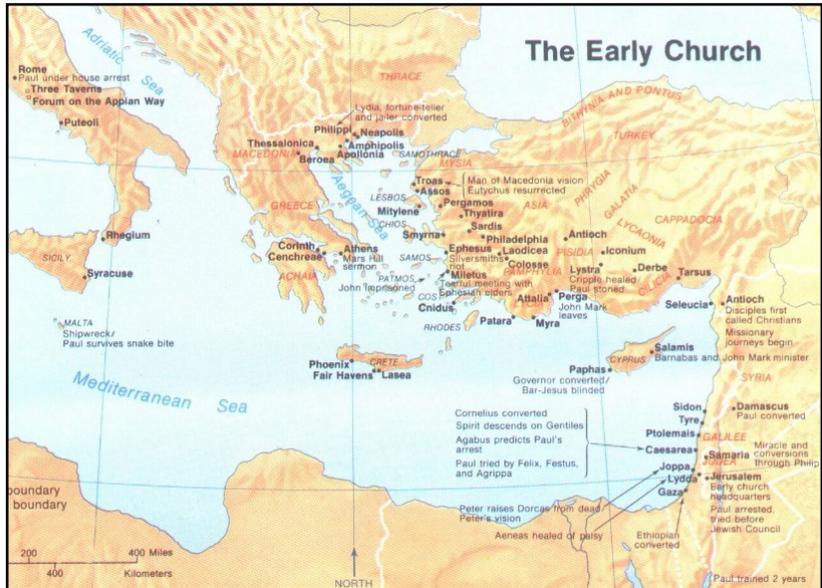


Life in the Early Church

[Acts 2:42-47](#)



We have been away from our study in Acts for several weeks now so let's briefly review the second chapter. Pentecost began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, resulting in the sound of a mighty wind, tongues of fire, and the apostles speaking the praises of God in the native tongues of those present. All this drew a crowd in the Temple and Peter stood up to preach. [Peter's sermon](#) was a biblical explanation of what was taking place. He told his audience that what they saw and heard was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Their speaking in tongues was an evidence of the outpouring of the Spirit of which Joel foretold. If Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled, it also meant that the **"Day of the Lord"** was approaching, a day which would end in judgment on God's enemies. Peter went on to suggest exactly what that judgment would entail ([Acts 2:22-24](#)). These Israelites had rejected the One whom God attested to be the Messiah, through miracles, and wonders and signs. Within the plan and purpose of God, they had put God's Messiah to death—Jesus of Nazareth. But God had raised Him from the dead.



The resurrection of Jesus should not be regarded as anything new, for David had spoken of this as a prophet. In [Psalm 16](#), he spoke of his hope as being based on the presence of God. His offspring would carry on the Davidic line, and one of His seed would fulfill God's promise to him (David—[2 Samuel 7:14](#)) of an eternal throne. But how could this be if David's son died, just as he would? His "Son," David knew, would be his Lord, and thus He would be God in the flesh. As the living God, His flesh would not be allowed to corrupt. Even if He died (or was put to death), He would be raised. David was not speaking of himself, for his grave was nearby. He spoke of Jesus, his Son, whose empty tomb was nearby.

The final punch came from Peter's reference to [Psalm 110](#). Not only had Jesus been raised from the grave; He had ascended to the right hand of the Father. Psalm 110:1 indicated what was next on the program. God was to put the enemies of His Son under His feet. The next step, indicated by [Joel 2](#) and Psalm 110:1 was the judgment of God's enemies, and those enemies were the very Israelites to whom Peter was preaching.

The facts announced placed the hearers in the awful attitude of the murderers of the Son of God, who was now not only alive again, but seated on the throne of God, with all power in His hands, both on earth and in heaven. The belief of these facts necessarily filled them with the most intense realization of guilt, and the most fearful anticipation of punishment.

Cut to the heart, they asked Peter and the other apostles what they should do. Peter told them to **"turn from their sin to God"** and as a demonstration of their faith to be baptized, and thus to be saved from that evil generation and the horrible fate which would someday befall them. Approximately 3,000 did believe and were baptized:

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41 NASB)

They were "added" to what? The implication is that they were added to the church. Who added them to the Church? Remember that Acts is the record of what Jesus *continued* to do and teach through His people after His ascension:

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, (Acts 1:1 NASB)

On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus the LORD called to Himself 3,000 souls, so that the church began with 3,120 members!

