

**The Church Alive – The Powerful Proof of the Presence of the Spirit**  
**Acts 2:42-47**

**42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.**

A couple of weeks ago we began looking at the text I just read, noting from it the powerful proofs, or evidences of the presence of the Spirit of God at work in the early church. It is my contention that the very same precepts are to be at work today, that a church and her people who are rightly controlled by the Holy Spirit will exhibit similar attitudes and actions. Last time we examined the first proof of the presence of the Spirit of God at work in the church; that proof being seen in the priorities of the church; those things the church regards as MOST important to participate in regularly, continually, and unwaveringly. We saw this in verse 42, noting the priority of the Word of God, of the fellowship of the saints, of the Lord's Supper and of praying together. Where a church or congregation is increasingly striving to do and participate together in such things, that church can be assured that the Spirit of God is present and at work.

This brings us to the second of our proofs of presence of the Spirit at work in the body of Christ...

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

If there is but one word I could choose to describe what I see as the practice of the early church, that word would be *intense*. To be *intense* means strenuous or excessively earnest in activity, exertion, diligence, or thought; and because the Holy Spirit was in present and in control, the early church was *intense* about her activities and in her thoughts. In our text, we find three things about which the early church was *intense*, three things we need to pray we also would become increasingly *intense*.

**A. An Intense Contemplation of the work of God (43).**

*"Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."*

We begin with an intense contemplation of the work of God. One of the lines we sang in that most beloved hymn, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" exhorted us to; *"Ponder anew, what the Almighty can do!"* It is a call to contemplate, to consider, thinking about what our God can do. The psalmist, in Psalm 105:5, says the same thing this way: *"Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth..."* In other words, *the people of God are to spend time reflecting upon the work of God to remind them of the greatness of the God who saves.* We see the very same thing in the first church, people who were contemplating the work of God to such and extent that they were filled with awe. Beloved, a church

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experiencing the presence of the Spirit of God will always be intense. We find two indications about how the early church was intense about God.

First, we read in our text, **“everyone was filled with awe...”** The KJV says it this way, **“And fear came upon every soul.”** One question we might seek to answer is this, to whom does “everyone” refer - to those within the church only, or does it also include those outside the church? At this point in the narrative, I would see the church has having such an impact upon the surrounding culture that the “everyone” here would include those outside the church, in the city of Jerusalem, seeing the mighty work of the Spirit of God through the church. But either way, the principle is this; if you want to determine whether a work is from God it is found in this, “Does it cause people to fear, to be in awe of God? If the work is from men, then men will be exalted, men will be applauded and receive the accolades. But if the work is a result of the presence of the Spirit, then God will be the One exalted. Do you want to know the presence of the Spirit? Then never forget Proverbs 1:7 that says what? **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...”**

And this is what we see throughout the book of Acts. Note with me Acts 5:11, after the death of Ananias and Sapphira for lying to God: **“And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.”** The presence of the Spirit was affecting not only the church but also all who heard such things. Why are people filled with fear and awe when the Holy Spirit works? Beloved, it is because they are seeing something that is unexplainable in human terms. When the Holy Spirit is at work, there is nothing ordinary, things become extraordinary. As the early church gathered, the contemplated, noted, testified and experienced God at work! They were intense about it, talking about it, praying for it, and participating in it. How about you, do you contemplate the things of God with the people of God, for the glory of God?

There is a second way in which the early church revealed her intense contemplation of the work of God. For not only was everyone in awe, but next we read in verse 43 that the apostles did wonders and signs, **“...and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.”**

Like Nicodemus with Jesus, the people of Jerusalem understood that what was happening, was happening as are result of God at work. Remember what Nicodemus said to Jesus when he was trying to contemplate what God was doing through Jesus. We read in John 3:2, **“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him.”** Now God evidently had given the apostles a unique ability to do miraculous wonders. Our text clearly states that these wonders and signs were taking place **“through”** the apostles. God was working through those whom He had gifted to build up the church. Why did God choose the apostles for this task? In order to authenticate the message they were speaking about Jesus, about the people’s need to repent and turn to God. God enabled the apostles to do miracles and wonders to prove the message. All of this reminds us that our testimonies are validated as we genuinely reveal God is working in and through us. If we show little of God in our lives, then God will appear little to those who see our lives. The apostles contemplated and revealed a big God.

We know that the early church had a problem to deal with as it began. There would be some who came into a church and say, “God has given me a “word” to give to you – and that word is...” Some would say things along the lines like “Jesus is no longer the only way to heaven.” We might think it impossible for anyone to listen to such a message, but how would the

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early church know if a person was truly speaking for and from God? We see it in our text; God authenticated the apostles' by confirming it with wonders, miracles and signs. This is what the author of Hebrews noted in Hebrews 2:3-4.

