

Main Idea: When the Holy Spirit is in control of a church or a person’s life, there will be three key evidences as there were in the first church in Acts 2:42-47.

- I. We see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our priorities (42).
 - A. The first church valued God’s Word.
 - B. The first church valued one another.
 - C. The first church valued worship.
 - D. The first church valued prayer.
- II. We see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our practice (43-47a).
 - A. The believers were serious about God (43).
 - B. The believers were serious about each other (44-45).
 1. Christ changes the way you look at yourself.
 2. Christ changes the way you look at your possessions.
 - C. The believers were serious about church (46-47a).
 1. They met together daily.
 2. They broke bread together.
 3. They praised God together.
 4. They influenced their community together.
- III. We see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our progress (47b).
 - A. The church grew because of the Lord’s working.
 - B. The church grew because of the people’s witness.
 1. You can’t be part of the church unless you are saved.
 2. You need to value the church if you are saved.

Ten years ago today we saw the power of evil demonstrated before our very eyes. No doubt you can remember where you were when you saw the television reports of the terrorists’ attacks. I was at the hospital to visit a newborn and her family when I saw the replay of the plane hitting the tower, and in just one day life changed for every person in our country and beyond.

This evening, as we gather for a joint service with our brothers and sisters at Pleasant Green Baptist Church in Portsmouth, I’m going to preach a message called “*What You Need to Know in a 9-11 World.*” I invite you to come as we look to Psalm 2 to find out what God says we should do when the nations are raging.

But this morning I want to talk about another day that changed the world, and I mean *eternally*. It began quietly enough with a small group of Jesus’ followers assembled in a secluded room, just 120 of them. Can God do anything significant with just 120 people? He did on this spring day two thousand years ago. By the end of that day, this little assembly mushroomed from 120 to some 3,120 people!

And that was just the beginning. A few days later they passed the 5,000 mark (Acts 4:4). In a short time the thousands turned into tens of thousands, and not just in Jerusalem where the 120 first assembled, but all over the Roman Empire. In just thirty years the followers of Christ took the message of Christ to Africa, throughout Asia Minor, and even into Europe.

How do you explain that? Here’s the answer the Bible gives. To put it simply, the Holy Spirit came and established the church.

I don’t think most of us realize the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost God sent His Spirit, just as the prophets foretold and Jesus promised, and He inaugurated something brand new. That something is called *the church*.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message which is part of our series on Biblical Revivals is based on a message originally preached as part of an expositional series in Acts on 2/18/01.

This morning we're going to finish the series we began five weeks ago and begin a new series that will take us into November. We've been looking at biblical revivals and asking the Lord to revive us, as individuals, as a church, and to do the same for our sister churches throughout the Tri-State and nation.

I don't know if we can call Acts 2 a "revival," but it is quite possibly the most significant work of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. And as a result of it, the church began. Just before returning to heaven Jesus had told His disciples in Acts 1:8, "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."

Friends, that's what began to happen in Acts 2, on the day the church began.

Now answer this. What is the evidence of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2? You say, "Tongues of fire coming and the apostles speaking in languages they previously could not speak." And you're right. Those are evidences of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. But they're not the only evidences, and quite honestly, they're not even the most significant evidences.

A lot of people associate the Holy Spirit's ministry with specular signs, like we see at the beginning of Acts 2, but they miss the intent of the signs which is the heart of the Spirit's ministry, as He demonstrates at the end of Acts 2.

We're going to look at the revival that happened in Acts 2, but I don't want to focus on the event itself. I want us to see the effect of it.

You know the story. The believers in the upper room. A violent wind from heaven. Tongues of fire on the disciples who then then spoke in other languages. The crowd ridiculing them saying they were drunk. Peter saying, "We're not drunk. It's only nine in the morning!" And then Peter preached a sermon and explained that the phenomena just seen was God's way of saying, "You were wrong about Jesus. He is the Son of God. Though you killed Him, God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses of the fact. Be assured that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

And you know what happened. Three thousand Jews from all over the world accepted Christ, were baptized, and were added to this new organism called the church.

But then what happened. The Holy Spirit's work didn't end there. To the contrary, He was just getting started!

Brothers and sisters, when the Holy Spirit manifests His presence in a church (or in an individual's life for that matter), you'll know it. But how? What's the evidence? Let's look at it in Acts 2:42-47. There we see three key evidences in the first church.

I. We see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our priorities (42).

A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night one of the hunters returned alone, staggering under an eight-point buck.

"Where's Harry?" he was asked.

"Harry had a stroke of some kind. He's a couple of miles back up the trail."