When Peter finished preaching 3,000 people were saved. With no gimmicks, no alter calls, no *"God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life"*. It was the **LORD** that added to the church. They were all saved, and they were saved by the hand of God not the acts of man.

When we understand that salvation is God's work, we will not be so caught up in methods or programs for witnessing, because we know that only the Holy Spirit can create new life. The advice given in a book entitled "[How to Boost Your Church Attendance](#)" exemplifies how a misunderstanding of God's work in salvation can affect preaching:

"Many of us in our preaching will make such statements as, 'Now in conclusion; Finally may I say; My last point is.....' These statements are sometimes dangerous. The sinner knows five minutes before you finish; hence he digs in and prepares himself for the invitation so that he does not respond. However, if your closing is abrupt, and a lost person does not suspect that you are about finished, you have crept up on him, and he will not have time to prepare himself for the invitation. Many people may be reached using this method."

Clearly, the author thinks his methods are saving people. He thinks that we can trick people into salvation. He doesn't understand that salvation is solely a work of God.

We are to preach the gospel but it is God who saves sinners:

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13 NASB)

Salvation is of the Lord.

Three thousand people were converted on the day of Pentecost as they took their places as new members of the emerging church, the pattern of organization of the believing community began gradually to take shape. Its form was very simple, but its features have remained as characteristics of the body of Christ.

And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42 NASB)

The infant church, the new Israel, now met regularly together and we learn here of their activities in summarized form. The word "devoting" is the Greek word *proskartereo*. It first meant: *"to be strong towards, to endure in, persevere in."* It came to mean: *"adhere to, persist in, to continue to do something with intense effort,"* with the possible implication of: *"despite difficulty."* It points to constancy, purpose, or resolve. Out of ten uses of the verb and one use of the noun in the New Testament, six are connected with prayer and two with the ministry of the Word.

They diligently observed two things: the apostles' doctrine, which was the New Testament Scripture, and fellowship, which consisted of breaking of bread and prayer.

APOSTLES TEACHING

The apostles were as yet the only teachers of the Church, and in this work they were executing the second part of their commission, which required them to teach those whom they baptized all things that Jesus had commanded:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20 NASB)

The apostles were the men to whom the Lord had said:

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." (John 16:13 NASB)

Their doctrine was consequently the fruit of the Spirit's guiding. The church was now in being, and the first thing that marked it was subjection to the Spirit's teaching through the apostles.

Having responded to Christ they were eager to learn about Him from the Apostles, and to learn more about the significance of His death and resurrection. Additionally they would seek to gain an understanding of the Christian application of the First Testament, for that was their "Bible".

In our language today we would say they were continually devoted to the study of the Scriptures, to understand what God has defined as truth. Three thousand new believers and the Apostles didn't start a new members class, they didn't have "Christianity for dummies" they studied doctrine.

One of the things that must define us as a believing community is we are committed passionately to truth. This makes us counter cultural. Because we live in a culture that doesn't embrace truth; it doesn't believe in truth; it doesn't believe in absolutes. It has bought into this ridiculous notion of relativity—which says there is no truth, there are no absolutes; the truth is whatever you need it to be, so create and manipulate your own truth to suit your own means. But we believe in an absolute God; therefore, we believe in absolute truth.

It is very important we understand that each of us must be passionately pursuing truth through a study of the Scriptures. [George Barna](#), *"the data gathering guru of the information age,"* made the statement, *"Christianity is so shallow there's not depth to build on."* He pointed out that 58% of American adults cannot name even half the Ten Commandments.

The whole issue of truth and knowing truth demands that we engage our minds. Paul put it like this to the Ephesian believers,

"But you did not learn Christ in this way,²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus," (Ephesians 4:20-21 NASB)

Notice how he uses words that imply the use of the mental faculties in understanding Christian truth: "learn", "heard", "taught", and "truth".

There is a great aversion to doctrine in our day. People are afraid of doctrine. But understanding Christian doctrine is essential to knowing God, delighting in Him, and obeying Him. This passage, like others in Acts ([19:9-10](#); [20:31-32](#)) and the epistles ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)), emphasizes the priority of a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of apostolic doctrine. This alone provides a solid foundation for healthy spiritual growth. Christians who fail to lay this foundation are vulnerable to spiritual error.

