

## Episode 5 - Community

**Matt Troupe:** [00:00:07] Hello, welcome to Episode 5 of the Free Grace Church Membership podcasts. In this episode we're going to be talking about community. No doubt you have been to a wedding and usually at a wedding the bride and groom exchange vows, their promises and commitments to one another. And that's very good and very important. But you know that having good vows and making a commitment to one another is not the same thing as fulfilling that commitment. It's not the same thing as actually having a good marriage relationship. And so when we talk about church membership and the covenant, and we've talked a little bit about this already, the covenant commitment is sort of like the marriage vows. It's making a commitment to say what you're going to do, but that's not the same as actually living in community. And that's what we want to talk about because that's really one of the most important things is that we actually live out what the Bible says. The issue of community is important because we've lost much of that in America. We are in a growing way separated from one another, we're isolated. We're often afraid of one another. The researchers would tell us that we get together less than our parents and grandparents did and really in all sectors of our society.

[00:01:25] And so this is important because we're lacking this. We're like those people that have a like a nutritional deficiency - we have a a social deficiency for community and friendship and love. But even more than that, the Gospel makes community possible. So.

[00:01:42] The normal sorts of things that keep us from community are answered in the Gospel. So we normally have things in our hearts like fear and suspicion and false judgments and pride. And when God comes to our hearts and saves us and begins to change us, He makes us different. And so he gives us love and patience and that makes community possible. Now when we talk about having relationships in the church and what biblical community is, the truth is it's difficult and messy. It's really beautiful. It's great to talk about in theory, but it is not easy to achieve. And it's not easy to maintain because it often means sacrifice and putting others first. And you know walking through when people are imperfect and and when we sin and people sin against us.

[00:02:40] Let's turn over to Acts chapter 2 verses 42 through 47 and read a little bit of scripture here because this is a good passage to express what biblical community ought to be. If you know the context here, the early church has really just sort of been created as Jesus has been raised from the dead and Peter and the Apostles are preaching. And it says that these early Christians, verse 42,

[00:03:08] "Devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers and all 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 favor with all the people and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

[00:03:48] Now this is a fantastic passage. And you know a great many things in the Book of Acts are either sort of you know one time events in the history of the church and we shouldn't expect a repeat of all those things - but this this section here that talks about the fellowship and the sacrifice and the community of the early church, we see this carried on

throughout the rest of the New Testament. And so the early Christians they had a shared faith in Christ and that's what brought them together. They had the Apostles doctrine, which was basically the teaching of Jesus. They had this hope that Jesus had been raised from the dead and he was alive and he was going to come again. The early Christians had shared worship practices. They were devoted to prayer, to the Apostles doctrine, and to breaking bread.

[00:04:36] They also shared their lives together. And the word "fellowship" is used in that word fellowship really means at its essence sharing and the sharing of life it doesn't just mean eating a meal or talking after church although it certainly includes that. We see other things that they shared in verse 44. It says that they had all things in common. What that means is they changed the way they look at their lives and their possessions. And so that they were willing to share with others. They engaged in shared sacrifice together in verse 45, many of the people were selling what they had, their property or their surplus items in order to meet the needs of others, especially the poor. And that's worth noting that sometimes in the church we have possessions that can meet someone's need and sometimes we have to be the one who is served and other people meet our needs and that's very difficult. We would all like to be the one who has the surplus but sometimes we're the one in need. The church also shared their space. They met together in one another's homes in verse 46 and so they were engaging in hospitality. They shared their meals together and all of this was a part of this bigger shared mission which was to spread the gospel and so this passage in Acts says that they had favor with all the people as they were sharing the Gospel and living this out. God had given them a certain favor and lots of people were getting saved. And so the idea of community is not just simply a fellowship meal or a potluck but it is a shared life together and a shared mission.

[00:06:20] Now the church is a community that is renewed based on God's work and word and that's what makes all of this possible. And so when we look at the New Testament, the words that are often used to describe the church they are communal words, words like household and family or army. They are the kind of words that designate people that live together and share their lives and the activities of their lives. In fact we even learn how to follow Jesus by spending time with other people. Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:10 as he was explaining how Timothy had been discipled. He said,

[00:07:03] "You however have followed my teaching, my conduct and my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings..."

