

Main Idea: When a church is filled by the Holy Spirit, there will be three key evidences as there were in the first church in Acts 2:42-47.

- I. The priorities of the Spirit-filled church (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. The practice of the Spirit-filled church (43-47a)
 - A. The believers were serious about God (43).
 1. The people were in awe.
 2. The apostles did wonders.
 - 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. The progress of the Spirit-filled church (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 be part of the church if you are saved.
- Make It Personal: Two responses...
1. Let’s be thankful for the Holy Spirit.
 2. Let’s keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23

We have some good news today, and we have it because of something that happened one day two thousand years ago

The day began quietly enough with a small group of Jesus-followers assembled in a secluded room, just 120 of them. Can God do anything with only 120 people? He did on this day two thousand years ago, for as a result of just one sermon preached on one day the church grew from 120 to some 3,120 people.

What made the difference? To put it simply, the Holy Spirit had come.

I don’t think most of us appreciate as we ought the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost God sent His Spirit to baptize the followers of Jesus into one body. He came just as Jesus promised, to indwell God’s people during this phase of history between the first and second coming of the Messiah. This is the age of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “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.” He said you *will be* my witnesses, and the power for witness will be the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We have all that it takes to fulfill the mission that Jesus gave us. The Holy Spirit has come.

A lot of Christians shy away from the subject of the Holy Spirit. I think one of the main reasons is due to severe misunderstandings concerning His work. When the name

^{**}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 For an earlier development of this text, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2001.

of the Holy Spirit is mentioned, the first word that often comes to mind is *tongues*. We have such a narrow understanding of why the Spirit came.

“He came to enable people to speak in tongues, didn’t He?” Yes, He did that. But in a sense, that was merely “warm up” for the game that would follow. In my estimation, the warm-up is over and the game—the real reason for the Spirit’s coming—has begun.

What is the Holy Spirit truly doing today? Just what is the *evidence* that the Holy Spirit is at work in a church or person’s life?

We know what it is *not*. The Holy Spirit doesn’t call attention to Himself. Jesus Himself explained this about the Holy Spirit in John 15:26, “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify *about me*.” And in John 16:14, “He will bring *glory to me* by taking what is mine and making it known to you.”

But how does He glorify Christ? What does it look like? Is it happening in your life and mine and in this church?

You say, “Well, it’s sort of subjective, isn’t it?”

Actually, it’s not. I believe we see the tangible evidence of the Spirit’s presence in Acts 2:42-47, the text that shows us what happened to the first church right after the Holy Spirit came.

I’ve entitled today’s message, “*The Spirit-filled Church*.” When a church is filled by the Holy Spirit, there will be three key evidences as there were in the first church in Acts 2:42-47.

I. The priorities of the Spirit-filled church (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 fellow with 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).”

Let’s set the stage for our study. In Acts 1:5 we see the Spirit promised. In Acts 2:4 we see the Spirit’s arrival and the accompanying expression of tongues. In Acts 2:14-36 we see Peter’s explanation of the Spirit’s coming. But then we see the real evidence of the Holy Spirit. Where? Right here beginning in verse 42. When the Holy Spirit came He transformed people’s priorities.

The author of Acts, Luke, says that the brand new church members “devoted themselves” (KJV “continued steadfastly”) to something. The Spirit affected their devotion. When the Spirit is present in a church’s life, as well as in the lives of individuals, it shows up in the area of priorities.

A young believer said to me, “I didn’t use to go to church, and when I did, it was because I had to. I didn’t want to go. But now I *want* to go to church. I don’t want to miss.”

That’s the evidence of the Holy Spirit. He gives us a new “want to.” He transforms our values. Take a look at the first church and what you’ll see is this. These new

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

believers began to value things they didn't value before. They devoted themselves to four priorities.

A. The first church valued God's Word. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ['doctrine' in the KJV]." First of all, who is "they?" It 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-led 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 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.

Simply put, 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

A couple of practical suggestions. One, get a good study Bible, like the MacArthur Study Bible, or the ESV Study Bible, and study it. Don't just read the Bible, study it. Look for themes, check cross references. And mark your Bible. Make notes in it.

A second suggestion. Bring that Bible with you to church. Bringing your study Bible to church puts you in the right frame of mind. I'm coming, not just to listen to somebody talk to me, but to study and learn and grow.

Three thousand baby Christians devoted themselves to learning the Word of God. They were hungry. Yes, the first church valued God's Word. Secondly...

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."

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.

³ James Boice, *Acts*, p. 58.

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).

It takes more a table of food to have true fellowship. The fellows at the lodge can have a jolly time eating a meal together, but that's not biblical fellowship.

Kent Hughes is right when he says, "Fellowship comes through *giving*. Fellowship costs! So many people never know the joys of Christian fellowship because they have never learned to give themselves away. They visit a church or small study group with an eye only for their own needs (hardly aware of others) and go away saying, 'There is no fellowship there.' The truth is, we will have fellowship only when we make it a practice to reach out to others and give something of ourselves."⁴

And realize this. Fellowship is a work of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13:14, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship [*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

So if you want to have fellowship, then you must learn to be a giver, not just a taker. And if want to experience devotion to *the* fellowship, you must learn to be a giver in the body life of the church where God has placed you.

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 piece of our lives. For New Testament believers, church was their life. For us, church is often 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 kinds we do like).

Not so in the New Testament. They were devoted to *the fellowship*. Church was 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 have eternal life when once we were heading for eternal condemnation? It's because of what Jesus did. He died in our place. He shed His blood for the remission of our sins. Three days later He conquered death, and one day is coming again.

We must remember. The early church did. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. They made worshipping Christ a priority in their schedules. Do you?