[John MacArthur](#) writes, *"A believer should count it a wasted day when he does not learn something new from, or is*

not more deeply enriched, by the truth of God's Word....Scripture is food for the believer's growth and power—and there is no other." [MacArthur's NT Commentary, p. 83]

They were not only committed to the Apostles doctrine but to:

FELLOWSHIP

The Greek word used here is "[koinonia](#)". It's a favorite word with Paul. This is the only time Luke uses it. The word literally means: "to share in common with." We use the word "*community*," which is actually a very good translation of the Greek word. It means that we share life together, that we share this Spirit and this life in common as the people of God; that we understand we need each other.

Christianity is relational. We begin by having a relationship to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Then we are immediately brought into relationship with other believers, which is known as the Church.

To truly dwell in community means that rather than living in individualism and isolation, we are in this together. Think about the analogy of the body that's used many times in the New Testament. The whole idea of the body is that none of the pieces function until they're a part of the whole. It's only when we're together that we actually function and accomplish the mission. The New Testament has no concept of a believer isolated out there all by himself or herself.

There are a multitude of areas which we can and must be involved in fellowshiping with one another. These are the so-called "one another" passages of the New Testament. We are to love one another...forgive each other...be kind to one another...accept one another...encourage one another...admonish one another...do good to one another...stimulate one another to love and good deeds...bear one another's burdens.

We need each other. Fellowship is simply the meeting of one another's needs in the Body. It is our partnering together to help each other live out the demands of the Christian life. It is the relationship of rejoicing with one another, weeping with one another, lifting up the fallen, coming to one another's aid, giving to one another, and sharing with one another out of the abundance of what the Lord is teaching us. It is the crux of Christian communication—one brother sharing with another brother the things of God and vice versa.

This fellowship is said to consist of two things:

BREAKING OF BREAD

There's quite a bit of discussion about whether breaking of the bread refers to Communion or just eating meals together. When you study the first-century church, one of the things you find out is it's hard to separate the two. Communion almost always, almost exclusively, rolled out of a common meal together. So in many ways it may be referring to both. It's hard to separate them out.

One thing worth noting in verse 42 is that Luke uses the definite article, "***the breaking of bread.***" The use of the definite article in the Greek before "breaking of bread" implies that it was not simply a meal but a distinct act of worship that had been set apart in the early church. It was "the" breaking of bread.

We have given priority to everything else except the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Our churches are often lecture halls or entertainment centers instead of worship centers. We need to put Christ back into our worship: "this do in remembrance of me."

The early church met on the first day of the week and they observed the ordinance of the Lord's Supper when they met.

We know from extra-biblical writings, such as the writings of [Pliny](#), [Justin Martyr](#), the [Didache](#) and other first and

second century writings, the early church began to meet together on the first day of the week to keep the ordinance, the bread and juice.

The Lord's Supper should remind us of the greatest truth in the world, that the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me, so that I could be forgiven and reconciled to God!

This fellowship also consisted of:

PRAYER

As Jews they were familiar with daily prayers and would continue to use them, gradually giving them a more Christian slant. In all that they did they remembered God and were faithful in praying, and giving thanks, and rejoicing.

The coming together in Jerusalem to worship was to be a sign of the new age:

"And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the LORD. (Isaiah 66:23 NASB)

Luke says they, ***"were continually devoting themselves to... prayer."*** Paul uses the same word for prayer in:

rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, (Romans 12:12 NASB)

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, (Ephesians 6:18 NASB)

What does this mean? It means that disciples of Christ are to pray **often** and to pray **regularly**. Prayer is not to be infrequent, and prayer is not to be hit and miss. Being "devoted to" prayer means that you are not haphazard, and you are not forgetful. It means you take steps to see that it is part of your regular life, the same way eating and sleeping are.

Prayer is vital to a believer's spiritual health. Prayer is a life priority. It connects me with God and it connects me with God's provision for my life.

In understanding the teaching of Scripture on God's sovereignty many ask, "Why pray?" That is a good question. The simplest answer being that the Word of God tells us to pray. Prayer declares our dependence upon God. Listen to what John MacArthur writes, ***"I mean, you know, prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence and if you can get enough people praying then you're going to activate God's power."*** Does that sound right to you? Prayer moves God? The more you get praying the better your chances? This is not what prayer is about.

They were a praying people because they were desperate, because they were needy. They were dependent upon Christ. We live in a culture of self-sufficiency: *We'll be our own gods, thank you very much, and we'll take care of our own needs.* But prayer is our recognition that: *I am not adequate; I'm not sufficient; I need help.* Therefore, I'm not praying because I'm going to get God to do what I want. I'm praying because I'm desperate and I need Christ.

So the first members of the Church spent their time studying doctrine, fellowshiping, worshiping and praying together. I think that this should still be what the Church is doing. This is the very first activity of the Church and it should still be the activity of the Church.

