

# The Characteristics of a Spirit-Filled Church

## Acts 2:41-47

### Introduction

When an object is magnetized it changes internally even as it maintains the same outward appearance. Its size, shape, color, and weight are unchanged and one cannot tell simply by looking whether an object is magnetized.

And the only way to determine whether a thing is magnetized is by seeing how it behaves – how it relates to other objects around it.

When Peter and the other believers received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost they looked just the same as they had before.

They were the same externally but they were quite different internally.

And how they related to others was altered in very significant ways.

Last week we looked at Peter's Pentecost Sermon and we saw how he preached a powerful sermon.

We saw how it was a sermon that was taken right from the pages of Scripture.

How he expounded on the fulfillment of prophecy regarding Jesus as Messiah.

And we saw how he pulled no punches as he directly blamed his fellow Jerusalem Jews for killing Christ.

We saw that the reaction of the multitude was to be "cut to the heart" in recognition of their guilt.

And how they asked, "Brothers, what can we do?"

Then we saw how Peter gave them hope as he called them to repentance and baptism.

And Peter promised them that if they would do so, they would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit as he gave his Pentecost sermon.

Just some 50 days previously we had seen him cower and deny his Lord three times in one night.

And now he stood before a great crowd and delivered a very powerful sermon that he could not have prepared in advance.

Obviously, he was the instrument of the Holy Spirit as he was given just the right words to say.

Words that would have God's desired effect on the crowd.

This morning we are going to look at Acts 2:41-47.

The first thing we'll see is the **result** that Peter's sermon had on the crowd in verse 41.

Then we will spend a good bit of our time exposing the **marks** of the Spirit-filled church.

And lastly we will see the **effects** of the church as the believers interacted with those around them.

Please join me in Acts 2 and follow along as I read our passage beginning at verse 41 –

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

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. 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.

## **I. The Result of Peter's Sermon (41)**

Peter had preached a very powerful sermon and the results of it were remarkable

It is perhaps the most effective sermon that Peter preached –

And it was his first one and completely unrehearsed!

I can still remember the first sermon I ever preached and I have to say it was nothing like Peter's

I rehearsed that particular sermon more than I have any sermon since

I can still remember standing in the pulpit and preaching through the sermon three times to an empty church on Saturday night before I had to do it for real on Sunday

Still, it was rather unremarkable other than for the fact it proved to me that I would not surely die from public speaking no matter what I thought

But as a result of Peter's sermon some three thousand people were saved at Pentecost

That was a 25-fold increase over the 120 who were in the upper room with the apostles!

An interesting side note is that we read in **Exodus 32:28** that about three thousand men fell at Sinai for the sins committed at the giving of the Law and here we see that about three thousand were saved at the giving of the Holy Spirit

I'm not sure of the significance of those numbers but it is an intriguing parallel nonetheless

### ***Salvation***

In verse 41 we first see that the three thousand "received his word"

That means that they believed it and acted on it unto salvation

And we miss some of the flavor as the original Greek indicates that they received it with gladness

It really should be no surprise considering the emotional state that they were in when faced with their guilt that they heartily welcomed Peter's message of salvation with eagerness

The idea here is that they jumped at the opportunity to be saved

This is often the response when a person truly recognizes their guilt before God

When they are truly convicted, most people are eager to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior

### ***Baptism***

But the three thousand went further and were baptized the same day

Baptizing that many people would have been no problem given the abundance of pools and water sources in Jerusalem

Had the 12 apostles divided up the crowd and each gone to a different place they could have easily baptized that number

Baptism is meant to be the believer's first step of obedience

Sadly, we often delay baptisms today due to logistics and other factors but the New Testament pattern is to be baptized quickly if not immediately

Baptism in the name of Jesus indicates the acceptance of his Lordship and control of a believer's life  
It would have been a huge and definitive step that no Jew would have taken lightly

Being baptized in the name of Jesus would have meant excommunication from his countrymen

For a Jew to be baptized in the name of Jesus meant that they had turned away from centuries of heritage

So, this baptism signified a renunciation of Judaism and all of its cultural and political advantages for those three thousand individuals – it was a significant step of faith

### ***Added to the church***

Those three thousand turned away from the priests, scribes, and Pharisees as they placed themselves under the teaching and leadership of the apostles

And in doing so they joined together with the fledgling church and were added to their number that very day

## **II. Marks of the Spirit-Filled Church**

Quite often in the life of the church we look back to the early church to try to discern what the church should be

As we look to the pages of Scripture to see how the early church governed and conducted themselves we must constantly be seeking to understand what is shown as being an historical narrative of what *did happen then* and what is being shown to us as what *should be happening now*

That's the situation we find ourselves facing this morning as we look at the earliest days of the church There is a difference between being told what happened and being told what should happen and it's not always easy to tell the difference

However, in virtually all cases there are guiding principles to be found even in those parts of Scripture that are more informative than instructive

As we turn our attention to **the marks of the Spirit-filled church** the first thing we notice is that they "devoted themselves"

Actually, this should read that they were "continually devoting themselves"