One of the things that thrills my heart is to see how people in this church value the privilege of worshipping 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, but I just didn't want to miss church." There was no question where that man's priorities were.

Do you value church? What steps are you taking to show it? It's so easy to say we do, but our actions tell the story. If I come to one or two worship services a month, I am showing that I value other things, even good things like family and work, more that the best thing, worshipping our Savior God.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*, p. 49.

I'm convinced that the key to meaningful worship on Sunday takes place earlier in the week. When I begin my week on Monday, I know I've got all kinds of things to do that week. And I know the Lord's Day is coming. So I need to get ready for it. I know I need to work in the yard, buy groceries, visit a family member, and for sure, fulfill work responsibilities. So I need to put those on the schedule. Monday through Saturday. But not Sunday. I'm going to worship the Lord when Sunday comes, and my whole week is going to revolve around that most significant event.

And Saturday night is key. If I get to bed late Saturday night, I know I won't be ready to engage in the kind of worship my Savior deserves on Sunday morning. So I need to guard my Saturday night, and lay out my clothes, and the kids' clothes, and spend some time in prayer, and get the rest my body needs so I'm ready to 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.

The story goes that 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

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, many churches don't pray much. Offer a concert, and a crowd will come. Put on a drama, and the multitudes will arrive. But have a prayer meeting, and the ranks are thinned. And we wonder why the typical church today is so anemic.

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

So there's the first evidence of the Holy Spirit. We see the evidence of the Spirit 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 worshiping Christ, and to prayer. And all these activities take place where? In the *church*.

So let's ask ourselves a question. Am I devoted to the church? If I am I'll be faithful to it, support it, and participate in it regularly and cheerfully. I won't badmouth it nor stay in the company of those who do. When I see a problem in it—and problems do arise from time to time—I'll deal with the problem in a biblical manner.

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.

So what's the evidence of a Spirit-filled church? The first evidence pertains to our priorities. Here's the second...

II. The practice of the Spirit-filled church (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.

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

⁶ John MacArthur, *Acts*, p. 85.

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.

1. *The people were in awe.* The KJV states, “And fear came upon every soul.” 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.

A good test to determine if a work is from God is this. 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. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7).”

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!

2. *The apostles did wonders.* Verse 43 again, “Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”

God didn’t give everyone the ability to do miraculous wonders. Here we’re told He limited it to the apostles, “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 miracles still present? 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.”⁷

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 away for awhile.” 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 in a common pot. It’s clear from verse 46 that some still owned homes. No, the giving was purely voluntary. Later,

⁷ MacArthur, p. 88.

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...

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.

So having enough food to eat was a *big* challenge, a *daily* challenge. To complicate things many 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. The Lord 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."⁸

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 that's what you'd need to accommodate 3,000 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, for we're told that they broke bread and "ate together." So after meeting in the temple courts for instruction and evangelism, 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?

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 411.

I'm impressed by the simplicity of the early church. No light shows, nor fog machines. They met in houses. And they broke bread together.

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 He calls us to do the same.

It's God's intent for His church to grow. It's not supposed to be 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. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd (John 10:16).”

Perhaps you've been attending this church for awhile, and you've been hearing the Shepherd's voice saying, “Come into My fold,” and are wondering what to do. We'd love to talk with you about becoming a part of this family.

To discover what's involved look again at the three steps we considered last time as mentioned in verse 41. “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 #2, you must *be baptized*. Baptism is the first step of obedience a believer must take. It's not necessary for salvation, but it is necessary as the Scriptural means of expressing 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 submitted your life to Christ, He now calls you to submit yourself to the nurture and authority of His church. You need to be added to a local, Bible-centered church.

When the Holy Spirit is in control of a church or a person's life, there will be evidence of it. We'll see it in our priorities and then our practice. Thirdly...

III. The progress of the Spirit-filled church (47b)

“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Someone has put together a takeoff of the familiar hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers” entitled “Backward Christian Soldiers.”

*Backward Christian soldiers, Fleeing from the fight,
With the cross of Jesus, Nearly out of sight.
Christ our rightful master Stands against the foe
Onward into battle, we seem afraid to go.*

Chorus

*Backward Christian soldiers, Fleeing from the fight,
With the cross of Jesus, Nearly out of sight.
Like a might tortoise Moves the church of God.
Brothers we are treading, Where we've often trod.
We are much divided, Many bodies we,
Having different doctrines, but Not much charity.
Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the cross of Jesus Hidden does remain.
Gates of hell should never 'gainst the Church prevail,
We have Christ's own promise, but we think it might fail.
Sit here then ye people, Join our sleeping throng.
Blend with ours, your voices in a feeble song.
Blessings, ease and comfort Ask from Christ the King,
But with our modern thinking, We won't do a thing.⁹*

Not so the first church. 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.” 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.”¹⁰

Know this. God is sovereign in salvation. He adds to His church. The tense of the verb (imperfect), literally “was adding,” indicates that people were continually being saved and added to the church.

B. The church grew because of the people's witness. The Lord added those who were “being saved.” How did they get saved? Someone told them they were *lost*.

Please don't miss two key implications 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. Furthermore...

2. *You need to be part of the church if you are saved.* What happened to those who were saved? They were “added” to their number. It's been well said that God knows nothing of solitary religion.

Make It Personal: Two responses...

1. *Let's be thankful for the Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit has come! If you have Christ as your Savior, you have the Holy Spirit. Give thanks!

2. *Let's keep in step with the Holy Spirit.* When the Holy Spirit is in control of a church or a person's life, we'll see the evidence of it—in our priorities, in our practice, and in our progress. Do you see the evidence in your life?

⁹ Anonymous

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 81.