**3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.**

That is all good and well, but I know the great question for people is not whether the apostles did such things, but rather if God continues to do wonders and signs through people today? Simply put, wonders – yes; signs, no. Beloved, a wonder is simply a working of God that can only be explained by God. I submit to you that the wonder God performs regularly today is regenerating dead, unbelieving hearts into live believing hearts. But the gift of signs, that which was needed to authenticate the message of Jesus and later the apostles, this is no longer at work. Why? Because we do not need signs to confirm the messengers of God any longer. And why is this? Because we can compare what any teacher says to the Word of God and see whether or not he is speaking for God. The point is this. In the first church the believers were this intense about God as the contemplated what God was doing by way of wonders and signs, feeling a sense of awe. May we too be in awe at what God has done, reading of the wonders and signs in the Bible as if for the first time, and let us always consider what God has done, is doing and promises to do as we look to Him.

## **B. An Intense Concern for Others (44-45).**

So the early church had an intense contemplation of God, but second, they had an intense concern for others. Let us read again verses 44-45, "**44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.**" What I would have you notice here is that *the believers were putting themselves into a position to be able to help one another*. Let me say that again, the believers purposed and put themselves into a position, looking for opportunities to help one another. Let us see What does this mean? Well, let me tell you what it does not mean. The early church as no commune, nor does this text support such a notion. John MacArthur notes, "The family, not the commune, is the basic social unit in God's design." But two things were true of the first church.

First, and we see this in verse 44, they "**were together**" —now this does not mean that they lived together in a commune as many had their own places. The point is that they purposely spent a lot of time together. Second, they "**were sharing...as anyone might have need**" according to verse 45. Here we see the intense concern they had for one another. In practical terms, what that means for us is twofold.

First, *where the Holy Spirit is at work, the people see themselves differently*. If there is anything generally missing from the church in verses 44-45, it is the me attitude. There is no, "I am an island and do not need others." To turn this around, there is also no saying, "I am nothing special; I have nothing to offer the church so it does not matter if I stay home." How dare a blood-bought, Spirit filled and gifted believer diminish the work of the Triune God in His choosing you; in His redeeming you from sin; and in His filling you with His Spirit for service to Himself and to the

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church! There is none of this at this point in the Church. Rather, they were *together*. And so must we be. They shared everything as there were needs. This does not mean that the people sold *all* their possessions and pooled their resources in a common pot. In verse 46 we notice that some still owned homes. The sharing here was purely voluntary. As people saw needs, they were concerned to see that need met. Just a couple of chapters over in Acts 5, we see that Ananias and Sapphira got into trouble, not because they did not give all, but rather because they *lied* about what they gave.

So then, not only does the working of the Spirit change the way we look at ourselves, but *the Spirit also changes how we see our possessions*. Let us not forget that the Jews had come from all over the world to Jerusalem to observe the feast of Pentecost. It seems that of those who became Christians, many remained in the city. We are talking about thousands of converts that now needed lodging and meals. And now here is the church, intensely concerned to meet the needs, not the wants, but the needs of the people. Our text says, "**as anyone might have need.**" The church provided first for her own of food, clothing, and shelter. This is amazing when you stop to consider that poverty was a huge issue in the first century. There was no Social Security, food stamps, or unions to insure fair wages. There was no legal recourse for abuse of people. In fact, the taxes were high and the system was corrupt by conniving men. Simply to feed these people would have been a great undertaking; yet they, the people, did this daily for one another.

To make matters worse, as individuals became Christians, many lost their jobs and were ostracized by their families. First century Palestine was a dog-eat-dog world where it was every man for himself. But the church set a new example. It provided for her people. God desires us to be this intense about one another. To be sure, according to 2 Thessalonians 3:10, when a brother can provide for himself, he should work and earn his own bread. But when there is a legitimate need that is beyond the ability of that brother to provide for himself, then the church is to do what it can to meet that need. This can only be accomplished when the church is together and sharing with one another. The early church was this intense in its concern for one another. Are we this intense about our concern for one another. As we are, we demonstrate the powerful presence of the Spirit of God among us.

### C. An Intense Commitment to the Church (46-47a).

So, the church's practice was an intense contemplation of the work of God, an intense concern for one another, and then thirdly, as an extension of that, the practice of the people in whom was the powerful presence of the Spirit was manifested in an intense commitment to the church. Let us read again verses 46-47, "**46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people.**"

You talk about an intense church schedule. Let us note the daily routine or practice of the church.

