

Characteristics of a Spirit-filled Church

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Turning the World Upside Down / Filling of the Holy Spirit; Church; Discipleship; Charis Fellowship; Worship; Evangelism; Service / Acts 2:42–47
Acts 2:42-47 gives us the characteristics of a Spirit-filled church.

Introduction

We live in deeply troubling times.

We have two major wars—in Ukraine and Israel—going on at present that are significant for our country in different ways. Thousands of people are being killed. Billions of dollars are being spent. No end is in sight.

Our country is facing a presidential election later this year. The debate over which candidate is better is going to become increasingly acrimonious. And even when the election is over, half the country is going to be bitterly disappointed by the result.

Furthermore, our culture is falling apart in moral terms right before our eyes. What was considered immoral just a generation ago is now accepted as normal by a growing number of people.

What is the answer to all of this?

It is the answer that God has provided for millennia. God is establishing his kingdom all around the world. God is calling people from darkness into the light. God is transforming people so that they are salt and light in the world.

That is why God sent Jesus to this earth. Jesus came to establish God's kingdom on earth. He wanted the people of God to be light on a hill. He wanted the church to be the new fellowship of people that would be completely different than the world.

After Jesus' resurrection, he showed himself alive to his apostles over forty days. Just before Jesus' ascension into heaven, he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

Ten days after Jesus' ascension, on the Day of Pentecost, the Father sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem.

The believers all spoke in tongues—foreign languages—in a way that was understood by Jews from all over the world.

The Apostle Peter then preached an incredible sermon in which he explained the phenomenon of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the people in Jerusalem. Three thousand people were converted as a result of Peter's sermon.

Luke then went on to describe the effects of the Holy Spirit on that group of believers.

John R. W. Stott gives us an important note. He writes:

Of course, the church did not begin that day, and it is incorrect to call the Day of Pentecost "the birthday of the church." For the church as the people of God goes back at least 4,000 years to Abraham. What happened at Pentecost was that the remnant of God's people became the Spirit-filled body of Christ (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 81).

Luke gave us a wonderful description of the characteristics of a Spirit-filled church.

Scripture

Let us read [Acts 2:42-47](#):

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

Lesson

[Acts 2:42-47](#) gives us the characteristics of a Spirit-filled church.

Let's use the following outline:

1. A Spirit-filled church is a discipling church (2:42a, 43)
2. A Spirit-filled church is a fellowshiping church (2:42b, 46)
3. A Spirit-filled church is a worshipping church (2:42c, 46)
4. A Spirit-filled church is an evangelizing church (2:47)
5. A Spirit-filled church is a serving church (2:45)

I. A Spirit-filled Church Is a Discipling Church (2:42a, 43)

First, a Spirit-filled church is a discipling church.

In verse 42a, Luke tells us that the new Spirit-filled believers “**devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.**” As disciples of Jesus, they knew that they had a lot to learn. And so the disciples committed themselves to learning what it meant to follow Jesus.

I love the way John Stott put it. He said, “One might perhaps say that the Holy Spirit opened a school in Jerusalem that day; its teachers were the apostles whom Jesus had appointed; and there were 3,000 pupils in the kindergarten!” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 82).

These new believers did not think that now that they were filled with the Holy Spirit they did not need any other instructor. Quite the opposite. They were hungry to grow in the word of God and they eagerly sat at the feet of their teachers—the apostles.

In addition, Luke noted that the teaching authority of the apostles was authenticated by miracles. He wrote in verse 43, “**And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.**” Since we now have the completed New Testament, we no longer need **wonders and signs** to authenticate the teaching of God’s word.

How would we demonstrate today a devotion to the apostles' teaching?

Spirit-filled believers demonstrate devotion to the apostles' teaching today by submitting to the authority of the New Testament, for the teaching of the apostles has been written down in the pages of the New Testament.

A Spirit-filled church is a New Testament church, in the sense that it studies and submits to New Testament instruction. The Spirit of God always leads the people of God to submit to the word of God.

Let me ask you a question: *Are you studying the word of God?*

II. A Spirit-filled Church Is a Fellowshiping Church (2:42b, 46)

Second, a Spirit-filled church is a fellowshiping church.

In verse 42b, Luke also told us that the new believers devoted themselves to **“the fellowship.”**

The Greek word for **“fellowship”** (*koinonia*) means “partnership” or “sharing.”