[00:07:14] And he goes on and on and basically Timothy didn't just learn doctrine or ministry from Paul, he learned from watching him live and that's one of the ways that we grow together is by spending life together and all of these different ways.

**Matt Troupe:** [00:07:28] So part of what this means and this confronts our American way of thinking is that following Jesus is fundamentally a family and group activity. And when I mean family I don't mean just your family I mean the family of God coming together. Everything else that we do in life tends towards doing it together with the family of faith. Certainly there are some things that we do personally and in private and that's great. But our faith is not fundamentally an issue of me and God, it's actually us and God. And so when we serve we're using our gifts for the sake of others, for the good of others we put them first, and we take what we have been given for the benefit of others. We see this in prayer and we see this in worship as well.

[00:08:17] So we grow together and we learn how to how to follow Jesus together. And the

whole of our life is together. But also there's this really interesting thing in the New Testament this series of commands that have been called the "One another" commands. And there's a whole bunch of them there's different estimates of how many, maybe fifty nine or so, but they're basically commands in the Greek New Testament that say "do this to one another", and it is a command that really shows how Christians are supposed to treat each other. And this word for one another with commands is used about 100 times in the New Testament and about 47 of those actually give us instructions for following Jesus, and these include a lot of things about unity. So I'm just gonna give you a couple examples.

[00:09:09] "Be at peace with one another." Mark 9:50

[00:09:13] "Don't grumble among one another." John 6:43

[00:09:17] "Be of the same mind with one another." Romans 12:6.

[00:09:22] "Accept one another." Romans 15:7.

[00:09:23] And we could just keep going. About a third of the commands involved with the one another commands that we're talking about here, are to love one another. That's repeated a whole bunch of times we're supposed to serve one another and tolerate one another and greet one another with a holy kiss and be devoted to one another in love and so that's very important. And then another group of these commands emphasize humility, like.

[00:09:51] "Wash one another's feet..." John 13:14.

[00:09:54] "Give preference to one another." Romans 12:10.

[00:09:56] "Serve one another." Galatians 5:3.

[00:10:02] And then there's you know another list like "Don't judge one another" and "don't put a stumbling block in one another's way" and "bear one another's burdens" Galatians 6:2 and we could go on and on. And this is a beautiful list of commands. And it describes what God's purpose and plan for community within the church is supposed to be. Now what this means, we're seeking this in the church, and this means that in order to follow Jesus as a member of the church you need to do more than attend to worship service on Sunday. You actually have to spend time because there's no way you can do those things that God wants you to do unless you spend time with one another.

[00:10:44] And so when you become a member at Free Grace Church this is this is the so what moments when you become a member of Free Grace Church. You're saying I want this in my life. I want that kind of Christianity. I want to pursue this. None of us get it perfect. We're all in process but we're pursuing it. We're seeking after it for the glory of God and for our own joy in Him.

[00:11:10] And this means you are going to have to plan time and make sacrifices for the sake of God's people and to be a part of the church, minimally. That means you're going to come to church on Sundays and you're gonna be a part of a small group, some sort of a midweek meeting, as long as your schedule permits. You're saying this is what I want. I want to be with God's people regularly so that I can worship and be encouraged. And so if you don't want that, if you don't want to be a consistent participant in worship and

community and service, then you don't become a member at Free Grace Church because this is what we're publicly saying, this is what I want for my life in Christ. You're saying I want other people to be in my life and I want to be in the lives of others.

[00:11:55] And the reason why this is important is because even though we all say we want this, this is not going to happen automatically because everything in our lives everything in our kind of remaining sinful hearts and our culture, works against this. So we have to push back against selfishness and individualism and seek this together. And I hope that you'll think through this I hope that you might have some questions and I hope that you will join us as we seek to establish biblical community at Free Grace Church.

[00:12:22] Thanks for listening.