Notice what else Luke tells us about the Church:

And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. (Acts 2:43 NASB)

Everyone was in awe. It was obvious that a work of God was taking place. The KJV translates this word as “fear.” But it means reverence, not terror. The word translated "awe" is the Greek word *phobeo*, which means: “*to reverence, venerate, to treat with deference or reverential obedience.*” It's not the idea of being horrified or afraid it's awe. It's the idea of the awareness of something supernatural is going on.

Now this word awe is reserved for special times in scripture. It's reserved for those times when peoples minds are struck wit an awe that is based on something divine that they can't explain. For example:

And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. (Mark 4:39 NASB)

Jesus speaks and the storm stops, the sea becomes still

And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:41 NASB)

Can you understand how this situation would bring awe? There is another good illustration in:

And it came about soon afterwards, that He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large multitude. ¹² Now as He approached the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. ¹³ And when the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴ And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" ¹⁵ And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. ¹⁶ And fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" (Luke 7:11-16 NASB)

Notice verse 15 "***And the dead man sat up, and began to speak.***" Just imagine what that must have caused. Verse 16 says, "***Fear gripped them all...***" Now that doesn't mean they were afraid. It says in the next statement, "***They began glorifying God***". You see, it's that idea that God is doing something. And they said, "***God has visited His people.***" Seeing God work leaves you in a sense of awe.

Do you experience this? Have you been in awe at the work of God? Today for most people who say they are Christians, God is an idea to talk about, or an inference from an argument, or a family tradition to be preserved. But for very few people is God a stark, fearsome, stunning, awesome, shocking present REALITY. He is tame. He is distant. He is silent. Where are the churches of whom Luke could say today, "***Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe***"?

The absence of this fear has a direct effect on the way ignore the Word of God, we trivialize fellowship, and the way we play more than we pray.

We are next introduced to a striking instance of the fellowship previously mentioned:

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

This is how the very first Christians lived. Stop and think about this, it is staggering. They were selling their stuff to meet the needs of others. When is the last time you sold something to help out another believer? Wow! This is love, these are disciples of Christ:

***"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:35 NASB)**

Take a good look at verses 44-45. This is what love looks like—this is what followers of Christ look like.

Everyone who has ever argued the case for communism has tried to use these verses to support it. They teach that no one is to have private property. This is not what these verses are teaching. There is no government here forcing this action. They did this because they wanted to. They wanted to help those in need. This was voluntary giving.

Many of the Israelites who had come to worship at the feast and were converted to Christ did not want to leave because they needed to be taught from the Apostles. They didn't have jobs or homes. What do we do with these people? They share what they have with them.

***And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common;* (Acts 2:44 NASB)**

The Greek word translated "[common](#)" is from the same root as the word for "fellowship" in verse 42. That tells me something about real Christian fellowship. Fellowship is more than merely hanging out with other Christians. It involves a commitment to one another.

This word is used by Paul in Philippians to describe the financial involvement of churches in his missionary labors. First, he stated:

***in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.* (Philippians 1:5 NASB)**

Participation here is *koinonia*, which referred to their financial and prayer support in the work. Second, he said that they were:

***For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.* (Philippians 1:7 NASB)**

"Partakers" [[sugkoinonos](#)] is a word meaning "*sharers or fellowshippers together with him in the grace of God*". Then he uses that same Greek word, *koinonia*—fellowship, when he writes:

***And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone;* (Philippians 4:15 NASB)**

"Shared" is *koinonia*. When Paul gave testimony to the Philippian believers to the church at Corinth, he wrote that they were:

***begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,* (2 Corinthians 8:4 NASB)**

Now, what do we make of all of this use of "fellowship" in relation to giving? Giving is a vital part of what we are to be involved in doing in the Body of Christ. The early Christians showed that they were not stingy but liberal in their giving!

Giving teaches us to be God-dependent. Giving liberates us from being enslaved by material possessions. Giving humbles us to see that we have a part in the work of God's kingdom. Giving actually creates a joyous spirit within the hearts of those who give.

This liberality to the poor should characterize the congregations of the Lord in every age and country. Poor brethren

must not be allowed to suffer for the necessities of life:

But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:17 NASB)

This conduct was in marked contrast with the neglect of the poor which was then common among the Jews, even in violation of their own law, and which was universal among the Gentiles. Nothing of this kind had ever been seen on earth before.