First, they met "**day by day.**" That is intense! These people purposed to find their way into one another homes, to meet together regularly. One commentator noted (Warren Wiersbe), "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." Where did they meet? In verse 44 we are

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told they met in the temple courts, the only place large enough to a growing congregation of 3,000 and more. Also, by meeting in the temple court, they could easily evangelize because every day the Jews met at the Temple for worship. Twice a day, in the morning and again in the evening the priests would offer a burnt offering and incense to God. And there was the church to speak of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Not only did they meet daily in the temple, but second, we are told they also were **“breaking bread from house to house.”** As we noted earlier, this phrase speaks of the Lord’s Supper, as it does in verse 42, but notice that they did this also in conjunction with **“taking their meals together.”** Get the picture, after meeting together for instruction and evangelism in the temple courts, the people went to various homes to eat, inviting others to eat with them. Beloved, we need to practice more hospitality like this, having one another in our homes. Once a week we try to do this by inviting one another downstairs after our morning service to eat a meal together. Do you see this as a burden, or as the early church did, as a blessing? Where the Spirit of God is at work, it is not a pain but a privilege to take a meal together. On a personal level, let me ask you, when was the last time you invited a family or two into your home to eat...and then sat around the table and to talk about Jesus Christ?

For the early church, much of the fellowship and instruction did not take place in stained glass cathedrals but in homes after they had met together corporately for worship in the temple. So in addition to meeting daily and taking their meals together, they, thirdly, were **“praising God.”** Where the Spirit of God is working, there will be an intense desire to praise and worship God in our homes with one another. I imagine that there was the singing of songs and the sharing testimonies as they met together. Jesus was the center of their coming together. When you have someone over to your home, please think about singing a hymn, praying together or even asking for some to share testimonies of God’s working in their lives. This is an evidence of the Spirit at work.

Finally then we see that a church where the Spirit of God is at work is also a group that influences their community together. The end of verse 47 says that they were **“having favor with all the people.”** This favor with the people was a God-thing; as God granted them favor with all the people. This is not always true. There will be seasons of spiritual prosperity, as is the case here but also times of spiritual persecution as we will learn about in Acts 8 and 12. But the church took advantage of the favor here in Jerusalem. The believers banded together and intensely influenced their community.

How did they influence their community? They purpose to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus is calling people to Himself through us the church. And what are we to say? The first thing to call people to is to *believe the message*. What message? The same message Peter preached in verses 14-36, the message of Jesus Christ; that Jesus was handed over to die for sinners by predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (23). Then God raised Him from the dead, as witnessed by the apostles and others (32). And finally that God has made this Jesus, whom men crucified, both Lord and Christ (36).

Let me ask you, “Is He *your* Lord and Christ?” What must happen for Jesus to become your Lord and Christ? This is exactly what Peter’s audience wanted to know in verse 37, and he told them in verse 38, **“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** If Jesus is to be your Lord and Savior, you must repent, you must turn from your sin and look unto Jesus. This is to place your faith in Him; believing He died on the cross for your sins in order to change your

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heart so that you might be made fit for heaven by His work. You must believe Peter’s message, and in so doing you will experience God’s amazing forgiveness. And then comes baptism. Believers are to be baptized and then become part of the fellowship. If you have submitted your life to Christ, you need next to submit yourself to the authority of a local church. You need to be “added”, as we noted in verse 41, to a local, Bible-teaching and Bible-living church. Where the powerful presence of the Spirit of God is at work, there will be proof of it in our priorities and then our practice. But there is one more proof of the Spirit’s presence I would share with you quickly as we close...

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

*And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Where the Spirit of God is at work, there will be progress, progress that comes from two sources, one primary and one secondary. The first source is God Himself. It was “**the Lord**” who “**was adding to their number day by day.**” May we never forget that it is the Lord’s prerogative to add new members to His own community. It is our joyful duty as members of this community to welcome to our ranks those whom Christ has accepted. Our text is clear, God is sovereign in salvation; it is His work to add to His church. The tense of the verb (imperfect) indicates that people were continually being saved and added to the church. Oh that this would be our prayer and our progress.

So the primary source of progress is the Lord’s working, the secondary source is the church’s witness. The Lord indeed added those who were “**being saved**” but how were they saved? Beloved, someone told them they were *lost; that they were fallen in sin and needed to be rescued by the only One who could, Jesus Christ.* There are two key implications from this final statement of verse 47; first, that you cannot be a part of the church, truly and rightly, unless you are saved; for again it is the Lord who added saved people to His church; and second, you need to be a part of the church if you are saved. Notice what happened to those who were saved in our verse; they were “added” to the number of the church.

These then are the powerful proofs of the presence of the Spirit in the church. The Spirit of God affects our priorities, what we see as important; He affects our practice, causes us to contemplate God, be concerned for other and be committed to the church to which He added us; and finally the Spirit of God affects our progress, allowing us to see others be saved as we faithfully speak to others about the work of Christ for sinners. Let us pray these things be true of and increasing in our fellowship to the glory of God.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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