

VI. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH (2:41-47)

A. Membership (2:41)

2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Verse 41 tells us of the fruit of Peter's preaching. Although the population of Jerusalem was fairly small, it was immensely swollen because of the pilgrimage feast of Pentecost. Those who heard Peter's message and received it were baptized in demonstration of their faith. The church instantly grew from a small band of 120 believers in the upper room to more than three thousand – exceeding the number of believers Jesus had in His three year ministry. No wonder He told His followers that they would see greater works than they had seen Him do (Jn. 14:12).

The passage emphasizes the visible relationships among believers, so being "added" does not mean added to the Lord (Kent, 34, n. 14); it means being added to the community of faith. In other words, the three thousand believers quickly became a distinct community. Luke likes to mention numbers (2:47; 4:4; 5:14); the church always wanted to know who belonged to the membership.

Participation in the community included reception of salvation followed by baptism. Baptism was the means by which the individual openly demonstrated his/her allegiance to Christ and was a token of repentance. There is no evidence that all the baptisms happened on the day of Pentecost; they could have easily followed during that week (Knowling, Expositor's, 93).

B. General Activity (2:42-45)

Acts 2:42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The Christian group, many of whom were new converts, spent much of their time in spiritual activity. They devoted themselves to (1) the apostles' teaching (since the Lord communicated through the apostles - I Cor. 12:28; 14:37; Eph. 2:20; 3:5), (2) fellowship, (3) the breaking of bread, and (4) prayer.

"Continually devoting" means to have a "steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action" (Longenecker, 289). The verb tense speaks of an ongoing action (Bock, 149). The same word is used of the disciples' devotion to prayer (Acts 1:14) and the resolve of the apostles to spend time in the word and prayer rather than being distracted with the physical needs of those in the church (Acts 6:4). In other words, these were a people to whom belonging to the church was everything.

They devoted themselves to four things:

- 1) They devoted themselves to apostles' teaching.
- 2) They devoted themselves to fellowship.
- 3) They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.
- 4) They devoted themselves to prayer.

The apostles were the guardians of authoritative revelation (Jn. 16:12-15); they were the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20). The ***apostles' teaching*** refers to the body of doctrine that was taught by the apostles and was circulating through the church; the apostles were the actual eyewitnesses of Jesus'

ministry, but most importantly, were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. The presence of prophecy in the early church was balanced by the teaching of the apostles which included instruction about Jesus as well as an explanation of OT types, symbolism, and fulfillment of prophecy (see Acts 6:4); as time progressed, this teaching then formed the NT. Devotion to the apostles' teaching is evidence that the early church was a learning church.

Fellowship means "to share in common." In the first century, the word was often tied to commercial interests. If people entered into a business together, they entered into a partnership or fellowship. In this case, it involves a commonality due to sharing in a common relationship with God.

Christian fellowship comes from the intervention of God when man enters into a new state of existence. *Christians participate (or have fellowship) with Christ* in every aspect of life (I Cor. 1:9). We live together with Him (Ro. 6:8; II Cor. 7:3), we share in His suffering (Phil. 3:10), His crucifixion (Ro. 6:6), His death and burial (Ro. 6:4). We were also raised with Him (Col. 2:12:3:1), and were made alive together with Him (Col. 2:13). We now share His life (Jn. 5:24; I Jn. 5:12). We are also given the tremendous blessing of having fellowship with the Father (I Jn. 1:3) and the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 13:14).

As a result of having the life of Christ imparted to us, we have fellowship with one another (I Jn. 1:7). As fellow recipients of the blessings of God, we share our material resources (Ro. 12:13; II Cor. 8:4; Acts 4:32; II Cor. 9:13; Ro. 15:26). We rejoice when we suffer together (I Cor. 12:26). We share our spiritual gifts to build each other up (Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 13:16; I Cor. 16:1, 2). We confess our sins to one another (Ja. 5:16) and pray for each other. Fellowship also involves stimulating one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24-25) and bearing one another's burdens (Ro. 15:1). Fellowship is an essential part of worship (Acts. 2:42); it is evidence that we have fellowship with God (I Jn. 4:12) and fruitfulness (Jn. 15:4).

"Fellowship" doesn't just mean getting together, as it is sometimes used; it encompasses the spiritual bond we have in Christ that results in community, demonstrates love, expresses mutual care, and functions as a unit with a commitment to a shared goal.

The meaning of **breaking of bread** is debated. Luke often uses the expression of an ordinary meal (Lk. 24:30, 35; Acts 20:7, 11; 27:35). Thus, some say it is a picture of family life in the early church. Others say it is a reference to communion. Longenecker says it's hard to believe that Luke only had a meal in mind when he sandwiched it between fellowship and prayer (Longenecker, 290). If this were not communion, one would wonder why such a trivial event was mentioned (Knowling, Expositor's, 93).

However, the two aren't mutually exclusive. In the early church the bread and the cup were taken in the context of a larger meal, not alone, as is the practice of many churches today (Jude 12; Bruce, 79; Alford II, 29; Bock, 151). Therefore, having communion didn't erase the picture of family life; it rather enhanced it by remembering Christ as well.

Prayer: The early church committed itself to prayer on a regular basis. In fact, of the 85 occurrences of the verb "pray" in the NT, 34 appear in Luke/Acts. Throughout the book, prayer is seen to be a major activity of the church.

In the verses that follow (2:43-47), Luke gives a short summary paragraph, as he often does through the Book of Acts, to identify the stages of the progress of Christianity.

2:43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

“**Everyone**” could include the unbelieving (Longenecker, 290), but the church surely experienced the power of God at work through the apostles. The actual word for “awe” is “fear;” the wonders and signs generated “a respectful, even nervous notice of what was happening in the community” (Bock, 151).

**2:44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;
2:45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.**

held all things in common: The word for “common” (koina, κλοινά) is related to the word for “fellowship” (koinonia, κολωνία) in 2:42 and continues the theme of sharing in common. Because they looked at themselves as one, they gave up the sense of personal ownership. Instead, they held all things in common, helping those in need even if it meant selling what they had to do so.

Though outward persecution isn’t mentioned until later, the early church did experience certain economic and social hardships making the selling of possessions necessary (Longenecker, 290). This, of course, was not compulsory as Acts 5:4 shows, but arose out of brotherly love (Kent, 35) just as giving to other churches did.

C. Daily Life (2:46-47)

**2:46 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,
2:47 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.**

Day by day . . . in the temple: The early believers not only worshipped *daily* at the temple (Solomon’s colonnade running along the east side of the outer court - 3:11; 5:12); they also enjoyed each other’s company on a day-to-day basis as they ate together in each other’s homes. Their commonality in Christ was experienced in their everyday environments. They enjoyed each other.

with one mind: There are many places in the NT where believers are exhorted to be of one mind (Ro.12:16; 15:5-6; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27). Being of the same mind emphasizes unanimity, or harmony (II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:2; Ro. 15:5).

The church shares the same Lord and faith so our desire should be to work together for the common good of the body and for the cause of Christ, rather than seeking personal advantage. We should be united in our feelings, interests and objectives, not aspiring or having an arrogant attitude or condescending spirit toward others. We should exalt Christ and build up His church by being imitators of Him (Phil. 2:1-8).

praising God and having favor with all the people: The joy the community shared spilled over into praise to God; their testimony and devotion was so exemplary that they even found favor in the unbelieving community around them. Instead of being isolated from the world around them, the Christians bore testimony of the transformation of heart that had taken place.

Thus, the early church was a devoted people; they were filled with awe, had hearts full of gladness, were sincere, and were of one mind; they were people who praised God and found favor among men. These were the people who ***“the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”***