

“Outward Proof of Inward Life”

Acts 2:40-47

Paul Gustave Dore was a renowned 19th century French artist who was known for his remarkable ability to sketch and create masterful drawings. His artwork has been a source of inspiration to artists and filmmakers such as Vincent van Gogh and even Tim Burton. It is said that he once lost his passport while traveling abroad. When he came to a border crossing, he explained his predicament to one of the guards. Giving his name to the official, the famous artist hoped he would be recognized and allowed to pass on through. The guard, however, said it was not uncommon for those who attempted to cross the border to claim to be someone they were not.

Gustave Dore insisted that he was the man he claimed to be. So the official said, “Alright, we’ll give you a test, and if you pass it we’ll allow you to go through.” Handing him a pencil and a sheet of paper, he told the artist to sketch a group of people standing nearby. Dore did it so quickly and skillfully that the guard was convinced he was indeed who he claimed to be. His work confirmed his word.

A lot of people claim to be Christians, but their works don’t always line up with their words. They may be professors of the faith, but have never been true possessors of the faith. Not everyone who claims faith in Jesus Christ actually knows Him in a personal and saving way. If the Spirit of God has truly come to take up residence in your heart, then the fruit He produces will be evident in your life. New life on the inside will show up on the outside.

If you have your Bible with you, I want you to take it and turn with me once more to the second chapter of Acts. I want to come back to this same passage where we were last week. The end of Acts 2 is a remarkable passage of Scripture that shows us what the fellowship of the early church was like. The picture we are given is very simple, yet very powerful. You might could say that it is within this

passage that we are presented with the basics of ‘body life’ that should be true of every Christian congregation.

Tony Merida—*“Luke tells us what characterized the early Spirit-filled congregation, what made it healthy, dynamic, and alive. He basically records the diet and exercise regimen of a healthy body of Christ.”*

I’ve referred to these as the marks of Spirit-filled fellowship. The church is established through the preaching of the gospel on the day of Pentecost. Those that believe are united in faith and are edified, or ‘built up’ in the doctrine of the apostles. They all share in a common experience, and there is a daily expansion of the church as the Lord adds to their number those who are being saved. What I want you to see is that the life of God on the inside is expressed outwardly through a new rhythm of life. These brand new believers are marked by a brand new devotion. They have been saved, and the Spirit has come to reside within them. As a result, the life of God inside of them will work its way outside of them through a new way of living.

True saving faith in Jesus Christ will always express itself in this way. There will be outward evidence of an inward change, outward proof of inward life. It is no gospel that says a person can believe something and yet remain unchanged. People become Christians, not by physical birth heritage, but by the experience of the new birth. A person is saved because of the convicting, converting power of the Holy Spirit who brings them to faith in Christ. And as a result, they undergo a profound change in their mind, heart, and will.

James 2:17—**“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”**

The person who has truly come to faith in Jesus Christ is someone who has been made alive in Christ. The life of God that is possessed inwardly will be observable in a person’s life. It shows up through new behaviors that were not present before. That’s what we are able to see here at the close of Acts 2 as

these new believers are brought into fellowship, and their faith is expressed outwardly.

What is the ‘proof’ that these who were dead in their sins and trespasses have now come to life in Christ? In what way is their new life being expressed? There are at least four major proofs that involve separation from world around them, dedication to God’s Word, participation in the church, and communication of the gospel to others. Let’s deal with these one at a time.

1—SEPARATION from the world (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.”

The first thing that I want you to see about these who came to faith in Christ is that they are now separated from the world. In his sermon, Peter had shown them how they were guilty of having the Son of God crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. He points out their personal accountability before God, and yet he also explains how they can be forgiven of their sin and saved from the coming future judgment. Notice his urgent appeal in verse 40:

“Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

The word ‘save’ there is an aorist tense verb in the passive voice and imperative mood. A better translation is, “Be saved from this crooked generation.” He’s not painting a rosy red picture of the world here. Notice how Peter describes the world around these men and women. He refers to it as a ‘crooked’ generation.

“Crooked”—*the word is ‘skolios’ and refers to something that is bent; it means perverse and unrighteous*

In other words, if you are to have any hope, it means you need to be saved out of this crooked culture that is bent on going its own way apart from God. Make the most of the opportunity that you have been given and come to Christ while you have time. That's what he is saying there. Don't let the opportunity slip away, because salvation is your greatest need. Humanity's problem can't be addressed by more education, or social reform, by making more money. The greatest need in any person's life is to be made right with God, and the only way a sinner can be made right with God is by being rescued out of a crooked culture. That is what happened here in Acts 2.