"You left Harry laying there, and carried the deer back?"

"Well," said the hunter, "I figured no one was going to steal Harry."²

Now there's a case of mixed-up priorities! When it comes to the first church, one thing is for sure. They knew their priorities. They were *devoted* to what really mattered.

Listen to the text, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (42)." That's significant. Because of

² *Bits & Pieces*, March 3, 1994, p. 5.

the Holy Spirit's presence, these new believers began to value things they previously didn't value. As a church, they devoted themselves to four new priorities.

A. The first church valued God's Word. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ['doctrine' in the KJV]." "They," again, refers to the individuals mentioned in verse 41, the 3,000 followers of Jesus who comprised the first church. They were the ones who'd been saved, baptized, and added to the church.

What did these people do? First and foremost, they devoted themselves to the "apostles' teaching." This is mentioned first because it must be priority #1 in the church.

A Spirit-filled church will be a studying church. It will be full of learners, people who have an insatiable hunger to receive teaching.

But not just any kind of teaching. What was the content of the teaching to which the first church was devoted? They devoted themselves to the *apostles'* teaching.

Why that teaching? That was God's plan. When Jesus came to earth, He chose twelve men whom He designated "apostles" (Luke 6:13). He allowed them to spend three years with Him. He taught them. And then just before He left the earth, He told them—the apostles—to pass the baton to others.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Matt 28:19-20)."

And so they did. When the apostles led people to Christ, they taught them. No doubt, they taught them the Old Testament Scriptures (as Peter did in his sermon), as well as teaching them the words and works of Jesus. Eventually, the apostles wrote down this teaching in what we call the "New Testament."

Let this sink in. The first evidence of a Spirit-controlled church will be a devotion to the Word of God. Its leaders will have a passion to teach and its members a passion to learn the Word of God. Beware of a "church" where people do not carry their Bibles.

To put it bluntly, a Spirit-filled church is always a Bible-studying church. The two things go hand in hand. And what's true for churches is true for individuals as James Boice points out, "If you are Spirit-filled, then you will be drawn to this Book. If you are not drawn to this Book, if you do not really want to study it, if you say, 'Well, you know, I look at the Bible from time to time, but it seems rather boring to me: it never really does much for me,' you ought to question whether you are really born again. Or if you are born again, you at least ought to question whether you are filled by the Holy Spirit."³

Three thousand baby Christians devoted themselves to learning the Word of God. They were hungry. That's the evidence of a *revived* church. It values God's Word.

B. The first church valued one another. Luke says, "They devoted themselves...to the fellowship." The Greek term is *koinonia*. In its most basic sense it means "common."⁴ As followers of Christ we have something in common. True fellowship involves a partnership and sharing. The people who receive Jesus Christ become partners with Him and consequently with other believers (1 John 1:3).

There's actually a definite article in the Greek text. The believers devoted themselves to *the* fellowship, that is, to the common bond we have in Christ.

Too often today we have a very different view the church. For us, church is a place we go. For New Testament believers, church is who we are. For us, church is a slice out of our lives. For New Testament believers, church was their life. For us, church is often

³ James Boice, *Acts*, p. 58.

⁴ For instance, the language spoken by the world in Jesus' day is called "Koine" Greek. It's called such because it was "common Greek," and was the universal language of the Roman Empire.

viewed as a recreation club—and so we go to church to be entertained by a sermon, some good music, and programs we like (and if we don't like the sermon, music, and programs, we'll leave and find one that offers the goods we like). Not so in the New Testament.

They were devoted to each other, to *the fellowship*. Church was their family.

C. The first church valued worship. “They devoted themselves...to the breaking of bread.” The phrase can refer to an ordinary meal as it does in verse 46, but here Luke has something else in mind. It's *the Lord's Supper*.

The first church made observance of the Lord's Supper, or Communion, a high priority. Why? Because Jesus commanded them to do so. “Do this in remembrance of Me (Luke 22:19).”

We're so prone to forget, aren't we? Why do we who were once heading for eternal condemnation now have eternal life? It's because of what Jesus did. He died in our place. He shed His blood for the remission of our sins, then three days later conquered death, and one day is coming again.

We must remember. The early church did. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread, which means they made worshiping Christ a priority on their schedules.

Do you? One of the things that thrills my heart is to see how people in this church value the privilege of worshiping Christ. On more than one occasion I met a man at the door who told me, “I had to work all night, so I might be a little groggy this morning. I haven't been to bed yet, but I just didn't want to miss church.” There's a man who values worship!

