

Peter's first sermon on the Day of Pentecost was his first and his greatest. And when he closed with the words recorded in verse 36, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ," the multitude came under deep conviction. "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" The people were convicted both of the Lordship of Christ and their own sin. They did not try to deny what Peter said. They simply cried, "Brothers, What shall we do?" Not bad for a first sermon.

Peter responded by giving specific instructions to God's covenant people: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (v.38). The he added significantly in verse 39, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The promised gifts for all who truly believe extends even to the Gentiles, those who are "far off". So at Pentecost Peter saw the promise being extended to us today. Luke concludes the description of that victorious occasion by saying:

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (vv.40-41)

Three thousand spiritual newborns! Earlier that day in the Upper Room there had been 120. Now in a flash there were 3,000! Three thousand new children of God 3,00 shepherding responsibilities for the apostles.

The crowd really believed and so were baptized, which for a Jew was a traumatic step. Just how traumatic is difficult for us to understand in our mildly Christianized culture, but in Jewish culture baptism was a rite for Gentile converts that symbolized a break with one's past and washing away of all defilement. Three thousand Jews took that revolutionary step that day. A.T. Roberson comments that the numerous pools in Jerusalem afforded ample opportunity for wholesale baptizing. What a day for Jerusalem!

First, there had been the 120 in the Upper Room, then the wind of the spirit, then flames dancing above the Twelve, then supernatural utterances as they began to speak in other languages, then a huge crowd. Finally, there was Peter's greatest

sermon and now the pools of Jerusalem were clogged with converts waiting to be baptized.

The Holy Spirit was reigning, and with his rule vast responsibilities descended upon the apostles. They would have to look to the Spirit for guidance. Fortunately, thanks to the Lord, things fell naturally into place. The reign of the Spirit in the lives of the people and the apostles led to some practices that brought growth to all and made the apostles' task possible. Four things happened (or better, happen) in the church where the Spirit reigned. They were then, and still remain, keys to spiritual growth and maturity.

Teaching (v. 42)

“They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching...” Note carefully that this verse literally says, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching.” It is very important that we note this term “continually devoting” because it governs the other characteristics of the church where the Spirit reigns. It denotes a steadfast and single-minded devotion to a certain course of action.

Many of us marvel at the free throw specialists in the National Basketball Association who when well into the game, breathing heavily, hurting from a foul, step to the free throw line and seldom miss (often maintaining an 80 percent success rate). How do they make it look so easy? By continual devotion to their task.

These 3,000 baby Christians were continually devoting themselves to God's Word as it came from the apostles. Think of those poor apostles- there were only twelve of them. There must have been nights when they fell into bed thinking they could never utter another word. What did they teach? The epistles? The epistles had not yet been written yet. The Gospels? There were no written biographies of Christ at that time. What, then, did they teach? The Old Testament, the sayings of Jesus as they recalled them, the Sermon on the Mount, the final conversations in the Upper Room...

These new Christians, under the reign of the Holy Spirit, were hungry for God's Word. They could not get enough of it. Being filled with the Spirit and being filled with God's Word go together. Ephesians 5:18-20 says:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and

make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:16-17 says the same thing except it begins with a charge to let the Word of God bear fruit within us:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Where the Spirit reigns, a love for God's Word reigns. Those early believers studied the Scriptures- God's communication to them. The early church knew nothing of the anti-intellectualism and the disdain for Biblical knowledge that characterizes some quarters of Christianity today.

The backbone of a healthy Christian life is teaching. Peter says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). Teaching was the milk of the early church under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The example of an energetic nursing baby is a fitting example for us to pursue, even if we have already moved on to steak. Young believers must make sure they are feeding on the teaching of God's Word. There is much confusion today about essential matters of our faith. In a non-reading, experience-oriented culture, solid Bible teaching is sometimes hard to find. Believers should be aware of churches of Christian fellowships where the people do not carry their Bibles. Read your Bible. Mark it up. Each of us must make sure that sometime, somewhere in our week we are being taught.

When the Spirit reigns, God's people continually devote themselves to the study of his Word. That is the first characteristic, but more than study is needed. We not only need to be a Bible-believing church but through the aid of the Holy Spirit we should be a Bible-living church as well.

Fellowship (v.42)

"They devoted themselves to...the fellowship." This kind of fellowship did not exist before the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Greek word used here (koinonia) is not even found in the Gospels. This is the first occurrence of the word in the New testament. The root idea is "commonness" or "commonality". New

Testament Greek is called koine Greek because it was the common Greek of the day-the street language of the people.

Every time this word is used in the New Testament, it denotes some kind of sharing-either sharing something with someone (for instance, in 2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:13 where it means an offering, collection, or contribution) or sharing in something someone else is experiencing. Here in Acts the emphasis of the word is on contributing or giving. The foundation of the early Christian's fellowship was giving. Verses 44 and 45 make this clear.

