



## Acts Week 3

### Devoted

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Last week, we discussed Acts 2:1-41 in part two of our series following the book of Acts, **Sent**. The Holy Spirit physically appeared before the apostles in Jerusalem ten days after Jesus' ascension into Heaven, just as He had promised. Receiving power from the Spirit, the apostles preached before the people in the city, explaining who Jesus was and how the Old Testament predicted Him. The Bible says three thousand people were saved and baptized.

In today's lesson, part three, we pick up with the events that immediately follow in Acts 2:42-47. In this passage, we are given a glimpse into the practices and habits of the first Christians (who early on were called followers of the Way). The Church is often seen as a building or institution, but it is really a group of people who know and follow Jesus together. Luke, the author of Acts, paints a picture of the Church that is still applicable to the Church today. How as a church are we to conduct ourselves? For the earliest church, living in Christian community involved three major things: devotion to the apostles' teachings, devotion to radical fellowship, and devotion to sacrificial generosity.



## BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
  - What is something the group can be praying about?
  - What is something the group can praise this week?
  
  - When you think of the Church, what comes to mind? A building or a people?
  - People in the church today often say, "The church has hurt me."
    - In what ways do you think the church can/does do harm?
    - Do you think people hurt by the church should still participate?
  - What do you know about the habits and practices about the early church?
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## BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

### Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Immediately following the preaching of the apostles in Jerusalem, and the saving and baptizing of three thousand people, the Church is described by Luke as living out what they knew to be the obedience God desired of them. The goal of the Church is to reach the lost, but the Church only functions when its members work and live together. The bottom line is healthy fellowship leads to a healthy mission. How then did the earliest Christians conduct themselves?

### **1. Devoted to the Apostles' Teaching (verse 42-43)**

Verse 42 says that the earliest Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..." Other translations, such as the NASB, translate verse 42 as saying they "were *continually* devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching..." The word *continually* conveys the surrender of the Church to the Spirit in that they not only studied the apostles' teaching but studied it *consistently*. It was a single-minded and steadfast devotion to the apostles' teaching that defined the early Church. So, what is the apostles' teaching exactly?

As far as what has been recorded by Luke., the apostles' have only taught once in public. From the perspective of the reader, the apostles' teaching would consist of what Peter taught those in Jerusalem earlier in the chapter. Peter's message at Pentecost focused on making Christ known by appealing to eyewitness testimony and the prophecies of the Old Testament. In other words, the early church, as well as the apostles, were very concerned with knowing *who* Jesus was and *why* they should believe He was the Messiah.

This apostles' teaching has been passed down through what we know as the Bible today! Both Old and New Testaments testify to the reality of Jesus as the Son of God and teach us how we should live in response to knowing who God is. For much of



history, believers did not have a complete Bible at their disposal. If you were lucky, you maybe had a copy of one or two of Paul's letters to the churches. You were luckier still if you could read at all! Today, we have the unique privilege of having at our fingertips the full counsel of God in a language we can understand. Want to know how to grow as a Christian like the early Church? Devote yourself to the Scriptures. This is how Paul puts it:

Colossians 3:16-17 (NKJV)

<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Do you want to hear from God? Don't look for a sign; look to His Word. Faithful churches center their worship around the Word and grow in it. We aren't here to preach opinions or play with people's emotions; we are here to preach the Gospel. It is whole, inspired, infallible, and sufficient for our needs. Peter says this:

1 Peter 2:2-3 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup> now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

So many believers are still on "spiritual milk" when it is high time to start eating solid food. What you eat is what you become. Reading the Word is better than no Word at all, but to grow in the Word requires more than a cursory reading. Like the early Church, it is continual and consistent devotion to the Bible, moving beyond the rudimentary and digging deeper into all that God has revealed to us through it.

## **2. Devoted to Radical Fellowship (verse 44, 46-47)**

God models fellowship for us in the Godhead (that is, the Trinity). God is one, but He is expressed as three distinct and separate persons with the same essence. The three members of the Godhead (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) have existed since before time in loving community. The very nature of God is communal, and so mankind, being made in the image of God, is by its nature meant to be communal as well.