Do you? What steps are you taking to show it? It's so easy it, but our actions tell the story. If I come to one or two worship services a month, my actions indicate I don't really value worship the way the early church did.

Let me offer a practical suggestion. I'm convinced that the key to meaningful worship on Sunday takes place at *the beginning of the season* and on *Saturday evenings*. At the beginning of the season—decide ahead of time what you're going to do with your 13 Sundays this fall. Any mandatory Sunday work coming? Any extra-curricular events for your kids? Any family get-togethers on Sunday? Any vacation travel days? In this day and age, if we don't get proactive, we'll look back at the end of the season before we know it and wonder how we missed 7 out of 13 opportunities to participate in corporate worship on the day the Bible calls *the Lord's Day*. So get the calendar out at the beginning of the season, and guard those Sunday worship opportunities.

And Saturday evening is key too. If I get to bed late Saturday night, I'm not as ready as I should be to worship on Sunday morning. I urge you to get to bed at a decent hour. Lay out your clothes, and your children's clothes. Spend time in prayer Saturday before you go to bed, preparing for Sunday's worship.

D. The first church valued prayer. “They devoted themselves to...prayer.” Literally the text reads “the prayers.” It's plural. The early church members devoted themselves to public prayer as well as private prayer.

As the story goes, one time when Bill Moyers was a special assistant to President Lyndon B. Johnson, he was asked to say grace before a meal in the family quarters of the White House. As Moyers began praying softly, the President interrupted him with “Speak up, Bill! Speak up!”

The former Baptist minister from east Texas stopped in mid-sentence and without looking up replied steadily, “I wasn't addressing you, Mr. President.”⁵

⁵ Don Oberdorfer in *Washington Post. Reader's Digest*, April 1980.

Ponder this, beloved. When we pray we are addressing the greatest Being in the universe. Because of Christ we get to talk to *God!* It's been well said that prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence.⁶

Sadly, the typical church doesn't pray much these days. Offer a concert, and a crowd will come. Have a potluck, and the multitudes will arrive. But have a prayer meeting and what happens? Maybe that's one of the reasons for the anemic condition of the typical church today.

The early church was a praying church. They made it a priority to talk often with their Master. And the presence of the Holy Spirit made it possible.

There's the first evidence of the Holy Spirit. We see it in our priorities. If I am living in submission to the Holy Spirit, I will devote myself to God's Word, to the fellowship, to worshipping Christ, and to prayer. And all these activities take place where? In *the church*.

Let's do some application. Are you devoted to the local church in which God has placed you? If I am, I'll be faithful to it, support it, and attend its services regularly and cheerfully. I won't badmouth it nor stay in the company of those who do. If a problem arises—and problems do arise from time to time—I'll deal with the problem in a biblical manner rather than run from it. I'll use my gifts in it. I'll give my offerings to the Lord through it. I'll tell others about it and invite them to come and be a part of it. I will do these things... *if* I am exhibiting the type of devotion the early believers felt for the church.

I'm excited to announce we've planned something special to help you this fall. Next Sunday morning I'm going to begin a nine week series called *Marks of a Healthy Church*. Here's the premise. Healthy things grow. If your children are healthy, they'll grow. If the plants in your garden are healthy, they'll grow. If this church is healthy, it will grow as God intends.

There are so many churches that are preoccupied with *growth*, but what's needed is attention to church *health*. So what are the traits of a healthy church? We're going to open our Bibles and identify nine of them. Then for the next Sunday evenings, we're going to gather in small groups and discuss the implications of those nine marks, one per week. We'll do that each week, with five intergenerational groups and one children's group. The format will be, first, to discuss the Sunday morning sermon, and then, to discuss a book we're going to read together as a church. It's Mark Dever's, *What Is a Healthy Church?* Make sure you pick up your book today in the office, or if you prefer to download it for your Kindle, make sure you pick up the reading schedule in the office, and start reading this week.

Again, we can't make this church grow, not with the kind of growth that pleases the Lord. But we can do things to make sure it's healthy, and healthy organisms grow.

There's the first evidence of the Spirit's presence. It shows up in our priorities.

II. We see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our practice (43-47a).

If there's one word that sums up the practice of the first church, it's the word *serious*. Because the Holy Spirit was in control, the first church was serious about three things.

A. The believers were serious about God (43). "Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles." I see two indications that the first church was serious about God.

⁶ John MacArthur, *Acts*, p. 85.

1. *The people were in awe.* The KJV states, “And fear came upon every soul.”⁷ How can you tell if a work is truly produced by the Spirit of God? Here’s a good test. Does it cause people to fear God? If the work is from men, then men will be exalted. But if it’s from God, then God will be exalted.

