

Unified
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Acts 2:42-47

Opening discussion: What do people look for in a church or Sunday School class?

Some followers of Christ spend a lot of time searching for the “perfect” church. They never find it. There are no “perfect” churches because there are no perfect people. The church to join is one where people are actively BEING PERFECTED by the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:42-47 is the model of this.

Big Idea: When individual believers live in the power of the Holy Spirit there will be great unity in the church.

Let’s look at the text to see what it says; what it means; and how it should change us. To get some context let’s start in verse 37. You will recall, after the Holy Spirit fell on the followers of Christ, Peter preached a powerful sermon.

Acts 2:37–38 (ESV)

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “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.

Acts 2:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Suddenly instead of twelve, or 120 followers of Christ, there were over 3,000! That’s an amazing church “plant!” So how did this Spirit empowered church live together as new believers? How did their group help them to grow as disciples?

Acts 2:42–47 (ESV)

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- Here we see a “model” church at maximum effectiveness.
- This was not a perfect church. As we read the rest of the New Testament we see that clearly. But, at the beginning this church was as close to ideal as we'll ever see this side of heaven. Let's look at the outward attributes.
- Verse 42: **What are some key words and phrases to circle?**
- **What does it mean to be “devoted” to something or someone?**
- The Greek word means to be serious about something; persevering in doing it continuously with diligence.¹ **To what were they so devoted?**
- The teaching by the apostles would have been both Old Testament scripture and what Jesus had taught them personally.
- Breaking of bread probably refers to both times of fellowship over a meal and the Lord's Supper based on the upper room event before His death.
- They were serious about prayer. We assume both in the group and alone.
- They were devoted to “fellowship.” This doesn't mean planning parties! This is that great Greek word believers should know, “koinonia.”
- Fellowship describes a “bond of common purpose and devotion that binds Christians to one another and to Christ. In other words, we have fellowship with Jesus; with His saving power; and with His Holy Spirit; and we share that fellowship with other believers.”²
- Koinōnia also means “participating together in the work of Christ.”³ Part of that work is sharing material resources with

- those in need. “Acts of generosity that demonstrate Christian unity and love (Heb 13:16).”⁴
- Sometimes we hear a church referred to as a “fellowship.” We should only say that if they demonstrate this kind of sharing in Christ and His work.
 - Verse 43: **What effect did the Spirit’s movement have on this church?**
 - Truth: When the Holy Spirit is in charge of a church everyone will be in awe (amazed) at what God does! Some of it will be miraculous!
 - Verse 44 says the believers were “together” and had all things in common. In the NLT: *44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.*⁵
 - Verse 45 goes further saying *“they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”*
 - **Do you think the early church was practicing early communism? Why was this different?**
 - (1) the giving was voluntary and not compelled by the government, and
(2) people still had personal possessions, because they still met in “their homes.” Example: Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:4 were not obligated to sell their property and give away the money. Communism doesn’t allow private property, in the early church people controlled their own property. The sharing here (selling property and donating to needs) was voluntary.⁶
 - They had shifted from GREED to GENEROSITY. They sold and gave based on need and motivated by the Holy Spirit. (Note: Being a wise steward in giving means giving to NEED and not GREED. Pray and investigate before giving.)
 - Verse 46 describes the “day by day” life of this remarkable church.
 - They were “attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.” They had “glad and generous hearts.” They were “praising God and having favor with all the people.” Worshiping God and having fellowship with other believers wasn’t just a “Sabbath thing” it was an every day way of life.
 - Interesting: The Greek phrase can be translated “at home” or “from house to house.” The latter is probably preferable,

- depicting the Christians as individually opening their homes to the larger fellowship. With such a large membership, the picture is probably that of a number of home fellowships.⁷
- Also interesting to note that even after believing in Christ these Jews continued to go to the temple to worship. Eventually though they would be thrown out (excommunicated) for their Christian beliefs.
 - The NKJV says they were of “one accord.” That means “unity of purpose and particularly applies to...“one heart and mind.”⁸
 - That sounds good! **When is having “unity of purpose” a bad thing?**
 - “(Frank) Stagg...points out that single-mindedness is not always a good thing. The same word is used of the angry mobs that rushed upon Stephen (7:57) and Paul (19:29).”⁹
 - Sadly, a lot of churches have unity of purpose or single-mindedness about the wrong things. Sometimes those things are good; sometimes they are bad; but they are not the BEST.
 - The goal for a group of believers is not just to be unified; it’s to be unified IN CHRIST. Otherwise, you might as well join the Rotary Club.
 - Don’t just look for unity or even community in a group of believers. Hold out for a group that displays unity in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This passage gives you a great example!
 - Greg Laurie’s Harvest Ministry has a great website with resources on what to look for in a Bible believing church: <http://www.harvest.org/knowgod/new-believer/foundations-for-living/church.html#finding-the-right-church>
 - Verse 47 shows us the result that comes from this kind of church: “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”
 - If you want a great outreach plan to win others to Christ and into your fellowship of believers, model this kind of church.
 - Notice that Luke says, “the Lord added” these new members. A reminder that God does the saving, not us, but we play an active role. **What are some of the ACTIONS these church members displayed that drew people to faith in Christ? Where did their motivation come from?**

So, What’s the Takeaway?

The late Dr. A. W. Tozer, said,

“If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.”¹⁰

- There is no PERFECT church. But the Acts 2 church is a model for us.
- The Acts 2 church was...
 - Empowered by and focused on the Holy Spirit.
 - A devoted church. Serious about teaching; about sharing; about hospitality; and about prayer.
 - A church that lived in “awe” of the power of the Holy Spirit and in expectation of miraculous outcomes that only come from God.
 - A church that shared their material goods to meet needs, not through force or guilt, but voluntarily as moved by the Spirit.
 - A church that gathered together with hospitality in both large and small groups, both at church and in homes.
 - A church filled with “glad and generous hearts” which praised God and had “favor” with each other.
 - A church so Spirit-driven and Christ-centered, that people respond easily to God’s call to follow Christ.
 - A church where all this was a “day to day” occurrence. A way of life.
- There are no “perfect” churches, but I pray we would be a group of Christians who STRIVE daily to be like the Acts 2 church!
- It all starts when each of us yields to the power of the Holy Spirit, and lives in obedience to Jesus’ teaching. May we be that church!

¹ Strong, J. (2009). *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 61). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. **prōskartērēō**, *pros-kar-ter-eh'-o*; from 4314 and 2594; to be earnest towards, i.e. (to a thing) to *persevere, be constantly* diligent, or (in a place) to *attend* assiduously all the exercises, or (to a person) to *adhere* closely to (as a servitor): —attend (give self) continually (upon), continue (in, instant in, with), wait on (continually).

² Chance, B. (2003). Fellowship. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 564). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers. *Koinonia* was Paul's favorite word to describe a believer's relationship with the risen Lord and the benefits of salvation which come through Him. On the basis of faith, believers have fellowship with the Son (1 Cor. 1:9). We share fellowship in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:23; Phil. 1:5). Paul probably meant that all believers participate together in the saving power and message of the good news. Believers also share together a fellowship with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), which the apostle understood as a most important bond for unity in the life of the church (Phil. 2:1–4).

³ Barry, J. D., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ac 2:44). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁶ ESV: Study Bible. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles, 2007.

⁷ The New American Commentary Volume 22 - Matthew by Craig L. Blomberg - Broadman Press (copyright) 1992

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Alan Redpath in "Christian Life" magazine. Christianity Today, Vol. 29, no 18.