The Greek verb is one of ongoing action

Luke used the exact same word in **Acts 1:14** where we have already seen that he wrote:

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

We will see this same word translated slightly differently in **verse 46** this morning:

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts

In both of those instances it's easy to see the continued action that is intended when Luke relates here the devotion of the early church

And Luke says that these early believers continued to persevere in **four** different areas

### **A. Devoted to Learning (42)**

First, Luke writes in verse 42 that "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching"

These new Jewish believers had left their old life in Judaism and now attached themselves to the teaching of the apostles

#### **They were devoted to learning**

The picture we have here is that of steadfast, single-minded devotion

These new believers were hungry for God's Word and they couldn't get enough of it

They behaved like the newborn spiritual infants who Peter wrote about in **1 Peter 2:2** as they craved the milk of the Word so that they might grow and mature

Remember last week we discussed how being filled with the Spirit and being filled with the Word go hand-in-hand

We won't take time to turn to them again this morning but we saw this truth in **Ephesians 5:18-20** and **Colossians 3:16-17** should you wish to jot down those references

The teaching of the apostles at that time could not have been from the Gospels or the Epistles because those had not yet been written

The apostles taught these new believers from the Old Testament and I would imagine that they taught especially how the prophetic writings pointed directly to Jesus

They likely also taught them the words and sayings that Jesus spoke during his earthly ministry

No doubt they taught what Jesus had said during the Sermon on the Mount, the Olivet Discourse and the conversations that were held in the Upper Room at the Last Supper, and the revelations of Jesus during the 40-days between his resurrection and his ascension

Christianity is not a mindless endeavor

**Romans 12:2** tells us to be transformed by the renewal of our minds

Believers are meant to be learners and human teachers are the instruments of the Holy Spirit

And it seems that the new believers took every opportunity to listen and learn as they hung on every word of the apostles

## **B. Devoted to Fellowship (42, 44-47a)**

The new believers also devoted themselves to "the fellowship"

This word for fellowship is the Greek word *koinonia* and this is the first time it's used in the New Testament

*Koinonia* has the root idea of "commonness" or "commonality"

It is the sharing of things or experiences or even the sharing of self

In the book of Acts the emphasis on *koinonia* is on giving or contributing rather than on receiving even though there is always a recipient to the giving

The early church would not have thought of *koinonia* or fellowship as taking place over punch and cookies – it was much more than that

Fellowship for them was a spirit of mutual generosity and sharing

We see this spirit amplified for us starting at verse **44**

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.

These verses have caused a great deal of controversy in the church over the ages as the question of whether this is meant to be informative or instructional has been a matter of much debate

These verses have been used by communists to argue that communism is supported by the Bible

And many others who, although they don't see communism in the verses, do believe they see a principle of common ownership that the church should be living by today

Since we always want to be informed by Scripture when possible and not by our own opinions or desires so let's see what we can find as we pull these verses apart and see if we can come to a biblical conclusion

First of all we read in **verse 44** that "all who believed were together"

That word "together" could mean they were all in one place at the same time or it could mean that they were of one mind

Since there were over 3,000 of them it seems most likely that it means they all were together in their thinking – there was general agreement among the believers

Then we read in **verses 44-45** that they

“had all things in common and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need”

There was a strong expectation of communal property in the Jewish tradition that may well have informed this attitude and behavior

During times of celebration and feasting no one charged anyone for the needs of the festival

All of the trappings and equipment were freely shared among all

People rarely even paid to rent a room as it was expected that those in the city would put them up

The early church could have simply been extending that expectation longer than for the days of celebration

Many of those who were being saved may have travelled a long distance to get to Jerusalem and had stayed on longer than they anticipated and therefore had needs that the other believers were happy to supply

An attitude of “we’re all in this together” could certainly be understood under the circumstances

However, we have no idea how widely this was practiced or for how long they kept it up

In **verse 46** where we see that the early believers met “in their homes” indicating that some still maintained ownership of their homes

Then if we were to look ahead to Acts 5 we would see that Ananias and Sapphira still owned private property

That account says they sold a piece of property for the benefit of the needy and Peter admonished them that the property and the proceeds from it were theirs to do with as they wished

Clearly, ownership of private property had not been abolished and not all property and goods were put into the common coffers and there was no requirement for anyone to give their property or funds

Then as we read the epistles we see that the poor and the rich are often mentioned which demonstrates that the two economic conditions remained long after Pentecost

And we see collections being requested but there is no mention of selling property to help others beyond a very short time span as the church was starting

Still, there are some general principles we should hasten to notice

First, fellowship in the early church cost something

Needs were recognized and met at the expense of someone else

There was a liquidation of assets and a sharing of the proceeds with those who were less well off

We also come to the understanding that the early believers valued people over possessions

They would rather see their brothers cared for than defend their own personal property rights

Surely we can see that these attitudes and actions are noble and God-honoring and worthy of being emulated today

Our benevolent fund is one way we continue to honor the principle of taking care of the needs of others

As God has blessed us we give of our resources in order that others may benefit when needs arise

And I know there are many in the church who quietly help out others with labor and resources on their own without any formality

