

“Marks of a Spirit-filled Fellowship”

Acts 2:40-47

If you have your Bible, take it and turn with me to the second chapter of Acts. For the past couple of weeks, we have been looking at this passage that records the events associated with Pentecost. What happens in this chapter is important because it signifies the arrival of God’s Spirit who came to live within the believers. It is also important because it means the power that we need for our mission of being witnesses has been supplied. The Holy Spirit is the One who empowers us to be Christ’s witnesses. What happens at Pentecost is also important in that it serves as the birth of the church. As Peter concludes his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, we are told that 3,000 people believe his message and come to personal faith in the Lord Jesus.

If the first part of chapter two presents us with the very first Christian sermon, the end of the chapter presents us with the first Christian fellowship. The characteristics of this new fellowship are mentioned beginning in verse 42.

I don’t know if you have ever considered this question, but what exactly is it that makes for a great church? Different people have all sorts of answers. For some, a great church has great music and preaching. It has a dynamic children’s ministry and an engaging student ministry. For others, a great church emphasizes social action and community involvement, or state of the art facilities. And all of these certainly have their place. Yet none of these by themselves make for a great church. If you want to know what makes for a great church, you need to look at these characteristics that are mentioned here in Acts chapter 2.

Now, let me be quick to say that the early church was not perfect. Though it was simple and effective, it was far from perfect, as later chapters in Acts will reveal. No church is a perfect church. The only perfect church is the one that is in

heaven with the Lord Jesus. The church on earth is made up imperfect people who are in process. We've been saved, yet we're being sanctified. Though the church isn't perfect, the picture that we are presented with here ought to be one that we constantly keep coming back to as we evaluate our own fellowship.

Think about what they didn't have:

- buildings or facilities
- line item budgets
- programming
- marketing and promotion strategy

They had none of the 'stuff' that we often prioritize. Yet what they did have was special. There was a simplicity that made up their fellowship. Their witness and ministry was set apart by divine power, so much so that the world around them took notice.

The church in Acts is a Spirit-filled fellowship made up of men and women whose lives have been transformed by the power of God. What is true of the church cannot be explained in human terms, nor can it be manufactured by man.

Rather, the fellowship of the church as described here is the visible, outward display of the invisible, inward life of God that unites the believers in Christ.

That's what sets the church apart from anything else.

I want to show you four marks of this Spirit-filled fellowship:

1—Their gospel ESTABLISHMENT (2:40-41)

“And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

Luke tells us that with many other words, Peter 'bore witness' and continued to exhort the crowd to repent and come to Christ. Keep in mind that nearly a month and a half prior to this, he had denied knowing Jesus three times. But now, Peter is bold and empowered. He is fearless and courageous in his witness. Such is the difference that the resurrected Christ makes, living inside a believer through His Spirit.

Remember the components of Peter's message:

- He connected what had happened with fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
- He declared Jesus to be crucified.
- He testified of the resurrection of Jesus.
- He asserted the Lordship of Christ and calls upon his hearers to repent and trust in Him for salvation.

He then gave his hearers an opportunity to respond in faith to the gospel message. We have not fully declared the truth of Christ until we have called upon people to repent and believe in Him. There is a sense of urgency in Peter's appeal, and verse 41 says that 3,000 souls were added to the church that very day.

The picture we are given of the early church at the close of chapter 2 is powerful indeed, especially when you consider that after one sermon, the church grew by 2500% as 120 people became 3,120 people. To put that in perspective, imagine if we grew by that much in one week's time. Say we have 1,100 worshipers. Multiplied by 2500%, it would be 27,500 people. Imagine if that many showed up for church next week. That's nearly a quarter of the population of High Point...

There is an interesting parallel here in Acts 2 whenever you consider it alongside of Exodus 19. For example, when the fire of God fell on Mt. Sinai, there were

3,000 Israelites who died because they broke God's law. However, when the fire of the Holy Spirit fell here, there were some 3,000 who were made alive! Jesus had already died on the cross for our law breaking ways. He endured the fire of God's wrath so that we could be saved and receive His life-giving Spirit.

It is Jesus who has established His church and founded it upon the bedrock of the gospel. The very first time that the word 'church' is used in the New Testament is found in Matthew 16 where Jesus declared His intention to build His church. He had asked His disciples the question, "Who do people say that I am?" They reply, "Some say that You are John the Baptist, others say that You are Elijah, and others even say that You are Jeremiah or one of the prophets." And then Jesus got personal with them. He asked, "But who do y'all say that I am?" It was Peter who spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus tells him that he was blessed because flesh and blood had not revealed this to him, but the Father in heaven. Peter had confessed the truth of who Jesus really is, a truth that he himself did not stumble upon. Rather, it was a truth that had been revealed to him by God the Father. The truth of who Jesus is has been revealed by God to the church. And no one can truly be a part of the church apart from confessing their faith in Christ.