Those who received the message that day were baptized, which meant that they made a clean break with the world around them. Formerly, they were identified by the world and its value system. Having repented of their sin and come to faith in Christ, they are now publicly identified with Him. They've been saved out of a crooked generation and have now been brought into the new covenant family of faith. They are now part of God's 'church.'

“Church” — *translates the Greek word 'ekklesia' which means an assembly or gathering around an idea; it is a compound word that comes from two words, 'ek' which means out of, and 'kaleo' which means called*

The church is made up of those who have been called out from the world, separated for God's own purposes.

What does 'separation from the world' mean? Well, let me first tell you what it does not mean. It does not mean that the church is to be cloistered away from the world. How else could we be salt and light? Jesus never intended for His bride to be hidden, but on display for the world to see. Though we are not of the world, we are in the world for a very specific purpose. In His 'High Priestly' prayer, Jesus expressed His heart's desire for the church and said:

John 17:14-21—“I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”

The church is not of the world, but is in the world for a reason. We're to be different so the world may believe.

God has always intended for His people to be different from the world around them. Think about how you see this illustrated throughout the Old Testament laws. The people of Israel were given a strict set of dietary laws which seem to not make sense to us. But it involved more than eating or not eating certain foods. Once they were in the land that God promised to give them, He wanted them to reflect His holiness to their unbelieving neighbors.

Deuteronomy 14:2—“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

God wanted His people to serve as His advertising agency in a world that is marred by sin. In that way, they were to serve as a beacon of hope and light in the dark, each one being an individual testimony of His grace and power to save. Think of them like you would a 'billboard.' A Christian is a 'billboard' that points others to the hope that he or she has found in Christ. The whole purpose of a billboard is not to bring glory to itself, but to that which it proudly advertises.

The church in Acts 2 had been called out of the world to be God's advertising agency. They were separated from the world and brought into the body of Christ. They were placed in a totally new environment, having been brought from darkness to light, and from death to life. It is obvious in the text that a powerful change was taking place in them, and it showed up outwardly in that they made a decisive break with the world around them.

A church that's like the world has nothing to offer the world.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1—“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make My dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty.’ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

On multiple occasions and in multiple places throughout the New Testament, the church is constantly exhorted to be separate from the world. Consider a few of these:

Galatians 1:3-4—“Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.”

Ephesians 4:17-18—“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are

darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”

Ephesians 5:8-11—“Walk as children of light...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

Philippians 2:15—“...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

Colossians 1:12-13—“...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

Titus 2:11-14—“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

1 Peter 2:9—“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

1 John 2:15-17—“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lusts of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Separation means that we are different from the world in what we believe and in how we live. To be sure, we once were lost in our sins and trespasses. We once walked according to the course of this world, no different than any one else. But by God's grace, we have been saved from a crooked generation! We've been brought into God's family.

We no longer have a hostile mind toward God, but now possess the mind of Christ. We love the truth of His Word. We love the fellowship of His people. There is now a holy motive behind everything that we do. The church is set apart by a different way of living. As the result of God's indwelling Spirit, the life of God that has come to take up residence in our hearts expresses itself through a totally different lifestyle than the world around us. It ought to be obvious that we are the sons and daughters of God, and rather than being worldly, we are 'other-worldly.' An aroma from a distant land ought to flavor our lives. We're pilgrims!

I don't think we fully realize the degree of just how much the world around us is constantly trying to press us into its mold. Satan is the prince of this present world system and is the culprit behind its ideologies. You and I face pressure on all sides to conform. We must be diligent in the matter.

We're marching to the beat of a different drum!

Ask yourself the question, "How am I different as the result of my faith?" Are you separated from the world and its misplaced value system, its mistaken ethical system, and its misguided approach to life in God's world? Those who see clearly live differently than those who are blind in sin and unbelief. It is evidence of the life of God within us as believers.

When the church has been the most unlike the world, the church has done the most in terms of reaching the world for Christ. And when the church has been full of spiritual compromise, her witness has been stifled. The same can be said of an individual Christian man or woman.

