

Holy Spirit Community: Life in the Early Church

1. Quick review
2. General observations
3. Exposition of Acts 2:42-47
4. The take-away for us

Quick review

1. Last weekend I was sick with a cold, so Ed taught (on short notice!). If you weren't here, go online and listen to it. If you were here and you weren't convicted, you need to go online and listen to it again.

Members should have been convicted that they weren't involved enough in each others lives. Non-members should have been convicted that they need to become members and give up their "fly-by-night" status. Elders should have been convicted that they weren't shepherding like the New Testament seems to make clear that they should be doing. In short, there was enough conviction for everyone.

General observations

1. **Acts 2:42-47**
2. How does this passage fit in the context of Acts? Why is it here?
 - a. **2:41** has been identified as a "summary statement" of the day of Pentecost, and Luke uses similar summary statements throughout Acts.
 - b. **2:42-47** has been identified as a "summary passage" that acts as a transition between specific events. In this case, the day of Pentecost (**2:1-41**) and the miraculous healing of a man who was lame (**3:1-10**).
 - c. There are similar "summary passages" in **4:32-37** and **5:12-16**.
 - d. These passages give us an overview of what was happening during this stage of the growth of Christianity and the church.
3. Is this passage, and especially **2:42**, a pattern or template to be followed by the church, or by each local church?
 - a. The "apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer"
 - b. Something to ponder as we go through this passage, and we'll address it again at the end.
4. Suffering and persecution
 - a. **2:47** - "and having favor with all the people."

- b. There seems to be an idea today that the church, or believers, in the New Testament era (when the New Testament was being written) were constantly experiencing persecution.
 - i. A careful reading of Acts does not support this idea.
 - ii. To be sure, there were times of persecution, but it wasn't a continual, never-ending reality.
- c. Persecution starts slowly in Acts (see **4:1-3, 21**), begins to build in **5:17-41**, takes off running with the stoning of Stephen in **7:54-60**, reaches a peak with Saul in **8:1-3** and **9:1-2**, but then lets off after Saul's conversion and **9:31** tells us that "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."
- d. Even periods of persecution by the Roman empire were sporadic and depended more or less on who the emperor was at any given time.
- e. To be clear, I'm not saying that persecution and/or suffering does not happen. **1 Peter** makes this clear; especially, for example, **4:12-19**.
- f. "Who Causes Your Suffering? The Sovereignty of God and Reality of Evil"
 - i. Desiring God article posted on April 7, 2018
 - 1. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/who-causes-your-suffering>
 - ii. The author discusses several examples, one being Job.
 - 1. **Job 1:20-22**
 - a. We even sing a song in our church based on this passage: "Blessed Be Your Name"
 - 2. **Job 2:9-10**
 - 3. **Job 42:11**

Exposition of Acts 2:42-47

- 1. A summary of what the church looked like in its earliest days (**42-43**)
 - a. They devoted themselves to two, or four, things:
 - i. Two or four? Some commentators think that breaking of bread and prayers are a further explanation of what fellowship looked like.
 - ii. The apostles' teaching
 - 1. Probably what was happening in verse **46**, "attending the temple together," but also in their homes, and elsewhere.
 - 2. The apostles were preaching and teaching: explaining the gospel, who Jesus is, how he fulfilled the Old Testament, what their lives should look like now that they were followers of Jesus, and more.
 - 3. The apostles are all dead and gone in our time. Do we have access to the apostles' teaching?
 - a. Yes - the New Testament

iii. Fellowship

1. **Poll:** What is fellowship?
2. “Fellowship” is a translation of the Greek word “koinonia”
 - a. “The term itself means a participation or sharing in common of something with someone else, in this case eating and praying. Thus, fellowship is not a very helpful translation, for fellowship is the result of *koinonia*, of sharing in common; it is not the *koinonia* itself. *Koinonia* is an activity which can result in fellowship of some sort, and it can entail things like sharing not just spiritual activities such as prayer but also physical food or other goods in common (v. 45, cf. 4:32-37).” Witherington, 160
 - b. See also **Romans 15:26-27** and **Hebrews 13:16**, where *koinonia* is also used, and translated as “contribution” and “sharing.”
3. Breaking of bread
 - a. We’ll discuss this more in verse **46**
4. Prayers
 - a. They prayed together
 - b. Could also be referring to praying in the temple, as in **3:1**

iv. “Devoted”

1. What did this “devotion” look like?
 - a. They made time for these things. These were people with lives, families, friends, jobs, businesses, hobbies, interests, etc. And yet, they made time for the apostles’ teaching and for fellowship.
 2. What did this “devotion” not look like?
 - a. Safe to say it did not amount to getting together for one hour each week to sing some songs, listen to a 25-minute message, and then bolt for the door, not to be seen again for at least another week.
 3. We are finite beings, with limited time, energy, focus, attention spans, and resources. We make choices every day about what to do with these limited resources, creating and reinforcing life habits. Some have eternal benefit and are worth devoting to, most do not. Food for thought.
 - a. See **Psalms 86:11**
- b. The result? “Awe [or fear] came upon every soul”
- i. Why? Because they could see that God was present, doing something huge, and they were either part of what was happening, if they were believers, or they were witnessing it first hand, if they were not believers.