Listen to what Jesus said Peter in response:

Matthew 16:18—“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Jesus refers to Peter as 'petros,' which means stone. Yet He promises that He will build His church on the 'petra' which means massive rock. Peter is a small stone, but the massive rock upon which Jesus will build His church is the confession that He is the Christ.

That word 'petra' is also a word that was used in classical Greek to refer to a collection of stones fused together to form a larger rock. Go with me back to geology class for just a minute. In geology, we all learned that there are three main classifications for rocks, right? You have igneous rock that is formed through the volcanic process. There is metamorphic rock that is formed by temperature and pressure. Then, you have sedimentary rock on the earth's surface that is formed by the joining of fragments and minerals. A subclass of sedimentary rock would be 'conglomerate' which is rock that is made up of gravel and stones that have become cemented together to form one large rock. That's what the word 'petra' referred to.

As 'petros,' Peter would be one stone in the spiritual house that is built upon the 'petra,' and that house is made up of multiple stones. 'Petra' meant many stones joined together to form a rock that is far larger and more significant than any one stone could be all by itself.

Peter himself says as much elsewhere:

1 Peter 2:5—“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Ephesians 2:19-22—“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

The point is that the church is founded upon Jesus Christ, whom Peter and the apostles preached as being crucified, buried, and raised to life. He is the Solid Rock upon which the church is being built up and established in the gospel.

“Church” —*the word in Greek is ‘ekklesia’*

It’s a compound word, from ‘ek’ which means out from, and ‘kaleo’ which means to call. Thus, it refers to those who have been called out from among others. It is a word that speaks of an assembly of people who are defined by a distinct purpose, or given a distinct objective. The idea is that the church is a special assembly of people who have been ‘called out of’ the world and are made to be the special people of God, called out by God for Himself.

The use of this word is important because it means that the church is not merely some institution, or a building, or an organization. It is a movement, not a monument. It is a people who gather, not merely a place to go. The church of Jesus Christ is God’s plan for the ages, the means by which He has determined to make a name for Himself among the nations. The church is a body of believers, made up of both Jew and Gentile, united in the belief that Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of the living God and Savior of the world.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4—“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Before a person will ever be saved, God has to take the blinders off of that person’s eyes about who Jesus is. That is exactly what happened on the Day of Pentecost as the church explodes onto the scene. Peter preached Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit and called on people to repent and confess faith in

Christ. Some 3,000 of them did, and the church was established from that point forward.

2—Their necessary EDIFICATION (2:42)

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Peter’s preaching led to some wonderful results. Those who received the word were baptized. It was how they publicly identified as believers in Jesus. On that the day, there were added to the church about 3,000 souls. Yet the work of making disciples doesn’t stop there. Conversion is only the beginning. Notice that verse 42 says, “And they devoted themselves...” There is a sense of unity being conveyed in these verses. Though these believers had come from a variety of places, the text says that ‘they’ were now all together in one body.

I want you to pay attention to the word ‘devoted’ there in verse 42. Luke uses the imperfect verb tense to describe ongoing, recurring and habitual activity over a period of time. The idea is that these who had come to faith in Christ and had been baptized into fellowship are now habitually set apart by new devotion.

And it is not a temporary devotion that is short-lived. It is deep seated devotion that shows up in a new rhythm of life. It means that they were continually devoting themselves. Pay attention to the definite articles in verse 42. They were not devoted to some squishy religious idea. No, they were devoted to ‘the’ doctrine. They weren’t devoted to an intangible idea of church. No, they were devoted to ‘the’ fellowship. Their lives and their loves had been completely transformed, and their devotion had been rearranged. It is expressed in four critical areas:

The apostles’ teaching

The newly established church was 'continually devoted' to the teaching of the apostles. These men and women had come to faith in Christ, and now they needed to be built up in that faith. They needed to be edified. Knowledge of the truth is foundational to the growth and health of the church.

Listen to this:

1 Peter 2:2—“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk [of the Word], that by it you may grow up into salvation.”

Romans 12:2—“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

1 Timothy 4:6—“If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.”

What you believe is important to your spiritual health. To truly be a Spirit-filled fellowship is to be a Scripture-fed fellowship. The church in Acts 2 was continually devoted to apostolic teaching, now written down and preserved in the pages of the New Testament.