Back in verse 42, Luke uses the Greek word *koinonia*, which means "having a share in" or "holding something in common." Used 20 times throughout the New Testament, *koinonia* describes the unity that the Church shares through the Spirit, stemming from



shared beliefs, convictions, and behaviors.<sup>1</sup> This is how the fellowship of God is often referred to. Verse 44 says the Church was so unified that they “had all things in common.” It wasn’t that they just lived in a commune; they had homes, but they rested in mutual generosity and sharing.

“The radical fellowship of Acts 2:44–45 was antidote for the suicide of materialism committed by the man who built bigger and bigger barns and lost his soul.”

- **John Piper**

The early Church immediately jumped into radical fellowship as a natural response to their being saved and becoming a part of the Body of Christ. To be clear, this isn’t necessarily a blueprint for us today. Although there is wisdom to be gleaned from this community of goods, the practice did not last long (this way of living was logistically difficult and susceptible to abuse as we will later see in Acts chapters 4-6). However, it still demonstrates that fellowship is massively important. The Church is designed to function as God’s representative to the world, and we need one another.

We each possess unique gifts and personalities that complement each other. The Church is not meant to look like a homogenous entity. The world finds community with like-minded people alone, but not so with the Church. If you are truly born-again, the Church is where you belong. Solomon says:

Proverbs 27:17 (NASB)

<sup>17</sup> As iron sharpens iron, So one person sharpens another.

We make each other stronger because, regardless of our differences, we are united through the Spirit that resides in each of us, and this commonality transcends any animosity that could possibly separate us. To say that “life is busy,” or “I don’t have time” is no excuse. The Church is called by God to radical unity, and we must work together. Our fellowship is a witness to the community. Without fellowship, we miss opportunities to grow. In faithful and healthy churches, you will find great fellowship amongst its congregants.

### **3. Devoted to Sacrificial Generosity (verse 45)**

What we have here on this earth is temporary. God commands us to be wise stewards of the possessions He has entrusted us with, but He also commands us to be forthcoming with whatever it is we have for the good of others less fortunate. Instead of trusting in riches, we are to trust in the Lord for our security.

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<https://seminary.grace.edu/understanding-biblical-christian-fellowship/#:~:text=Koinonia%20can%20be%20defined%20as,beliefs%2C%20convictions%2C%20and%20behaviors.>



“Fellowship cost something in the early church, in contrast to our use of the word fellowship today. Fellowship is not just a sentimental feeling of oneness. It is not punch and cookies. Fellowship comes through giving. True fellowship costs!”

– R. Kent Hughes

Being part of the Church, and being a follower of Jesus, means you must be a giver. The early Church in Acts sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all according to those who had need. We see a similar situation to that described by Luke in 2 Corinthians 8 where Paul mentions the church in Macedonia.

2 Corinthians 8:3-5 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup>For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup>begging us earnestly for the favor<sup>[b]</sup> of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup>and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

The Macedonian church was so sold out for Jesus in their generosity that they *begged* for the privilege of giving an offering or contribution. Once again, the specific details, like selling everything you own, are not necessarily a blueprint for the church today, but it demonstrates none the less that the early Church was sensitive to the needs of the community, and to one another.

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## BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- Of the three areas emphasized by the early Church, what would you say is most difficult for you to have devotion towards: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, or sacrificial generosity?
- Of the three areas emphasized by the early Church, which would you say the modern Church is most lacking in?
- How would you say the modern Church looks different from the Church in Acts?
- Regarding the Apostles' Teaching:
  - Would you say you are still drinking "spiritual milk" or are you growing and eating solid food?
  - What area(s) in the Bible do you need to devote more time to studying?
- Regarding fellowship:
  - What are obstacles to you being in fellowship with others in the Church?
  - How can you be more plugged in to what your church is doing?
  - What specific areas in your church could you be serving?
- Regarding sacrificial generosity:
  - Do you cling tightly to your possessions or are they free to be let go of according to what God would command of you?
  - What is something you could give up to help others around you in your community and in your church?