Throughout Acts we see this. “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events (5:11).” “When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high esteem (19:17).”

Why are people filled with fear when the Holy Spirit works? It’s because they are seeing something that’s inexplicable humanly speaking. They’re seeing God at work!

We see a second indication in verse 43, which says, “Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”

2. *The apostles did wonders.* God didn’t give everyone the ability to do miraculous wonders. He gave that ability to the apostles as this text indicates—“done by the apostles.” But why the apostles? God enabled the apostles to do miracles to substantiate the authority of their message.

Think of a problem that faced the first church. Suppose someone stood up in their assembly and said, “God gave me a new message, and He wanted me to pass it on to you. Jesus is no longer the only way to heaven.” How could the early church tell if a person truly was a spokesman for God? Here’s how. God authorized the apostolic message by giving the apostles the ability to perform miraculous signs and wonders (Heb 2:1-4).

Does God do miracles today? Sure He does. But is the gift of miracle-working still extant? No. We don’t need signs to confirm the messengers of God any longer. Why not? We can tell if a person is speaking for God by comparing what he says to the completed record of Scripture.

The point is this. In the first church the believers were serious about God.

B. The believers were serious about each other (44-45). How serious? Notice verses 44-45, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”

Don’t misread this. The first church was not a commune, nor does this text support such a notion. MacArthur rightly observes, “The family, not the commune, is the basic social unit in God’s design.”⁸

But two things were true of the first church. First, they were *together*—that doesn’t mean they lived together, but they certainly spent a lot of time together. In practical terms what that means for us is this...

1. *Christ changes the way you look at yourself.* I’m not an island. There’s no place for the attitude, “The church doesn’t need me. I think I’ll stay home today.” No way. They were *together*. So must we be.

In addition, they had “everything in common.” Again, that doesn’t mean the people sold *all* their possessions and pooled their resources. It’s clear from verse 46 that some still owned homes. No, the giving was purely voluntary. Later, Ananias and Saphira got into trouble, not because they didn’t give more but because they *lied* about what they gave.

What that says to us is this. Not only does Christ change the way you look at yourself, but...

⁷ Does “every soul” refer to those within the church only, or does it also include those outside the church? I think it includes both groups.

⁸ MacArthur, p. 88.

2. *Christ changes the way you look at your possessions.* Remember, many Jews had come to Jerusalem from all over the world to observe the feast of Pentecost. I would assume that many didn't go home right away after becoming Christians. That meant they needed lodging and meals. And so the believers who had the means to do so met needs.

Not *wants*, but needs, as the text clearly indicates. "They gave to anyone as he had *need*." Food, clothing, and shelter.

Ponder this. Poverty was a big problem in the first century. There was no Social Security to care for the elderly and orphans. There were no unions to insure fair wages. There was no Appeals Court to prevent abuse. Instead there was high taxation in a system filled with corruption.

Having enough food to eat was a *big* challenge, a *daily* challenge. To complicate things many individuals lost their jobs when they became Christians. They were ostracized by their families. It's a dog-eat-dog world out there. It's every man for himself.

But not in the church. God expects His people to be serious about each other. When a brother can work, he should work and earn his own bread (2 Thes 3:10). But when a brother is in need and can't do anything about it, those who can help him should do so. And they did in the early church—because they were serious about each other.

C. The believers were serious about church (46-47a). "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."

Luke gives us a snapshot of the daily routine of the first church. He gives us four details which highlight how serious the believers were about church.

1. *They met together daily.* Let that sink in. They met together *every day!* Warren Wiersbe remarks, "The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for 'services as usual.' They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won souls daily (Acts 2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine."⁹

Where did they meet? According to verse 44, they met together in the temple courts. Why there? For one reason, it was the largest place in town, and you'd need it to accommodate 3,000 plus people!

What's more it was a great place to evangelize. Why? Because every day the Jews met at the Temple for worship. In the morning and again in the afternoon the priests would offer a burnt offering and incense to God. There was always a congregation of people that gathered to watch the priests enter the sanctuary. What a great open door for evangelism!

2. *They broke bread together.* Where? In their homes. Here "breaking bread" doesn't refer to Communion. We're told specifically that they broke bread and "ate together."

After meeting for instruction and evangelism in the temple courts, the people went home to eat. And they invited others to eat with them.

I hope you do that. It's a privilege for Christians to eat together. When was the last time you invited a family or two to your home to eat, and then sat around the table and talked about your Savior?

I'm impressed by the simplicity of the early church. They met, not in stained glass cathedrals, but in houses. And they broke bread together. What's more...