The fellowship

Not only were they continually devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, but they were also devoted to the fellowship they had with one another. Fellowship is a good word, it is a biblical word, and it is also a misunderstood word. It refers to something far richer, far deeper than mere handshakes and potlucks. I know it may be hard for a lot of us baptists to believe, but you don't have to have a cup of coffee and a donut in your hand to have fellowship...

“Fellowship”—*word is ‘koinonia’ which means to share in a common life; idea of participation*

Some people approach fellowship like a bag of marbles. The people assemble in the same place, but they’re not together. They clatter, but they don’t connect. They mix, but they don’t mingle. That’s not ‘koinonia.’ Christian fellowship is more like a bag of grapes. Shake the bag around a little, and it starts to drip. Look inside and it’s not a pretty sight, but they’re mingling. Each one bleeds into the others. That’s ‘koinonia.’ It is true, Spirit-empowered fellowship. The church is not merely a group of loosely connected individuals, but is instead a body of believers who share in a common life.

A Christian is someone whose life is set apart by devotion to Christ and His church. One of the issues that has led to ineffectiveness and lack of power in the church has been a lack of devotion to the fellowship among those who make it up. We’ve devoted ourselves to everything else in the world while giving nothing but lip service to the things that matter most.

I read an article this week that pointed out how church attendance has dropped significantly in the last ten years. It explained how less people are attending church, but more than that, people are attending church less.

Belonging to the church involves more than simple church attendance, but it will never be less than that. Devotion to the fellowship means that we prioritize the family gathering. We must not let other ‘stuff’ get in the way between us and our brothers and sisters, whether it be travel sports, incessant vacations, plain old laziness, relational spats, etc.

The breaking of bread

This is a reference to the Lord’s Supper, or communion. It means that the believers prioritized worshiping the Lord together. Regular observance of

communion exemplified their unity as believers who shared in a common life and served the same Lord.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17—“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

The prayers

They continually devoted themselves to ‘the’ prayers. And in verse 46, it says that ‘day by day’ they attended the temple together. They met together in each other’s homes and praised God together. All of it means that they prayed and worshiped together regularly as a way of life. They took the promise of Jesus quite literally:

John 14:13-14—“Whatever you ask in My name, this will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

Someone has well said that worship is the furnace of the spiritual life. It is the celebration of God for who He is and what He has done and for what we are trusting Him to do. The issue in worship is not what you get out of it, but what God gets out of it. The Holy Spirit will ignite your spiritual life when worship becomes not merely an event, but a way of life. The church in Acts had a worshiping lifestyle!

Devotion to the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, communion, and prayer was necessary for their edification and growth. Notice that this led to:

3—Their common EXPERIENCE (2:43-45)

“And awe 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.”

The third mark of this Spirit-filled fellowship involves their common experience. It is the direct result of what God’s Spirit produced as they were devoting themselves to the Word, fellowship, worship, and prayer. Notice what their experience involved:

Curiosity that was provoked

Verse 43 says, “And awe came upon every soul.” There was a sense of wonder and fear being produced in their hearts. It is the sense of being in the presence of God. It meant that God’s presence was being made manifest in their lives, and provoked a deep sense of reverential awe.

It also means that the church affected their surrounding society in a profound way. The city at large was struck with ‘awe’ and wonder by what was happening. They weren’t at awe over programs, personalities, or performances, but at the supernatural dynamic of the church’s life. Clearly, there was more than mere human effort at work. It was obvious to others that something powerful was going on that could not be explained in human terms. This was no ordinary group of people.

Verse 43 also says that many ‘wonders and signs’ were being done through the apostles. It was divine validation of their apostolic witness, and it authenticated their message.

The church no longer needs signs and wonders because we have complete revelation right here in the Bible. We have the record of the apostles ministry

and the doctrine of the apostles in the 27 books of the New Testament. God's Word is our authority as the church.

Unity that was produced

Verse 44 says, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common." It was a supernatural together-ness that was being produced by the Spirit. This is true community or 'common unity.' It doesn't mean that they all forfeited their individual preferences and uniqueness. It means that they didn't make their own individual wants or preferences the basis of their unity. They were brothers and sisters in Christ, and the gospel served as the basis of their commonality. Not their race or ethnicity, not their age or gender, and not their political affiliation.