Luke has given us a description of the generosity of the early church. In the First Testament it is clear that God instructed His people to care for the needy, especially the “widows and orphans,” but also the “strangers,” the foreigners, the “Gentiles.”

When we come to the Gospels, we discover that Jesus had much to say about material possessions. Let me list just a few of the texts I believe serve as a precedent to the practice of the early church. Even before the public appearance of Jesus as Messiah, John was preaching about money and material possessions. As can be seen, he did not call for people to give up the necessities, but he did teach that when one had a spare garment, it should be given to one who had none:

And the multitudes were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" ¹¹ And he would answer and say to them, "Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise." (Luke 3:10-11 NASB)

When Jesus began to preach and teach, He made it clear that material possessions were not the essence of life. Thus, those who were to be His followers were called to turn from materialism and to trust in Him to provide for them.

And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." (Luke 12:15 NASB)

"Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailling treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. (Luke 12:33 NASB)

The New Testament epistles also have much to say on the Christian's attitude toward material things and his responsibility to care for the needs of others. Consider these passages:

contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (Romans 12:13 NASB)

The word “contributing is our word [koinoneo](#), [koy-no-neh'-o] fellowship.

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Galatians 6:10 NASB)

For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. (Hebrews 10:34 NASB)

And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:16 NASB)

What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. (James 2:14-17 NASB)

While I do not see the Bible to be teaching that every Christian should sell all of his or her possessions, I do see it teaching (Both Testaments) that all that we have has been given by God and that we are merely stewards of it. We are to use what God has given as faithful stewards. When we have more than enough and another has less than enough, we have the obligation to give that which we have in excess to meet the deficiency of another.

And 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, (Acts 2:46 NASB)

It's very interesting that Luke tells us that daily they were gathering at the temple. They were all Jewish, so it was only natural that they would continue to meet in the temple. The temple had been, to them and their fathers, for many generations, the house of God and the place of prayer. But what were they doing at the temple? Virtually all of the scholars agree that what they were *not* doing was participating in the sacrificial rituals. That would be contrary to what they just believed. But the question is this: By now there are 3,000 plus; it would go up to 4,000, then 5,000 people. Where is that group going to meet together in common? Well, the only logical place would be the courtyard of the temple, a huge area that was set aside where thousands of people could gather together as the church, as this new believing community. And it's believed that daily they came together as the church. Probably there they were taught; probably there they sang praises to God. You would have to believe that if you were an orthodox Jew, you went to the temple and there were thousands and thousands and thousands of people gathered together singing praises to God. That might get your attention!

The "breaking bread," *klontes arton*, mentioned in this sentence, is not the "breaking of the loaf," *e klasis touartou* of verse 42; but refers to common meals of which they partook "*from house to house.*" This is evident from the connection: ***"breaking bread from house to house, they received their food with gladness and singleness of heart."*** It was that breaking of bread in which they "received their food," which was not done in partaking of the emblematic loaf.

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. (Acts 2:47 NASB)

Note that the Lord was "*adding to their number.*" What number? That is an unmistakable reference to the church! The Lord was saving sinners and simultaneously adding them to the church.

The Lord added to them day by day those who were being saved.' This not only summarizes the situation in chapter 2 but will now be the theme of Acts 3-19 which will reveal a huge emphasis on the continuing rapid growth of this new Israel. It will be the beginning of the fruit of Pentecost. It will eventually include Gentiles being incorporated into the new Israel (compare [Ephesians 2.11-22](#); [Galatians 6.16](#); [Romans 11.17-29](#)) and will continue on until Rome itself is receiving the Gospel from the Apostles.

What a beautiful picture we have here of the first Church. Here we see that the Holy Spirit established certain practices which lay the foundation for churches throughout the centuries. We cannot duplicate the Jerusalem church, but we can seek to pattern our practices after the example they set.

How about you? Are you continually devoted to the study of the Scriptures? Do you have a passion for this Book that you might know God's truth and thereby know God? Do you have a deep commitment to authentic community? Is there an environment that you've created where people who know you and love you have the freedom to speak truth into your life so you might live more like Jesus? Do you have a high level of commitment to worship? Or is it something you fit into your schedule every now and then when it works? Would you describe yourself as a person of prayer? Are you Christ-dependent rather than self-sufficient? Are you someone who really does understand that all you've been given is ultimately God's and you steward it for the greater good of the kingdom?

One of the most striking characteristics of the newly-born church in Jerusalem was their commitment. They were committed to Jesus, the Christ. They were committed to one another.

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