

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (24-4-1994 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Response to Peter's Sermon  
Acts 2:42-47  
Additional Bible Reading: Acts 4:32-37

### Introduction

Luke goes on to tell us the results of Peter's Pentecost sermon. There was a remarkable response, and 3000 repented, believed and were baptised. This was an amazing display of the power of the Holy Spirit. Then the church was characterised by certain clear effects. It is wrong to think that they were confined to Pentecost. These effects are always there when the Holy Spirit creates a church and fills it with His power.

Here is a picture of the church by which we can examine our own lives and our own church. It challenges us to prayer and consecration. It urges us to seek the Holy Spirit to manifest these things more and more amongst us.

### A learning church

**They devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching** (Acts 2:42). Luke is very fond of the word προσκαρτερουντες, using it six times in Acts (Paul uses it three times in his letters, Romans 12:12, 13:6; Colossians 4:2) to describe something that continued steadfastly. In the early church there was commitment, continuance, persistence, and they gave themselves fully to whatever they had set their hand to. Their actions were not just fitful, or just in times of excitement. They went on, week in, week out, month in, and month out.

A real test of the individual and the church is their continuance and perseverance. Maybe there comes a new phase in a church's life. The people resolve to turn over a new leaf, to be more committed. This is splendid – if it lasts. In the words of Sir Francis Drake, at Cadiz harbour in 1587, “O Lord God, when thou givest to thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning but the continuing of the same until it is thoroughly finished which yieldeth the true glory, through Him that for the finishing of Thy work laid down His life.”

The Holy Spirit opened a school in Jerusalem that day. The teachers were the Apostles, appointed by God. The pupils were the 3000 who joined the church. They sat at the Apostles' feet, hungry for instruction, and they persevered in it. N.B. the work of the Holy Spirit does not give an excuse to neglect teaching. Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Holy Spirit are incompatible and contradictory. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. When He fills us, we shall want to be taught the truth. Nor does the presence of the Holy Spirit mean we no longer need human teachers. He does His work through the exposition of His inspired Word by those He has called and gifted. The presence of the Holy Spirit will always stimulate us to want to know the truth and not only that, to put it into practice.

But where do we find it today? The Apostolic truth is in the Gospels, the epistles and the book of Revelations, in the New Testament. The criterion for entry into the Canon

of Scripture was that the writing must be Apostolic or from the Apostolic circle. So obedience to the teaching of the Apostles – those especially commissioned and inspired by the Holy Spirit – requires us to submit to the teaching of the New Testament. The Spirit of God leads the people of God to submit to the Word of God. Rooted and grounded in the truth, they become mature and stable, with clear, strong convictions. **The people who know God will be strong and do exploits** (Daniel 11:32 A.V.).

If the Bible has come alive to us, we shall be built up in the truth, not seduced by error, know where to find strength and support in the hour of trials, and be able to give reason for the hope within us. Our reason for meeting together is not for entertainment, a good sing, to hear funny stories, hear a “wee word”. But we are there to devote ourselves to the Apostles’ teaching, relying on the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, move our wills, and apply the truth as it is in Jesus.

### A loving church

**They devoted themselves ... to the fellowship** (Acts 2:42). Teaching is important, but there are other aspects of the church’s life. Churches ought not to just be preaching centres, but they ought to be families. Being a Christian is a two-way relationship. Vertical – conversion means fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3). Horizontal – fellowship with other believers because we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who brings us together as brothers and sisters in God’s family.

Fellowship, *κοινωνία*, means the common sharing of something. In secular use the word means a business partnership. James and John were partners in their fishing business (Luke 5:10). So also Christians are spiritual partners. We share in spiritual business, we all belong to Christ, possess the Holy Spirit, have the same family home, the same Father, the same deep interests. Being a Christian is not just a private and personal affair. It begins there, but it leads on to a social relationship because we are in God’s family. Our lives are bound up with one another. All are important. All are needed. All are valued.

Fellowship was a very practical affair. **All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to everyone as he had need** (Acts 2:44,45). Later it is recorded that they sold their land and houses, and brought the proceeds of the sales to the Apostles’ feet to be distributed to those in need. As a result, no one in that church had want of anything.

The obvious question arises from this - are we to take this literally today? Was the early church full of communists? And the wider issue – what in the Bible is of permanent and universal application, and what was temporary and cultural for the first century? There is not complete agreement on these points in every detail. C.f. debates on women wearing hats in church, or wearing trousers, some churches continuing the holy kiss and washing of one another’s feet. On this particular issue, many in church history have taken it literally, e.g. the basis of monasticism, and the Hutherite Brethren in Moravia among sixteenth century Anabaptists. Some Charismatics live together today in communities.

But it is obvious that not everyone in the early church sold all their property and gave up all their possessions. Otherwise how could they have continued to break bread in their homes (Acts 2:46)? Ananias and Sapphira's sin was not that they had kept back part of their property (Acts 5). Peter made it clear they were entitled to do that if they wanted. Their sin was lying and deceit, pretending they had given it all when they had not done so. Again, John Mark's mother had a house in Jerusalem, and a servant (Acts 12). There are also references to churches meeting in people's houses throughout the epistles (e.g. Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Philemon 2).