Galatians 3:26-28—"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Out of many, we have been made one in Christ. That is the kind of unity that only the Holy Spirit can produce in the church. And the Bible says that we must be careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Generosity that was practiced

Verse 45 says, "And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." Don't get the idea that this was some kind of an early form of communism or socialism. This is not some government mandated relinquishing of personal property, and neither does it mean that they all lived in a commune.

Notice the phrase ‘as any had need.’ In other words, if any in their midst had a need, the others were generous and sacrificial with their stuff. They parted with possessions if it meant meeting a need in the life of the fellowship.

4—Their daily EXPANSION (2:46-47)

“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.”

As a result of the Spirit’s power at work in their lives and through their witness, the Bible says that the Lord added to the church day by day those who were being saved. Men and women were coming to faith in Christ daily. From all over the city, people were being drawn to this Spirit-filled fellowship. People were being led to faith and baptized and were assimilated into the body of Christ.

Consider how exponentially the church grew in Acts:

- 120 disciples (1:15)
- 3,000 more were added (2:41)
- daily conversion growth (2:47)
- 5,000 men besides women and children (4:4)
- multitudes of men and women (5:14)
- numbers increasing greatly (6:7)
- many new believers (9:42)
- a large number who believed (11:21)
- a great number of Jews and Greeks believed (14:1)

- a great number of Greeks and leading women (17:4)
- many new believers (17:12)
- almost all of Asia believed (19:26)
- many thousands of Jews believed (21:20)

This is what a local church should strive to be. There were certain 'core' values that were shared by the early church, the same convictions that we share as a local church even though we are nearly 2,000 years removed. They valued:

Biblical teaching—they gave themselves to the teaching of the apostles

Corporate worship—they broke bread together and were people of prayer who relied on the power of the Holy Spirit

Close fellowship—they were devoted to the fellowship and even opened up their homes to one another and were in each other's lives

Selfless service—they sold their possessions to help meet the needs of their brothers and sisters

Personal evangelism—the Lord added daily to the church as they were faithful to spread the gospel

World mission—they will take the gospel to the ends of the earth and plant other churches

Wiersbe points out how these early Christians that we are introduced to in the book of Acts were not content to meet merely once a week for services as usual. They met with one another daily (2:46), cared for one another daily (6:1), won lost people to Christ daily (2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (17:11), and they increased in number daily (16:5). Their faith was a day-to-day reality vs. merely being a dull routine.

The risen Jesus was a living reality to them, and His resurrection power was at work in the church through the presence of His Spirit. It was a kingdom community, an embassy of heaven that gave the world a preview of a coming King.

Tony Evans—*“In the movies, previews advertise coming attractions. Designed to entice, the preview focuses on the hot clips of the movie such as the chase scenes, love scenes, and fight scenes. The point of the preview is to whet our appetites for the upcoming attraction. Someday a big show is coming to town, and it’s called the kingdom of God. God the Father is the Producer. The Holy Spirit is the Director. Jesus Christ is the Super Star, and it will be a world-wide production. But until then, God has left previews of coming attractions in the world. We are His hot clips. God has left His church here to provide clips of the major production that is to come.”*

Unfortunately, what we are putting forth to a watching world is more like a gag reel than a hot clip. Most of our clips have been so weak in showing the power and wonder of the feature film that few people show their interest in the box office.

Do we truly realize the power that is available to us? Do we have any concept of the power Jesus intended for His church to wield in this dark and hopeless world? Or has our vision of the ‘church’ become so dimmed that the word suggests nothing more than a building where go once a week to sing songs and hear sermons?

I find it amazing that the church in Acts had none of the things that we assume are necessary for ministry success today, and yet it won thousands of people to Christ and saw local churches established throughout their world. The reason can be attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit who energized their worship and witness.

The Holy Spirit has made me a part of the body of Christ, which means that the Christian life is to be lived in close relationship with others. The Spirit knows nothing of 'lone ranger' Christianity. In the book of Acts, the Spirit takes those He indwells and puts them in the family, and then He sends them right back into the world on mission. In fact, He seems to spend more time taking the believers outside the church than keeping them in it. Wow! What God did at Pentecost means that as a church, we have all the power we need to do what God has called us to do. We are not lacking of resources, but have been given what we need through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Think about it.

Henry Martyn—*“The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of mission, and the nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we must become.”*

It means you have the presence of God with you wherever you go and in whatever you face. It means there should be passion in our worship because the living Spirit of God indwells us as His church. It means that there should be power in our witness to a lost and dying world. It means that there is now great purpose in our gathering together as the redeemed people of God.

If you are not yet a Christian, let me once again use Peter's words to those in Jerusalem—

Acts 2:38-39—**“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.”**