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Bridgeway Community Church
Series: "TABLE TALK"
September 17, 2023

TABLE TALK:
"Can we talk... about Spiritual Authority?"

I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Bridgeway Community Church!

Today we are launching a 4 week series called **TABLE TALK - *Conversations About Coming Home***. In my vision message last week, we announced that our new theme for this ministry year is just 2 words.

Do you remember what they are? "COME HOME."

This theme is an invitation... It is an invitation to *Come Home to God* and to *Come Home to Church*. We said that we wanted people to have that "Family Feeling" regardless of their color, class, or culture, like in **Acts 2:42-47**.

In **Acts 2:42** it says that this new community of believers were committed to 4 things:

- 1. The Apostles Teaching**
- 2. Fellowship**
- 3. Breaking of Bread**
- 4. Prayer**

Over the next 4 weeks I would like for us to spend a bit of time on each of these *4 areas of devotion* that the new testament church had.

Today, the Apostles' teaching...

- **In Acts 2:46 (NIV)** it says that, "*They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.*"

I figured that today we would do the sermon a little differently.

Let's make *the sermon a conversation* around the table. I have invited several people from our congregation to join me up here, so would my 4 guests please come on up now, please?

As they come up, let me tell you what the 4 weeks of sermon titles will be...

- **September 17 - #1 TABLE TALK: *Can We Talk...about Spiritual Authority?* (Acts 2:42)**
- **September 24 - #2 TABLE TALK: *Can We Share Together?* (Acts 2:42 & 45)**
- **October 1 - #3 TABLE TALK: *Can We Break Bread Together?* (Acts 2:42 & 46)**
- **October 8 - #4 TABLE TALK: *Can We Pray & Praise Together?* (Acts 2:42 & 47)**

II. SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Today's topic is about AUTHORITY, specifically, SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY.

The Bible says that the New Testament believers were devoted to the Apostles' Teaching. (**Acts 2:42 NIV**)

- After Jesus' ascension into heaven, men and women were praying together in the Upper Room. And Jesus had said to them in **Acts 1:8 (NIV)** - "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"
- As they were praying, suddenly the Holy Spirit showed up like a hurricane. And all of these people who were in Jerusalem thought they were drunk, because they were praising God and sharing the gospel to all those present in their own mother-tongue!
- That day, three-thousand people were saved. And it says that they devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching, to Fellowship, to the Breaking of Bread, and to Prayer.

So before we get into what it means that they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, let me introduce those who will be joining me for this discussion today...

- Sandra Anderson-McGraw
- Charles Barton
- Susan Kadari-Malek
- Marcus Gibson

Thank you all for being here today!

Now, as we return to this picture of the first disciples in Acts 2 and how they “devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching. What were they devoting themselves to?

These apostles were the 12 disciples who had walked with Jesus for 3 years. They thought he was a prophet, which he was; but he was also the incarnate Son of God who came to take on the sin of the world to free all of those who trust in Him from the penalty of their sins.

So when people come to Christ for salvation and are illuminated by the Holy Spirit to see who Jesus really is, they had the Old Testament Scriptures that they read or heard preached and they had direct exposure to the teachings of Jesus, as they had walked with him for 3 years.

So when the new believers in this community came together, they had people teaching them who had actually walked with Jesus! So now when they teach during their gathering, they are not only reading and teaching from the Old Testament, but they are passing on the teachings of Jesus that they received from their 3 years of doing life with and learning from him.

With that context, now I’ll put a question out for us at the table here to discuss...

Question 1:

**When You Hear That They Were “Devoted To The Apostles’ Teaching,”
What Do You Think That Meant To Them *Practically*?**

- There is power to the Word of God, and when those first Christians heard it, the teaching of Jesus transformed them from the inside out
- As the disciples were changed through receiving Jesus’ teaching, it also inspired change in those around them as they witnessed lives transformed by the Word of God

Question 2A:

Given That We Still Have Spiritual Leaders Today, (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors & Teachers - *Ephesians 4:11*), But In Addition, We Now Possess The Written Word Of God, *How Do We Distinguish Between The Spiritual Authority That Comes From Spiritual Leaders Who Teach The Word Of God And The Spiritual Authority That Comes From The Written Word?*

- True spiritual authority comes from submitting to the Word of God. We all need to know the Word of God so that when we sit under the teaching of our spiritual leaders, we can discern whether what they are teaching is sound or not.

- Pastors and Ministers are shepherds that God has given us, but it is OUR responsibility to pursue God and to learn God's Word.
- We are called to listen to our spiritual leaders, but we need to ask the Lord for a *discerning spirit*; this helps us distinguish between our spiritual leaders' own perspective and what the Word of God says.

Question 2B:

When What We Understand the Word of God to Teach and What Our Spiritual Leaders are Teaching Clash, *How Should Believers Respond?*

And for this question, I'll open it up for those in the congregation to respond...

- If a pastor says something I disagree with, let it go in one word and out the other'
- Bring your question directly to the pastor. I may have misunderstood what they said and just need to get clarity rather than making an assumption. It's better to go directly to the pastor to discuss it further rather than just leaving the church.
- It's also important to distinguish between a teaching that is the pastor's opinion which we disagree with, *and a teaching clearly from God's Word that we just don't like*. That being said, we need to create an environment where people can bring their honest questions and doubts to spiritual leaders without being shamed for them.

AUTHORITY provides security, safety, and a sense of covering.

However, AUTHORITARIANISM commands control over people that can be overbearing, cultic and maybe even abusive...

Question 3:

How can we find the proper balance between avoiding *authoritarianism* without throwing out the idea of being under *spiritual authority* altogether, which many have done?

- God has given us all free-will; Jesus wants us to freely say "yes" to him. As Christians, and non-Christians, you have a right to pursue your truth. What you do not have a right to do is to be disrespectful.
- For some people, preaching God's Word gives them a rush of pride that goes to their head. They believe they are the cause, rather than the Lord; that pride causes them to move from authority to *authoritarianism*.

In **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)**, it says...

- *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Did you notice what all of scripture is useful for?

- For *teaching*: teaching you what's right
- For *rebuke*: teaching you what's wrong
- For *correction*: teaching you how to get right when you've been wrong
- For *training in righteousness*: teaching you how to stay right

If you're not under the authority of God's Word and under the sound teaching of it, then "right" becomes whatever is in your heart; whatever is in the culture; whatever is recommended by your peer group. So I think it's important for us to see that these earliest disciples all submitted themselves to the apostles teaching, to the truth and authority of God's Word, the Bible.

III. CONCLUSION

Question 4: **Any final thoughts?**

- It's so important to be part of a faith community where you can be known, where you can help and correct and support each other, and where you can have "big brothers" and "big sisters" in the faith that you look up to.
- Use your spiritual authority primarily in prayer—asking God to change minds and hearts—rather than through authoritarianism, trying to get people to do what you think is best. Take it to God in prayer!
- We may not always agree with our siblings in Christ! But like a healthy family, we have to be able to love each other through and despite our disagreements.
- Our final authority is the Word of God. The Word of God calls us to come together with our faith community; but it also calls us to meditate on the Word and to stand on it. We need each other— but we also need to take personal responsibility to stand on God's Word.

Let's thank those at the table today!

And like those first Christians—submitting to the authority of the Word of God and coming together around Jesus—let's partake of the Lord's Supper now...

Practice Lord's Supper and then close in Prayer