

- ***READ ACTS 2:42-47*** In 1974, McDonald's was "the place" when it came to fast food burger joints. Demand was so high that the chain cooked its burgers in mass all the exact same way. Obviously, people were fine with that for quite a while since McD's was so successful. However, Burger King came to the realization that people might rather have a burger that doesn't feature ketchup, mustard, and onion. This led to their strong new slogan which said, "Have it Your Way." For BK, this was a brilliant move that forced nearly all other fast food restaurants to change the way they did business.
- While this mentality of desiring to have everything given to us just how we want it might be appropriate for the food and dining business, the reality is that this ought not be our mindset in how we approach the area of religion, faith, and church. In fact, what I see here in **Acts 2:41-47** is not a mind set of people wanting to have everything their way. Instead, what I see is a group of people coming together for a common purpose that is outside of themselves. Their focus was on the Lord and pleasing Him through faithful service and showing love towards their fellow man.
- This is the type of attitude that we must have if we want to be a people who are growing mightily and prevailing in our faiths and in their church. We must be a people who are not allowing for a "Consumer Church" mentality to creep into our minds and into this place. Sadly, we see this type of mentality all around us. We see people who are looking to have a church experience that is completely based upon having it their way. We are going to begin our study by looking at how this mindset is manifested, and then we will conclude by looking what it actually means to belong to a local church, what that demands of us, and what the true benefit is.

I. How the "Consumer Church" mentality is manifested:

A. People approach church as a place that should serve them.

1. What I mean by this is that there are many people who are looking for a church that operates much more like a service organization than simply a body of believers working towards the goal of getting to heaven. This type of mentality really shouldn't surprise us considering how things work in this country. None of us would even begin to try to argue that we are not extremely blessed in the opportunities that we are all provided in this country. While this is something that I absolutely appreciate about where we live, the reality is that these opportunities are often not the only thing given to us. Sometimes we are given success by simply being born into certain families, economic statuses, or situations. There are many who don't have to work very hard for what they have, and this provides the perfect opportunity for an "entitlement" mentality to creep in and take hold.
2. If people are given so many good things in life by others then why should that be any different when it comes to churches? If everyone around me has been put onto this earth to serve my every want and need then why would churches be any different? With this type of mentality then why should it surprise us that people are coming to churches looking to have some desire fulfilled or itch scratched? Instead of people coming into a local church body to see how they can contribute, they are coming to be served in some sort of capacity. This "Consumer Church" mentality is simply a result of the culture in which we live.
3. Therefore, it shouldn't surprise us when churches catch onto this and their leadership begins to play into the mentality of those who are coming to them to be served. Every church wants to be as large as possible, right? I certainly want for this church to grow and grow numerically to the point where we are busting at the seams, but the question becomes...what are we willing to do in order to make this happen? Are we going to focus so much on numerical growth that we are willing to give into this type of mentality where people are only coming to the church so that they can consumer some sort of good or service? This is what many around us are doing, and it is only intensifying this "Consumer Church" mentality.

B. People look for churches that offer and operate in the ways that most fit their desires.

1. This is one reason why we have so many churches that look, teach, and operate in different ways. If you know me at all then you know that I am definitely not one who believes or teaches that every congregation has to look exactly alike or do things in the exact same way, but there is a pretty good pattern revealed to us in the New Testament (even here in **Acts 2:41-47**) of how a church belonging to Christ ought to operate. This simple pattern, along with the teachings of the Apostles, has been taken, crumpled up, and thrown in the trash by many religious groups because the people want to be simple consumers, and they will go to whichever church best fits what they want.
2. And they, being the people in general, all seemingly want different things in different areas. Some want a church whose worship is concert style with the band, the lights, and the whole nine yards. Others want a church that is a more formal type of worship. Some want a church that offers every service under the sun whether it be mom's day out programs, after school programs, sport leagues, etc. Some people aren't too fond of strong teaching from the Biblical text. They'd much rather have motivational talks about how to live fulfilling lives. People are looking for churches that will be there to serve their needs and meet their desires and preferences. If a church doesn't offer what they want or meet their desires then they will simply go looking elsewhere until they find it.
3. This is why we have churches that openly and proudly advertise themselves as being "a church for people who don't like church." If you don't like congregational worship then come enjoy our concert! If you don't like teaching that convicts then come hear our pep talks. If you want to have all of your physical, social, and recreational needs fulfilled then come let us do that! They are simply playing into the entitled "I want it my way" mentality of many people in the world. This whole circumstance has simply turned belonging to a local church into something much more akin to belonging to a country club. You come, join, pay some dues, and then sit back and relax as you are served in a variety of ways. This simply is not what we see when it comes to how first century disciples and churches operated.

II. Belonging to a local church...

A. means committing to adopting an attitude of servitude.

1. Those who make up local churches are those who have first of all given themselves to Christ Jesus as disciples. We are people who have recognized our broken nature and condition. We have come to the realization of what Jesus has done for us by dying on the cross for our sins. He died so that we might live. However, our desire to follow Him demands that we must give up everything of ourselves in order to be as He would have us to be.
2. This means that we must die to ourselves. This was such a big part of Jesus's teachings and ministry that all three synoptic Gospel writers include an instance of Jesus teaching what it means to be a true disciple of His. While I appreciate all of their recordings of such things, I am most appreciative of Luke's account for including a part that is not seen in Matthew or Mark's Gospel. It is one tiny word that carries so much weight. Luke writes in **Luke 9:23**, "And He was saying to them all, ***"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."*** That small word "daily" shows us that this is something that must fully encompass our lives. We must fully give ourselves to the will of Jesus. We must be willing to do things only according to His way, and His way is the way of servitude.
3. We know that Paul writes in **Philippians 2:3-8** that we are to have the same mindset of Christ in being willing to put other's needs before our own. Jesus serves as that example in coming to earth to die for our sins. Jesus Himself stated that even He came to this earth not to be served but to serve others. (**Matthew 20:28**) If Jesus Himself wasn't going to make everything about