All the believers were together and had everything in common [Greek, koina]. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

The early believers did not sell everything, as some have tried to say. Some still had houses, as verse 46 indicates: "They broke bread in their homes." Also, in Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira owned property. The point is, the fellowship of the early church rested on the mutual generosity and sharing.

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. It does not take place simply because we are in the church hall. Fellowship comes through giving. True fellowship costs! So many people never know the joys of Christian fellowship because they have never learned to give themselves away. They visit a church or small group with an eye for their own needs (hardly aware of others) and go away saying, "There is no fellowship there." The truth is, we will have fellowship only when we make it a practice to reach out to others and give something of ourselves.

Fellowship is preeminently a work of the Holy Spirit.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the Love of God and the fellowship [koinonia] of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Furthermore, fellowship happens as we draw close to the Godhead.

First John 1:3 says:

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship [koinonia] with us. And our fellowship [koinonia] is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

As we experience koinonia with the Father and the Son, we draw closer to each other and enjoy fellowship (koinonia) with one another. I think the most beautiful illustration of this in the Bible is found in 2 Corinthians 8. In the fourth verse we see the Macedonian church begging for the privilege of participation (the word is koinonia) in an offering, or a contribution. Those particular believers were extremely poor, and yet they determined to practice koinonia by giving to other. Why? The answer is given in verse 5:

And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord [fellowship with him] and then to us in keeping with God's will.

That is koinonia. When we think about this Christian word we use and abuse all the time, we need to remember its link with giving. Do you want to have fellowship? You must be a giver.

When the Spirit reigns, God's people not only relate to the Word-they relate to one another in koinonia and sharing. "God setteth the solitary in families. (Psalm 68:6, KJV).

Worship (v. 42)

Their worship consisted of two things: "the breaking of bread and...prayer" I believe "the breaking of bread" refers to the regular observance of the Lord's Supper, for two reasons. First, the reference comes between two religiously-loaded terms in verse 42- "fellowship" and "prayers." And second, in verse 46 the phrases "broke bread" and "ate together" are purposely separated. After their principal meal they would take the remaining bread and wine and engage in the elevating remembrance of Christ's death. They "[continually] devoted themselves" to this. Christ and his atoning work were constantly before them, daily bringing their hearts upward in solemn and joyous contemplation.

Another way they worshiped was "prayer." The text should properly read "the prayers," suggesting specific prayers, probably both Jewish and Christian. The early believers suddenly saw the old formal prayers through new eyes and also, in their new joy, created new prayers for praise-much as Mary did when she sang the Magnificat.

When the Spirit reigns, the hearts of God's people move up toward him and their relationship with him intensifies.

Evangelism (v. 47)

The final broad characteristic of the first church was evangelism; “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (v. 47). As Robertson says, it was a continuous revival day by day.” When the Spirit reigns, God’s people relate to the world as they should.

What happens in the church where the Spirit reigns? There is a radical wonderful reorientation of essential relationships.

Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to the Word-teaching
Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to each other-koinonia
Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to God-worship
Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to the world-evangelism

That is what God did for the 3,000 and what He wanted them to do for Him. That is also what He wants to do for us and what He wants us to do for Him.

As the Word went out, “Everyone was filled with awe”- not just because, “many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles,” but because everything worked together to bring a profound sense of God’s presence.

The awe and soul-fear was not terror, but something like Isaiah experienced when he saw the holiness of God and cried, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). Such a response is the deep reaction of a frail, fallen being standing before the true God of love and righteousness. In the early church there was a sense of holiness much like that which the children of Israel had when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai-awe in the presence of Almighty God.

How we need this today! Nothing would promote revival more than a sense of awe before our holy God coupled with a sense of our own unworthiness. Verse 46 gives a beautiful picture of the worship in the early church:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

This was all marvelously balanced. It was both formal and informal, “in the temple” and “in their homes”. Jesus had called the temple his Father’s house, so they naturally went there to worship. Much of their time was spent on Solomon’s porch with its marvelous view of the Mount of Olives (cf. 3:11 ad 5:12). Also,

since their communal meal could not be eaten on the temple precincts, they broke bread from house to house.

The believers also had “gland and sincere hearts”. “Glad” means “exulting gladness”. The New English Bible translates this “unaffected joy.” When someone passed by one of the house fellowships, they not only heard solemn testimonies and hymns, they sometimes heard laughter. Sometimes we look like someone has put Clorox in our coffee, but in the early church they were human and full of joy.

The church under the rule of the Holy Spirit is devoted to teaching, fellowship, and worship, and evangelism flows forth as a result. Along with a sense of human sinfulness, the people’s realization of God’s holy presence enabled them to continually feel a sense of awe at His majesty. There was also genuine joy. What a beautiful picture—a church where the Spirit reigned.