

As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

## Scripture Guide Week 4 - Acts 2:42-47

Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the apostle Peter's sermon during Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40), we see a great work of the Holy Spirit which brings over 3,000 people to faith in Jesus. In the section that follows (2:41-49), Luke intends for us to see how the Spirit has begun empowering and directing the newly formed fellowship of believers. The Spirit has not simply filled a handful of men who lead the church, but he has filled an entire community<sup>1</sup>.

Before continuing the narrative of the book of Acts, in which Luke generally keeps the spotlight on the apostles themselves, he now provides a sort of montage of how the church was living in fellowship with one another. He zooms-out the camera to show the whole church and allows us to see what characterized their life together. The key elements layered throughout the montage are the church's devotion and unity.

v. 42 The believers were devoted<sup>2</sup> (προσκαρτερέω) to and giving diligent attention to the apostles' instruction (διδασχί<sup>3</sup>). The apostles were those who Jesus had especially appointed to be with him and to preach the gospel (Mark 3:14), and now they were Jesus' representatives on earth (Acts 1:8). Because of their designation by Jesus, their words carried the same authority as the words of Jesus. Their teaching was the official doctrine for the church community. So the practices that Jesus taught the apostles directly (Luke 11:1-4) and instituted in the upper room in Jerusalem (Luke 22:19) were already being practiced regularly by all the believers together. And so the new community was devoted to breaking of bread<sup>4</sup> together and to prayer<sup>5</sup> together. In fact, when we look at the three things that they were devoted to (teaching, prayer, and communion) we see the earliest, basic elements of what we find in any church gathering.

They were also devoted to fellowship (κοινωνία<sup>6</sup>). The idea of fellowship is embodiment and participation - similar to that of a family. Now that they all have a share in his Spirit (1 John 4:13) Jesus has made them a κοινωνία family. No longer are they simply individuals, but they are called to be a new "body" together (Eph 4:4). Verse 46 also says that they also were devoted to unity with one another (ὁμοθυμαδόν<sup>7</sup>), such that they had one mind in all they did. They were continually meeting together so that they could express devotion to their one Lord and King, Jesus. The fellowship and community they had with one another was manifested most clearly in their unity. The Spirit was making them one, just like what Jesus prayed for them (John 17:11-23). But this passage shows how the church put action together with their unity.

v. 43 We see that they all were united in feeling a sense of awe, or reverential fear (φόβος), which connects to the biblical theme of the "fear of the Lord" (Jer 32:39-40, Acts 9:31). Their awe was, in part, because of the miraculous signs that God was doing through the apostles. The signs and wonders were confirmation that though Jesus had left the earth, the presence of his Spirit meant that his saving work was going to be continually be on display within the church. That the apostles are performing "signs

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting at this point, all the believers are from "the house of Israel". Therefore the group of believers saw themselves not as some *new* group of people, but as the true people of God, who had received the long awaited Messiah and the indwelling of his Spirit. Thus, we see in vv. 42-49, this group of Jewish believers begins immediately embodying what national Israel was meant to be like in its earthly existence.

<sup>2</sup> vv. 42 & 46 use the same word προσκαρτερέω, which means devotion, steadfast perseverance, or attending oneself continuously to something.

<sup>3</sup> διδασχί means teaching or instruction. The apostles taught based on the Hebrew Bible. However, this was not the apostles merely sharing their opinions or summarizing the OT Scriptures. They taught with the authority of God's word itself. Later the apostle Paul explains that all Scripture is useful for teaching (διδασχί), which certainly applies to the OT, but the apostles understood their role and authority to teach the word of God with the authority of Jesus himself (2 Tim 3:16-17, Matt 7:28-29). Acts 2:42 shows that the earliest Christians devoted themselves to the apostles just as they would to their Hebrew Bible.

<sup>4</sup> At least five other times in the New Testament we see "breaking bread" as a shorthand expression for taking communion together. For example, later in Acts, Luke says that the group of believers had gathered on a Sunday for the purpose of "breaking bread" (20:7). And Paul in 1 Cor 10:16 teaches of the significance of the cup of wine being representative of Jesus' blood and the broken bread being representative of his body.

<sup>5</sup> Literally "the prayers". Most translations simply say "prayer" however it is possible that there were specific prayers recited, such as from the book of Psalms, which the entire congregation vocalized together. See Acts 4:24 where Psalm 2 and other Scriptures are recited aloud.

<sup>6</sup> Κοινωνία means fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse the share which one has in anything; specifically, participation in the Spirit of God - see Phil 2:1, 1 John 4:13.

