it’s a party thrown to honor the Son!
      - 1) We have to decide what forms and formats best honor the Son
      - 2) Maybe clowns and smoke machines help... maybe not so much
  3. Our series is *Restoration Revisited*; what does it mean to be NT church
    - a. It doesn’t mean we look like NT church... or their forms and formats
      - 1) It does mean capturing their power and passion... maybe their party
      - 2) Why did they come together? What was the point of their meetings?
    - b. What should our party look like? It sure doesn’t look like theirs!
    - c. What we’ll notice today is the church’s FORMS vs it’s FUNTION

## II. Forms vs Function: Who Moved the Church

- A. The church in Acts 2 met both together at Temple and in private homes
  - 1. As the church moved into Gentile areas, it met in “*house churches*”
    - a. In Acts 16, the church at Philippi had its start in Lydia’s house
    - b. Paul’s greetings to/from Priscilla/Aquila (Acts 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19)
    - c. Where did Paul think that the Colossians met? (Col 4:15, Phile 2)
  - 2. Church wasn’t a building; it was 20-30 people in someone’s home
    - a. There was no Sunday School, no greeters in the lobby, no bulletin
    - b. How does that change the dynamic between their church and ours?
      - 1) **First**, you can’t skip church or sneak out without being missed
      - 2) **Second**, can’t just sit there (sleep); you get called on or called out
      - 3) **Third**, no one sees participation as leadership (*passing the supper*)
      - 4) **Fourth**, likely few Sunday-only members; there was risk involved
- B. What happened to completely change the form and format of assemblies?
  - 1. Constantine legalized Christianity with the edict of Milan in AD 313
    - a. Soon Christianity was not only legal but official religion of Rome
    - b. Pagan temples were given to churches (*were first church buildings*)
    - c. Empire paid people to be baptized; do you think that worked?
  - 2. Well, it didn’t make disciples, but it made the grow... and change
    - a. Worship gradually came to be the led by religious professionals
      - 1) You don’t want pagans sharing the teaching or leading prayer
      - 2) People didn’t know worship songs, so you had singers sing them
    - b. Worship became less participation; it became religious theater
    - c. And what if the crowd outgrows meeting place? Build new one
  - 3. That changed not only the nature of our meetings; it changed church
    - a. **Theater**: Went form a place of shared lives to a religious show
      - 1) Want someone in asking you, “*What’d he say?*” (*Neither does Lynn!*)
      - 2) Might church be better if we could talk? (*no grumbling about preacher*)
    - b. **Altar**: In the first churches, they shared meal and table fellowship
      - 1) Family table was replaced by a holy place where you are silent
      - 2) What if someone asked, “What are we doing?” Like get hushed!

### III. Form vs Function Today

- A. What does all this have to do with price of peas in Peoria?
1. Is the point that we sell the building and start meeting in homes?
    - a. Some churches are indeed doing that, but that isn't really the point?
    - b. Being NT church doesn't mean recapturing their forms or formats
      - 1) We don't have to sing antiphonal chants, but we must PRAISE God
      - 2) We don't have to travel by boat; we must GO into all the world
      - 3) We must worship "*decently and in order*," but not in their ORDER
      - 4) OK we start EXACTLY at 10:30? Paul says, "*Wait on each other*."
  2. To be the NT church, we must seek to fulfill the function for church
    - a. Our HOW may be very different, but we follow the same WHAT
    - b. We've made up new HOW's (*Sunday School, zone program, potluck*)
      - 1) They all seek a NT WHAT's; each church will be different in forms
      - 2) If a church thinks clowns fit NT function, I say "*Bring in the clowns*"
  3. But what if the FORM of church gets in the way of those FUNCTIONS
    - a. NT churches had a fellowship meal in the middle of communion
    - b. At Corinth, that got in the way! Paul, "*That's not the Lord's Supper*"
    - c. Had to change FORM (love feast) to fit FUNCTION (fellowship)
- B. What was the FUNCTION of the meetings of NT churches? ([Acts 2:42](#))
1. I think that is a pretty good summary of what the church did together
    - a. **Apostle's Teaching**: Why did out-of-towners stay? To learn more.
    - b. **Fellowship**: They did more than share time in foyer ([Acts 2:44-45](#))
    - c. **Break Bread**: Likely refers to both communion and eating ([2:46](#))
    - d. **Prayer**: They constantly prayed together as church ([Acts 4:24, 29](#))
  2. Those are WHAT's, not HOW's; they are FUNCTIONS, not FORMS
    - a. **Teaching**: Should we continue apostles teaching? How? ([Acts 20:7](#))
      - 1) I read an article in CT that argued for "*longer and better sermons*"
        - a) Someone sent me an article that said we need to get rid of sermons
        - b) People learn better in focused discussion... and won't come to class!
      - 2) We can decide which format is best, but we MUST teach God's word
      - 3) Change for sake of change? Keep the same for sake of tradition?

- b. **Fellowship:** Does the form of how we do church get in the way?
  - 1) Fellowship means sharing as in the sharing of lives, time & resources
    - a) We supposed to be more concerned about one another's needs (**Phil 2**)
    - b) Does the way we do church teach us what the back heads look like
  - 2) You can't find a verse where the of the church is doing religious duty
  - 3) We come to encourage one another to love and good works (**Heb 10**)
- c. **Breaking Bread:** We do have communion every week, right?
  - 1) We've got this one, right? We do communion every week, right?
    - a) What does the cross mean to you? How does Supper connect you?
    - b) I don't know because we don't have a forum where we share that!
  - 2) How did Jesus institute the Supper? What was its format?
    - a) They had a conversation; he talked with disciples about its meaning!
    - b) When Jesus took the bread and cup he didn't just pray; he talked
  - 3) What if someone was confused in church, "*What's with the snack?*"
    - a) They would get shushed, right? They'd get that evil look we give.
    - b) What better time to talk about the meaning of the cross than then?
  - 4) Communion is not just a sharing with Christ; it is a sharing together
- d. **Prayer:** Does the form that prayer takes when in church get in way?
  - 1) Prayer was the engine that drove church in the first century
    - a) When Peter was arrested and in prison, the church prayed together
    - b) They prayed so hard that they didn't let him in when he showed up
  - 2) We've turned prayer into invocation and benediction—open and close
  - 3) Are we doing church on our knees like they did in the first century?

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. What does all this have to do with the price of peas in Peoria?
  - 1. We're getting ready to reboot our small group program
    - a. This isn't about replicating some NT form; it is about function
    - b. There are some things that Sunday morning church does well
    - c. There are some areas where it gets in our way of NT functions
  - 2. We want these groups to help us to be more like the NT church
- B. What reason is there for you not to be a part of this effort?