Himself then how could we possibly feel as if we can make it about all about ourselves. However, Jesus didn't just teach this concept through example, but He straight-up taught that we must be servants of others if we have any desire of finding success in His kingdom. **(Luke 22:23-27)** My belonging to a local church isn't about coming to join a group that will wait upon my every want and need, but it is about belonging to a group where we are all looking out for one another and making sure that others are cared for above ourselves. This is exactly what can be seen in the church that is described in **Acts 2:41-47**.

B. means being a part of a group of people seeking to glorify God according to His will.

1. While those who possess a "Consumer Church" mentality want to make the work of the church all about them, the reality is that our faith and spiritual focus must be on glorifying God according to His will and desires. Unfortunately, this seems to have been a struggle of man for a very long time. We all remember back to Cain and Abel and how Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God while Cain's was not. **(Genesis 4:3-5)** We might not know exactly what it was that made Cain's sacrifice displeasing to God other than Abel's being offered by faith, but we know that it was done in such a way that God didn't not have regard for it.
2. Additionally, we can look to the poor examples of Nadab and Abihu offering strange fire to the Lord **(Leviticus 10:1-3)**, Israel's golden calf **(Exodus 32)**, Saul's unauthorized **(I Samuel 13:1-4)** and disobedient **(I Samuel 15:1-31)** sacrifices, the less than best sacrifices of **Malachi 1**, and the worship that was not edifying in **I Corinthians 12-14**. From nearly the front cover of our Bibles to the back of our Bibles, we find that worship and service to God must be done according to the will and desire of God. It isn't about pleasing ourselves. It isn't about doing things our way or the easiest way. It is all about doing things according to what we can reasonably believe God wants based upon the inspired text of Scripture.
3. From these examples I want to draw a few conclusions:
 - a) There is such thing as worship that God is not pleased with. Not all worship is pleasing to God simply because we offer it up to Him. We must be willing to set aside our likes and dislikes in order to embrace worship that the the Text indicates is acceptable to God. I very well might like instrumental accompaniment with singing better than *acapella*, but that doesn't matter if we conclude from the New Testament that disciples in the first century worshipped without the use of instruments. I'm not worshipping to appease myself, but I am worshipping to give honor and glory to God.
 - b) Worship and service to God is only good when it is accepted by God. It doesn't matter how we feel about it. We could be filled with all of the warm and fuzzies in the world, but if God is not pleased with what we are doing then we are wasting time and energy.
 - c) Worship and service to God is about more than simply "doing the right thing." There must be heart and soul that is poured into what we are doing for the Lord. **(I Corinthians 13:1-3)** We must embrace to our very hearts a desire to submit ourselves fully to do those things that we believe to be pleasing to God. We should desire to worship God in spirit and truth. **(John 4:24)** Anything less than our best full-hearted worship and service to God will only hurt us and leave God dissatisfied and unaccepting of our worship and service.
 - d) The bottom line is that my worship and service to God isn't about myself. It is about lifting up the almighty name of God, and however he desires that to be done must be the way that we do it regardless of what we might naturally desire to do. Its not about what I can gain from worship, but it is about offering up our hearts, souls, and lives before the almighty God of heaven who not only created us, but who has redeemed us through the giving of His Son on the cross for our sins.

C. benefits us in our efforts to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

1. This is so often what we miss in this discussion. We must give attention and focus to what we should be doing and how we should be doing it. We have to give a lot of attention to combatting the idea that the church should be all about different ways, but the reality is that we are served in many ways by being a part of a local group of disciples who have joined themselves together in purpose and work.
2. While it IS NOT about me, the reality is that God has created the church with us in mind. He knew in His all-knowing mind that we would be better off being joined together with people of like faith who are striving for the same goal of living lives that are pleasing to God. He knew that it would be good for us to make a habit of assembling ourselves together as is stated in **Hebrews 10:24,25**. He knew that our coming together would help encourage to live faithful lives to God. He knew that this great support system would benefit us so greatly when life becomes difficult and we are tempted to be overcome with struggles and lose faith.
3. This, again, can be clearly seen in what is found in **Acts 2:41-47**. Through these disciples being committed to the Apostles' teachings that would lead them closer to God, through their spending much time together in worship, through their time spent together in fellowship as brethren, and through their serving of the needs of one another...this church thrived and grew not just in number but in strength, as well. The focus was all on God and others, but they still benefitted from being a people who had their priorities in line. They were determined to be servants and producers instead of consumers simply looking to be served.

The same blessings and promises remain for us. If we will commit ourselves to being people who are not seeking to be served, but who are seeking to serve God and others then we will be exactly as God would have us to be. If we are willing to humble ourselves to only worship and serve with full hearts and in ways that can be found without Apostolic writings and traditions then we can have confidence that our worship is being accepted by God. While the focus is first and foremost on God, the reality is that we will be like the first century Christians and benefit in the same ways. We too will be a people who are growing mightily and prevailing to the glory and honor of the great eternal God who awaits that day when all of the faithful will be glorified with Him for all of eternity in that great home of heaven.