<sup>7</sup> "A unique Greek word, used 10 of its 12 New Testament occurrences in the Book of Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community. ...meaning to "rush along" and "in unison". The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church." Larry Pierce, "homothymadon," Blue Letter Bible: The Outline of Biblical Usage, 2020, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3661/nasb95/tr/0-1/>

and wonders” is significant<sup>8</sup> because, in the Bible miraculous signs usually accompany either God’s proclamation of judgment or his promise of coming salvation. The Jewish people witnessing the apostles’ deeds would have made an immediate connection to God’s Spirit being present among this group of people. So these signs were not first and foremost intended to make much of the apostles, but of God and his message of salvation for sinners. Additionally, in this context, these Christians are in the midst of seeing an amazing number of new believers in Jesus all making professions of faith and getting baptized. Witnessing this definitely would have made them all feel a great sense of wonder as they realize that they are being caught up into something massive.

**vv. 44 & 45** We see that the believers were all united in sharing a joyful and humble attitude. We see that the believers felt like all that they owned, whether property or household possessions or food, was to be shared together. They held<sup>9</sup> all their possessions in common. It seems like they were determined that there would be no one in need among them, since they were preemptively selling possessions so that they could more quickly meet new needs as they came up (see also Exo 16:18, 2 Cor 8:15). This also seems to be an enactment of Old Testament law (Deut 15:4 & 11), where God calls the people to “open wide your hand to your brother, the needy, and the poor,” because the inheritance they have been given is abundantly more than they could ever wish for. Further, it seems that the believing community viewed their earthly possessions as nothing, since in Jerusalem “they had no lasting city” (Heb 13:14) and they awaited a new and better inheritance (Heb 10:34). In all of this, it is clear that the Spirit is causing these people to individually see themselves as less important than each other (Phil 2:4). They are being filled with Jesus’ own Spirit who enables them to keep his commandment to love one another and truly fulfill God’s law of loving God and neighbor (Matt 22:39-40, John 15:12, 1 John 4:12).

**v. 46** They were continually gathering in the temple and worshiping God together. It is clear that though Jesus came to be the true fulfillment of the temple (John 1:14, 2:21), even still, his disciples still saw themselves deeply connected to the Old Testament rites and expressions of faith. They still gathered together in the temple as they, perhaps, did previously. Only now, they are gathering together to worship God in Spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). For them, worshiping the Messiah Jesus together as his people was the true fulfillment of temple worship.

In addition, as they gathered, they were sharing food together perhaps in the temple outer courts. This may have been a huge picnic<sup>10</sup> feast which included sharing the Lord’s Supper together. Sharing a meal together possibly indicates that they viewed the entire community as a new family - sharing, eating, worshiping together.

**v. 47** Lastly, they enjoyed having good favor in the eyes of all the people. The new Christian community was not, at this point, hidden in fear of persecution. They were worshiping and walking by the Spirit in manifest devotion to their risen Lord Jesus. Perhaps the people of Jerusalem saw the devotion and unity of the believing community and were drawn to them. And God used their public witness to continually add to their multitude.

## **Conclusion**

We see how the Spirit was working in individual hearts in such a way that they are all knitted together in unity. The Spirit worked in them so that they could bear fruit and give clear evidence of his presence. The result is an ideal picture of what a Christian community can look like when the Spirit works in a mighty way. Luke’s presentation of this ideal devotion and unity can be stirring for us as well. We can long for the closeness of a family of believers. We can strive for the kind of love that truly loves and values others as higher than ourselves. But it is only by the power and leading of the Holy Spirit that this kind of unity and devotion can be experienced. May we all pray and seek the Spirit to so move us.

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<sup>8</sup> Verses with “wonders” and “signs” show up about 24 times in the Bible; 7 times pertaining to the plagues and God rescuing Israel out of Egypt and another 9 times attributed to the apostles themselves.

<sup>9</sup> “At first glance it can look like the first-century church modeled an early form of socialism...[but] there is no evidence that the first Christians shared in the means of production and no record that they abolished private property... Second, the distribution of possessions in Acts was not by force or coercion, but chosen freely and voluntarily. To say the church had a wonderful communal spirit is far different from saying they practiced anything remotely like state-enforced communism.” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/first-christians-socialists/>

<sup>10</sup> Most Bible translations mention that they broke bread “in their homes” or from “house to house” (οἶκον), however this just as well translated “households”. Taken this way would indicate perhaps them sitting down together in family groups in the temple courts. Some Christians take this verse to mean proper church worship should happen in “house churches” but the passage seems to leave some uncertainty.