We should be devoted to fellowship and consider our fellow believers as more important than our stuff just as the early church was – even if it doesn't rise to the level of having all things in common

### **C. Devoted to Worship (42)**

We also see in **verse 42** that the new church was devoted to worship which included “the breaking of bread” and “the prayers”

The “breaking of bread” referred to here is the observance of the Lord's Table

We come to the conclusion that the Lord's Table is meant rather than a regular meal because it is sandwiched between the two obviously religious terms “fellowship” and “prayers”

Christ and his atoning sacrifice were regularly before these early believers and they acknowledged it often by regular observance

Then in **verse 44** we see that they were faithful to meeting together

They steadfastly continued to meet together in the temple and they held worship services in their homes where they partook of the Lord's Supper and also enjoyed common meals together

We see this pattern later in the New Testament as the Lord's Table was often connected to a communal meal

And whatever food they enjoyed they attributed to God as they praised him and “received their food with glad and generous hearts” –

The word translated “glad” is the same word that is used by Luke to describe John the Baptist leaping for joy in Elizabeth's womb when the expectant Mary came near

it's a word that implies verbal exclamation and body movement – shouting and leaping or dancing

And the word translated “generous” means to share freely without hindrance

It comes from the idea of smooth soil without stones

Even the consumption of a common meal was cause for worship and that worship was not necessarily stuffy or sedate!

Lastly, in **verse 42**, we see that they were devoted to prayer

Actually, the text says they were devoted to “the prayers” which seems to indicate specific prayers

These early believers had just come out of Judaism and they were used to reciting a litany of daily prayers

Perhaps these are the prayers that are in view here – still being prayed but with new insight

What is clear is that they were devoted to corporate prayer

The early church was steadfastly devoted to meeting together both in the temple and in their own homes as they commemorated the sacrifice of the Lord and lifted their voices together in prayer

### **III. The Effects of the Church (43, 47b,c)**

The early church left no doubt that something dramatic had taken place in their lives

The new believers were different and it showed

And they had an effect on the people around them

#### **A. Awe**

First of all we see in **verse 43** that what was happening inspired awe in those who witnessed it

The Greek word translated “awe” is *phobos* which we readily recognize as the root of our English word “phobia” which relates to fear

We also see this exact same word in **Acts 5:5** and **5:11** concerning the reaction of the people to the death of Ananias as judgment for lying to the Holy Spirit

This “awe” was reverential fear that resulted in withdrawal or backing off

The people who had mocked those who spoke in foreign languages now backed away and were silenced

The apostles enjoyed something of a calm before the storm as they encountered nothing of the opposition and interference that was about to come

#### **B. Favor**

Then in **verse 47** we see that the behavior of the church caused them to gain “favor with all the people”

These earliest believers were relating to the outside world as they should

As the Word of God was taught and lived out there was a sense of reverential awe that caused people respect what was happening but also a sense of favorability toward those who were practicing it

Clearly, those people had changed and the change while awe-inspiring was attractive

#### **C. Evangelism**

And that attractiveness led to evangelism

The last part of verse 47 tells us that

The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved

Peter’s Pentecost sermon brought in some 3,000 souls but the continued growth of the church was based on the witness and testimony of the church

Evangelism will occur naturally in a church that is devoted to learning, fellowshiping, and worshipping

Those practices make for a healthy church and healthy things tend to grow

I believe it’s wrong for people in the church to say, “It’s not about numbers”

Without a doubt, the church is not interested in drawing huge numbers by any means necessary

But if we are steadfastly, single-mindedly devoted to living as these earliest members of the church did, growth should be the natural result

And we should want to see the kingdom of God increase in size as well as spiritual maturity

It’s not an either/or proposition

The early church was attractive to those around them but I want you to take note of where the growth came from

Our text says, “The Lord added to their number” –

God is responsible for the growth but we are his instruments and we must do our part

We must live in such a way that people notice and we gain their favor

## **Conclusion**

The earliest church was single-mindedly devoted to teaching and learning God's Word

They were devoted to the unfettered generosity of fellowship amongst their spiritual brothers and sisters

And they were devoted to worship as they engaged in regular, corporate prayer and the remembrance of Christ at the Lord's Table

Not only were they "all together" as they pursued these disciplines but they were also joyful in them  
Imagine how it must have been to walk by one of their house churches and hearing them laughing and maybe even jumping for joy as they shared a meal together alongside the more serious times of teaching

A church that is filled with the Holy Spirit will be a place where the teaching of God's Word is central  
A place where people are convicted of their personal sinfulness and shown how to correct it

And it will be a place where the Bible is not only believed and taught but where the Bible is lived

The Spirit-filled church will be a place where fellowship is the order of the day and people will be open-handed as they are generous with one another

And it will be a place where worship is engaged in with a sense of awe mingled with joy as we lift our prayers to God together

As we remember everything God has done for us through his Son

Just as a magnetized piece of steel looks identical externally in spite of its internal change

The earliest of believers looked the same before and after the Holy Spirit indwelt them

But they were different and they had an effect on those around them

May we endeavor to do likewise

Let's pray