- c. What else was happening?
 - i. Many “wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”
 - ii. We’ll see a specific example of this in Acts 3.
2. Luke expands on verses **42-43** in verses **44-47**
- a. **Acts 2:44-47**
 - b. “Luke is giving a description of the ministry of these disciples to one another in a variety of contexts, not simply telling us what happened when they gathered for what we might call church.” Peterson, 160
 - c. What were they doing?
 - i. Caring for each others’ physical needs
 - ii. Eating together
 - iii. Meeting together, in the temple and in their homes
 - d. Caring for each other’s physical needs
 - i. What made this possible?
 - 1. They “were together” (**44**). They were not isolated from each other.
 - 2. This does not imply an early form of “communism,” though it may seem to. In v. **46** we see that they still had homes, implying that personal ownership.
 - ii. This wasn’t a one-time reaction to the gospel where they sold everything they had and gave the money away, never to own anything ever again. The verb tenses are imperfect, implying an ongoing action in the past, rather than the aorist tense, which describes a snapshot of an action that happened in the past.
 - 1. Verse **45** says that they did this “as any had need.”
 - iii. But, having said all that, the fact that they were doing this at all shows the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
 - iv. Does this happen today?
 - e. Eating together
 - i. “breaking of bread” in verse **42**, and “breaking bread in their homes” in verse **46**
 - 1. What’s in view here? The Lord’s Supper, or what we also call “Communion?”
 - 2. Maybe, or even probably. But for these early believers it seemed to be something that was integrated with their meals that they had together, and not simply an every-so-often symbolic token “meal” in a formal church setting.

3. In this context, and in the Jewish culture, the action of breaking a loaf of bread while giving thanks to God was how they started a meal.
 - a. See **Luke 22:14-20**.
 4. So the action of breaking bread and giving thanks was an everyday symbolic reminder of Jesus' sacrifice for them - a daily reminder of the gospel.
- f. Meeting together
- i. In the temple
 1. At this point they did not have a "church building" to meet in, but what they did have in common was the temple, which was a huge place that could accommodate meetings of hundreds or even several thousand people at one time.
 - ii. In their homes
 1. Some, or most of them, still owned homes and had places to live, as mentioned earlier.
 2. They were eating together, as also mentioned earlier. But presumably they were also discussing, teaching, learning, and applying what they were hearing from the apostles.
 - iii. This sounds like what many (some?) churches do today - meet together on a weekly basis as a large group for corporate worship, and also meeting together in smaller groups in each others homes for ongoing "fellowship," breaking of bread, and life interaction.
 1. **Let's get personal here:** Small groups have been attempted a number of times at Grace Fellowship. Why haven't they been successful? Or have they been successful? Are we simply resistant to the idea of interaction at this personal a level?
 - iv. Luke tells us in verses **46-47** that as they met together they:
 1. "received their food with glad and generous hearts"
 - a. "generous"? that's an interesting description
 2. were "praising God"
 3. were "having favor with all the people"
 - a. What does this tell us? These early believers were not living in isolation from the community in which they lived, in this case Jerusalem. They were living their lives in full view of their world, and the world, for the most part, liked what it saw.
 - b. We might call this living "missionally" today.
- g. What was the result of all these things?
- i. The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

1. The Lord, through the Holy Spirit, was at work through the gospel preaching and teaching, and the gospel living.
2. Note that both God's sovereignty and human responsibility are involved here.
 - a. The "Lord added to their number"
 - b. "those who were being saved"
 - i. How were they being saved? See **2:38**
- ii. And to tie all this in to Ed's message from last week on church membership, the new believers were "added to their number"
 1. They were not being saved in isolation - they were added to the church. The concept of a stand-alone Christian who was not part of the church just isn't there.
 2. Luke was careful to report the actual numbers of the church in those days, implying, perhaps, that someone was keeping track of these things.

The take-away for us

1. Is this passage, and especially **2:42**, a pattern or template to be followed by the church, or by each local church?
 - a. The "apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer"
 - b. Not necessarily, or even simply "no."
 - c. **However**...that doesn't mean that these things should not be part of normal church life.
 - i. Why? Because this is the work or outworking of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers - the same Holy Spirit who is working today.
 - d. Interestingly, our church's motto or tagline is "God's Word. Prayer. Fellowship. Faith."

Resources

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce
2. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
4. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III
6. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/who-causes-your-suffering>