We often think of **“fellowship”** as coffee and cookies after a worship service. That is certainly a part of the idea of **“fellowship”** but Biblical **fellowship** is far more than that.

The new believers received the gift of eternal life on the Day of Pentecost. As a result, they became partners, as it were, with God *and* with one another.

The apostle John put it this way in [1 John 1:3](#), “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship (*koinonia*) with us; and indeed our fellowship (*koinonia*) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

Fellowship is the spiritual duty of all believers to stimulate each other to holiness and faithfulness. It is best expressed through the “one anothers” of the New Testament (cf. [Romans 12:10, 16](#); [13:8](#); [14:19](#); [15:5](#), [7](#), [14](#); [16:16](#); [Galatians 5:13](#); [Ephesians 4:2, 25, 32](#); [5:21](#); [Philippians 2:3](#); [Colossians 3:9, 13, 16](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:9, 18](#); [5:11, 13](#); [Hebrews 3:13](#); [1 Peter 1:22](#); [4:9, 10](#); [5:5](#), etc.).

It is also expressed in spending time with fellow believers and in eating together. We have a beautiful picture of this in verse 46, “ **And day by day, attending the**

temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.”

The **fellowship** that we have with God and with one another is permanent because eternal life is forever.

However, the joy associated with **fellowship** may be lost through the sinful neglect of its duties.

For a Christian not to participate in the life of a local church is inexcusable.

Those who choose not to get involved in the life of a local church are disobedient to a direct command of Scripture. [Hebrews 10:24-25](#) charges believers to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

The Bible does not envision the Christian life as one lived apart from other believers. All Christians are to be actively involved in the life—that is, the worship and ministries—of a local church.

Let me ask you these questions: *Are you actively participating in the life of a local church?*

III. A Spirit-filled Church Is a Worshipping Church (2:42c, 46)

Third, a Spirit-filled church is a worshipping church.

In verse 42c, Luke also tells us that the new believers devoted themselves to **“the breaking of bread and the prayers.”**

“The breaking of bread” refers to their celebration of the Lord’s Supper. **“The prayers”** is a reference to formal prayers rather than to private prayers.

Luke was describing aspects of their worship service.

Luke also referred to their worship in verse 46a, where he said, **“And day by day, attending the temple together.”**

They were meeting in the temple precinct, most likely the courtyard of the Gentiles. This was a very large courtyard. On feast days, when everyone packed into it, it could accommodate as many as 200,000 people!

It was the only place in Jerusalem where one could get such a large crowd together in one place. This was most likely the place where Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost because 3,000 people became Christians on that day.

We should remember that the new believers saw themselves as recipients of the blessings promised in the Old Testament, and so it was natural for them to continue worshipping in the **temple**.

Furthermore, at this point they continued to enjoy the favor of all the people, and it wasn't until later that persecution against them broke out in Jerusalem.

The new believers not only worshipped formally, but they worshipped informally as well.

Luke goes on in verse 46 and says that were “**breaking bread in their homes.**” That was a deliberate repetition.

Verse 42 says that they devoted themselves to “**the breaking of bread.**” Then verse 46 says that were “**breaking bread in their homes.**”

It means that they did both. They had formal worship and they had informal worship.

The church had a healthy blend of both. As John Stott says, “And certainly it is always healthy when the more formal and dignified services of the local church are complemented with the informality and exuberance of home meetings. There is no need to polarize between the structured and the unstructured, the traditional and the spontaneous. The church needs both” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 85).

While we note the church's worship was both formal and informal, we should also note that it was both joyful and reverent. There can be no doubt of the joy of the new believers, for Luke tells us that they “**received their food with glad and generous hearts**” (2:46b). Since God had sent his Son Jesus into the world, and had now poured out his Holy Spirit on them, they had plenty of reasons to be joyful. Besides, “the fruit of the Spirit is. . . joy” ([Galatians 5:22](#)). Every worship service, then, should be a joyful celebration of the mighty acts of God through Jesus Christ.

While joy is appropriate in worship, it is never irreverent. If joy in God is an authentic work of the Spirit, so is the fear of God. Luke tells us in verse 43 that **“awe came upon every soul,”** which seems to include Christians as well as non-Christians. The Greek word **awe** (*phobos*) refers to fear or holy terror related to the sense of divine presence, and to the attitude of reverence.