⁹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 411.

3. *They praised God together.* No doubt they sang songs and shared testimonies together. They gave God honor for what He had done in their lives.

4. *They influenced their community together.* Verse 47 says they “enjoyed the favor of all the people.” This is beautiful. God granted this favor. True, He doesn’t do so always. Sometimes He allows His people to feel the heat of persecution (as in Acts 8:1 & 12:1).

But for now, there was favor in Jerusalem. The believers banded together and influenced their community together.

God takes His church seriously, and so must we. I am so thankful for what God is doing in this local church. He continues to send new people our way. Let’s never forget, it’s God’s intent for His church to grow. It’s not supposed to be a clique nor a club. It’s a vine that grows (John 15:1). It’s a body that’s being built up (Eph 4:12). It’s a spiritual house that’s being expanded living stone by living stone (1 Pet 2:5). It’s a sheepfold concerning which the Good Shepherd said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also (John 10:16).”

I’d like to talk for a moment to those who are not members of this wonderful God-ordained entity called *the church*. Perhaps you’ve been hearing the Shepherd’s voice saying, “Come into My fold,” and are wondering what to do. Three things. Take a look at verse 41 and you’ll see them. “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number.”

The first step is to *accept the message*. What message? The message that Peter preached in verses 14-36, the message of Jesus Christ. Jesus was handed over to die for sinners by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge (23). Then God raised Him from the dead, as witnessed by the apostles and others (32). God has made this Jesus, whom men crucified, both Lord and Christ (36).

Is He *your* Lord and Christ? You say, “What must I do for Jesus to become my Lord and Messiah?” That’s what Peter’s listeners wanted to know (37), and he told them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the Holy Spirit (38).”

In order for Jesus to become your Savior, you must repent and place your faith in Him. You must “accept” Peter’s message, and in so doing you will experience God’s amazing forgiveness.

Then, step two, you must *be baptized*. Baptism is the first step of obedience a believer must take. It’s not necessary for salvation, but it is the God-ordained way to express your faith in Christ. To be baptized is to say outwardly what you’ve already said inwardly. “I believe in Jesus. He is my Savior and Lord. I want the world to know.”

The third step is *church membership*. “About three thousand *were added to their number* that day.” Just as you will search in vain to find an *unbaptized* Christian in the New Testament, so you will search in vain to find a *solo* Christian—a professing Christian who refuses to become part of a local church. Throughout Acts, right after people identified with Christ publicly through baptism, they were “added” to the church (2:47; 5:14).

If you have identified with Christ, you need next to identify with a local church. You need to be “added” to a local, Bible-teaching and Bible-living church, placing yourself under its authority and devoting yourself to its people and ministries.

We’re talking about evidences of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is in control of a church or a person’s life, we’ll see it in their priorities and then in their practice.

III. We see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our progress (47b).

Notice the end of verse 47, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” This was a church on the move. It was a growing church, and it grew for two reasons.

A. The church grew because of the Lord’s working. “The *Lord* added to their number daily.”¹⁰ Know this. God is sovereign in salvation. He’s also sovereign in church growth. He adds to His church. The tense of the verb (imperfect), literally “was adding,” indicates that people were continually being added to this first church.

Yet who did He add? The text says, “those who were being *saved*.” Well, how did they get saved? Someone told them they were *lost*. So there’s the other side of church growth. It happens ultimately because of the Lord’s working, but the Lord works through means.

B. The church grew because of the people’s witness.

Friends, we’ve been talking about a day that changed the world, the day the church began. I want to finish by pointing out two key implications that come out of this final verse.

1. *You can’t be part of the church unless you are saved.* The Lord added “saved” people to His church. Have you been saved? If you don’t know for sure, I urge you to find out what it means to be saved. And know that church membership won’t do it for you, nor will getting baptized, nor will living a good life. Salvation is something the Lord must do for you, and He does it when you put your total trust in His Son.

So there’s the first implication. You can’t be part of the church unless you are saved.

2. *You need to value the church if you are saved.* Like the people in verse 47. They were “added” to their number. To whose number? To the number of people who were serious about their Lord, His Word, and each other. They started valuing things they’d never valued before, things like studying sound doctrine, fellowship, corporate worship, and corporate prayer.

Friends, if you’re saved, those are the things your Savior wants you to value. And to help you, He established His church. I cherish the church and I hope you do too, not because it’s perfect, but because it’s His.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce offers this needed reminder, “It is the Lord whose prerogative it is to add new members to His own community; it is the joyful duty of the community to welcome to their ranks those whom Christ has accepted.” F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 81.