2—DEDICATION to the truth (2:42a)

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...”

Not only were they separated from the world, but notice a second way that the life of God was expressed through these new believers. It involved a newly found devotion. Pay attention to the word ‘devoted’ there in verse 42. It is an imperfect tense verb that describes ongoing, recurring and habitual activity over a period of time. The idea is that those 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 had been completely transformed, and their devotion had been rearranged.

The language that is used here is in the imperfect tense, which means that they are now continually devoting themselves to something that had been absent before. It means that there is a new way in which they now habitually live. What is the first thing that they become devoted to?

The church was continually devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles. It was a spiritual reflex, evidence of faith. They had believed the truth about Jesus Christ, and they wanted more of it in their lives.

“Teaching”—*word is ‘didache’; it refers to an authoritative body of instruction; the word for doctrine*

These men and women had come to faith in Christ, and now they needed to be built up in that faith. New life must always express itself this way. It is the proof

that a birth has taken place. When a baby is born, that baby has an built-in instinct to crave his mother's milk. The moment he enters this world, he longs for momma's milk so that he can be nourished and become strong.

1 Peter 2:2—“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

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.”

God's Word is living and powerful. It gives and nourishes spiritual life. Evidence of the life of God within you is a love and desire for His truth. In fact, it is increased exposure to God's Word that renews our minds and helps us discern what God's good and perfect will is for life.

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.”

The life of God in a person will result in a love for truth. A new believer may not understand everything there is to know about God's Word, but they will have a posture of obedience and submission to it. Like a baby that cries for her mother's milk, the newly reborn child of God will have a new nature that longs for the milk of the Word.

The church in Acts 2 was continually devoted to apostolic teaching, now written down and preserved in the pages of the New Testament. They hungered for more of it. They took advantage of every opportunity they had to sit under their spiritual shepherds. Why?

Well, one of the reasons that they wanted it so much was that they recognized their own ignorance. They had been humbled and broken by the fact that they

crucified their Messiah. How could they have been so blind to what the law and the prophets had said about Him? Now that their eyes had been opened to the truth, they wanted to know more. They wanted to know what it means to be in Christ. They wanted to know more about the Holy Spirit who had come to live inside them. They wanted to know more about God's saving purposes in the world and how they should order their lives around them.

Nothing else mattered more than the apostles' teaching. It was the most important fact in the world, the only message that can deliver people from sin and turn them around. If the life of God resides within a person, they will long for the truth His Word to nourish their soul. Are you hungry for God's Word?

3—PARTICIPATION in the church (2:42b-46)

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

A third way that new life in Christ expresses itself is through participation in the church. These brand new believers had been separated from the world, were now dedicated to the deposit of apostolic doctrine, and they now participated in a common life together.

Common identity

The Spirit who had come to indwell the believers draws them together in fellowship. That's the word used there.

“Fellowship”—word is *'koinonia'* and refers to a shared life; carries the idea of mutual participation

Christian 'koinonia' means that the church is not merely a group of loosely connected individuals who come together for a weekly event. Instead, the church is a body of believers who share in a common life. Like any family, the gathering is important because we want to be together.

- They all devoted themselves to the teaching
- They all devoted themselves to the fellowship
- They all devoted themselves to the breaking of bread
- They all devoted themselves to the prayers

Hebrews 10:24-25—“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

illus. of the 'one another' passages in the NT (26 of them)

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 versus merely being a lifeless routine.

Common curiosity

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. Now, the church no longer needs these 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.

Common unity

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. Whenever we

promote ourselves, we undermine the unity that the Holy Spirit intends for the church to have.

Common generosity

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.

Participation in the church means that we have a common identity. We share in a common life together. One by one, we make up this local fellowship. And it is something that we are to protect and prioritize. We may not always feel like coming together, or opening up our lives with other believers. Remember, Christian discipleship doesn’t feel itself into action—it acts itself into feeling.

4—COMMUNICATION of the gospel (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)

How does the life of God in someone truly express itself outwardly? Separation from the world, dedication to God's Word, participation in the church, and communication of the gospel. When you think about the phenomenal growth of the church, you can see how all of these things came together and formed the church's witness. They were separated from the world and lived differently. They were committed to God's truth. They valued the fellowship that they had with each other, and they had a verbal witness that didn't contradict their manner of life. Is it any wonder why the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved? He'll do the same thing right here.