It describes the feeling produced when one realizes that God is at hand. The new believers knew that God had visited their city. He was in their midst, and they knew it. They bowed down before him in humility and wonder.

It is a mistake to believe that in public worship reverence and rejoicing are mutually exclusive. The combination of joy and awe, as of formality and informality, is a healthy balance in worship.

Let me ask you these questions: *Do you worship God, both formally and informally? And is your worship both joyful and reverent?*

IV. A Spirit-filled Church Is an Evangelizing Church (2:47)

Fourth, a Spirit-filled church is an evangelizing church.

Luke told us in verse 47b, **“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

This verse does not specifically say that the believers were evangelizing.

But we know that God reaches people when the Spirit of God takes the word of God and applies it to a person. And that is done when believers proclaim the good news of the gospel to others.

I want you to notice three things about an evangelistic church.

First, the Lord himself does the evangelism: **“And the Lord added to their number.”** The Lord did it through the preaching of the apostles and the evangelism of the new believers **“praising God and having favor with all the people”** (2:47a). Yes, God indeed uses human means to bring people to himself in salvation. But at the end of it all, it is the Lord who gives new life to dead sinners.

Second, new converts became church members: “And the Lord added to their number... **those who were being saved.**” There were no professing Christians who did not possess saving faith. All those who were saved became members of

the church of Jesus Christ. People who are saved today need to join a local church so that they can participate meaningfully in their new fellowship.

And third, the Lord converted people daily: “And the Lord added to their number **day by day** those who were being saved.” In those early days in Jerusalem, someone was converted every day and added to the church of Jesus Christ. I used to think that we just don’t hear of growth like that. However, many years ago, I heard John MacArthur say that they were baptizing people every week at Grace Community Church because people were getting saved every day. So, God still works today as he did in the first century.

Let me ask you a question: *Are you evangelizing?*

V. A Spirit-filled Church Is a Serving Church (2:45)

And fifth, a Spirit-filled church is a serving church.

Luke goes on to tell us in a very practical way how the new believers loved one another. He tells us in verse 45 that **“they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”**

Some have misunderstood this verse. They think that the Bible teaches a form of Christian communism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Communism is the forced distribution of one’s possessions. The Bible never teaches this. Instead, the Bible teaches the voluntary generosity of one’s possessions.

The picture that Luke painted was that the new believers were so overwhelmed by the love of God that they gladly shared what they had with others who had any need.

The Apostle John put it this way in [1 John 3:17](#), “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

Christian love causes us to serve fellow believers with what we have. It may be our physical possessions. But it must also be with our spiritual gifts.

God has given every Christian a spiritual gift and he expects us to serve our brothers and sisters with the spiritual gifts that he has entrusted to us.

Believers know that their physical and spiritual possessions are not theirs but God's. They are simply stewards of what God has entrusted to them. That is why they are generous.

They recognize that they are to share with others what God has entrusted to them. And when they do so, they are demonstrating Christian love, which is a characteristic of a Spirit-filled church.

Let me ask you these questions: *Are you expressing Christian love through the generous use of your physical possessions and spiritual gifts?*

Conclusion

So, a Spirit-filled church is a discipling church, a fellowshiping church, a worshipping church, an evangelistic church, and a serving church.

John Stott makes the following observation:

Looking back over these marks of the first Spirit-filled community, it is evident that they all concerned the church's relationships. First, they were related to the apostles (in submission). They were eager to receive the apostles' instruction. A Spirit-filled church is an apostolic church, a New Testament church, anxious to believe and obey what Jesus and his apostles taught. Secondly, they were related to each other (in love). They persevered in the fellowship, supporting each other and relieving the needs of the poor. A Spirit-filled church is a loving, caring, sharing church. Thirdly, they were related to God (in worship). They worshipped him in the temple and in the home, in the Lord's Supper and in the prayers, with joy and with reverence. A Spirit-filled church is a worshipping church. Fourthly, they were related to the world (in outreach). They were engaged in continuous evangelism. No self-centered, self-contained church (absorbed in its own parochial affairs) can claim to be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit. So a Spirit-filled church is a missionary church (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 87).

The Holy Spirit has come. We don't have to wait for the Holy Spirit as the 120 disciples did for the Day of Pentecost.

If we are going to be salt and light in our community, let us—each one of us—commit ourselves to discipleship, fellowship, worship, evangelism, and service.

As we do so, I believe we will watch God turn our world upside down. Amen.