So the situation in Jerusalem in Acts 2 was a temporary measure because of special circumstances. In days when there were no state pensions, benefit schemes, insurance societies, there were many who were utterly financially bereft. The selling of all possessions was voluntary for some. Not all were involved. It may be a practice God calls some to do today, but it is certainly not required of all today, anymore than it was in the early church.

But the underlying principle is still valid, that of the strong fellowship, unity and oneness of God's people. The church is no place for parties, division, snobbery or cliques. Also, fellowship should be practical, e.g. burden bearing, hospitality, patience, forbearing, encouraging, supporting, setting good examples so as not to be stumbling block to others, warm, and sympathetic. At times, this will spill over to material and financial support. **If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words and tongue but with actions and in truth** (1 John 3:17,18). The brother who once requested that his wallet be baptised with him was on the right lines! Purses are often the last part of a man or woman to be converted.

Our God is a generous God, and He wants His people to be generous. Loving practical fellowship is a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence in a church. Lord Nelson famously said, "I had the happiness of commanding a band of brothers". Happy is the pastor who can say he leads (not commands) a band of brothers.

#### A worshipping church

**They devoted themselves... to breaking of bread and prayer** (Acts 2:42). Corporate worship was another thing they continued steadfastly in. They observed the Lord's Supper, though this was probably part of a larger meal, i.e. the love feast, and therefore remembered the New Covenant which Jeremiah foretold. They now had a new relationship with the Lord through His death, the benefits of forgiveness, knowing and belonging to the Lord, and knowing new birth. They also engaged in prayers. The Greek *παις προσευχαις* suggests prayer meetings and prayer services as well as private prayer.

When the Holy Spirit is at work He always draws people out in prayer. This is top priority. He shows us how weak we are, and therefore dependent on Him. Think of the enormous task He has given us as His witnesses. We dare not turn our backs on Him. We must learn to speak to God about men before we will be able to speak to men about God. Our lives need to be fed by heavenly springs. We must cherish this fellowship with God. There is so much He longs to give us. Then the Holy Spirit

prompts us to pray for one another and our families. How that strengthens the bond of love and fellowship.

The early church met both in the Temple and in their own homes. In our terms, they had a place for more structured and formal services, and also had informal and freer home meetings. Their worship was balanced in its form and also in its expression. They had glad and sincere hearts. They praised God (Acts 2:47). “Joy for breakfast, dinner and tea” (Matthew Henry). Yet their joy was not irreverence, for they were filled with awe (Acts 2:43). This included Christians and nonChristians. God had visited their city. He was in the midst. They bowed down before Him in humility and wonder. How important it is to combine joy in the Lord with fear of the Lord. Rejoicing and reverence. Joy and awe. Informality and formality.

Be joyful in your Father – but remember He is in heaven. A healthy balance in our worship is needed.

### An evangelistic church

The passage tells us what the early church did in response to Peter’s sermon – but it also tells us what the Lord did. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved** (Acts 2:47). There was a process in the life of individual Christians. First they were saved from the penalty of sin. They continued to be saved daily from the power of sin. They grew in their experience of the salvation of God. Similarly, there was a process in the life of the church as a whole. Church membership continually increased as more and more were saved. The Lord added, as they preached the Gospel and the Holy Spirit made the Word effective. The Lord did it. He was the head of the church and the secret power of the church. He added, not they.

It is He who saves. There is a subtle temptation to depend on techniques, personalities and skills. God may use these things, but dependence is on Him and not on them. He saved, and He added them to the church. It is important to note that God neither added them to the church without them being saved (i.e. no nominal Christians), nor did He save them without adding them to the church (i.e. no solitary, isolated Christians). Salvation and church membership belonged together.

The Greek tense used emphasises that God *kept* adding, daily. Evangelism is not an occasional or sporadic activity, a fortnight’s activity every fifth year, or something like that. It is meant to be an ongoing thing. We worship God daily, and we witness daily.

### Conclusion

So we see the marks of a Spirit-filled church. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching. They wanted to believe and obey what Jesus and the Apostles taught. Then they loved one another, and fellowship was important to them. This fellowship was practical and visible loving, caring and sharing. Then they worshipped, remembering the Lord’s death in His appointed way, and meeting regularly, formally and informally, for prayer. Finally they reached out to

the people in Jerusalem. They were not self-centred or self-contained, or inward looking. The Spirit-filled church is a missionary church.

The early church had to wait for the Holy Spirit to come on them at Pentecost. We do not have to wait. He is in the midst of our hearts and the midst of the church. He indwells us as individuals and as churches as His temple. But He must also fill us, control us, and be allowed to do what He wants with us. It is our responsibility to humble ourselves before His sovereign authority, concerned not to quench or grieve Him, asking Him to take His freedom. The result in our church will be a love of Bible teaching, loving fellowship, living worship, and effective evangelism.