

BELIEVERS TOGETHER -THE ATTRACTIVE CHURCH

Acts 2: 42-47

Leo Douma

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What do we mean when we say something, is 'attractive'? It means there is something that appeals to us. We are drawn to it. It attracts our attention. We want to have another look. There is something we would like to have. I want to put it to you that the picture of the newly formed church in our text is very attractive. When we read this segment of Acts, didn't you experience that sense of 'I would love to be in church like that'? The "... *believers were devoted... filled with awe... all were together and had everything in common... they ate together with sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people*". The attractiveness of this church in Acts 2 is not coincidental. We have said so far in our study of Acts that this New Testament book is about the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The key task of the disciples was to be witnesses of Jesus by the power of the Spirit. That witness, and that power were seen on the day of Pentecost. Peter preached with urgency about Jesus and 3000 people were converted. Now, here in our text, we are given a snapshot of what that church of 3000 looked like. What we see is an ideal picture of the church. It's a picture of the church before sin and persecution distorted things. We will see that later in Acts. Let's see what our text says about this congregation. What was it that made them so attractive?

First, we see that the church was a learning church. We are told in verse 42 that they "*devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching...*" In other words, there was good, ongoing teaching by the disciples. Three thousand people were converted on Pentecost. But once converted and brought into the church that did not mean those new believers stopped learning. They needed to keep growing in the faith. Spiritual growth does not occur by some mystical experience of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps growth in the faith through good teaching. Not just any teaching, but authoritative teaching. That's the point of verse 43 "*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miracles were done by the apostles.*" The linkage of verses 42 & 43 is not coincidental. The miracles were recognized as the work of God. They were God's way of demonstrating that the apostles were speaking on behalf of Jesus. They had witnessed everything Jesus said and did, including his death and resurrection. It meant that the teaching of the apostles was recognized as the Word of God. It was the Spirit who empowered them to witness and teach. So, there was not a debate of ideas when these new Christians got together. There was a submission to the teaching by the disciples.

For us today the New Testament is the authoritative teaching of the apostles. These are the words inspired by the Holy Spirit to be written for us. We too should be devoting ourselves to that teaching. The Greek word we translate “devote” means ‘to be loyal to someone; to diligently occupy oneself with something.’ That’s what we should do. We should be deeply loyal to God by very diligently studying his Word. How else are we going to get close to God? How else are we going to know who God is and how he wants to relate with us? That’s why it’s so important to be regular in church, to be involved in a small group, to be doing your own devotions. A Spirit-filled church that demonstrates the power of the Spirit is one that studies the Word deeply and submits to that Word. A Spirit empowered church is one that obeys God.

Secondly, we see that the church was a loving church. We are told in verse 42 (the second key item in that verse) that the believers *“devoted themselves ... to the fellowship.”* Again, note the word “devoted”. This is something they worked hard at. They were loyal and diligent. The word for “fellowship” in the Greek is “koinonia”, which means “having things in common”. It involves loving, caring, and sharing. It’s deep stuff. Too often we reduce fellowship to being acquainted with other people. We think it’s about socializing. But the picture here in Acts is something deep that requires effort. It’s about a real love and care for each other. It’s about a willingness to share to meet each other’s needs. And you notice to what extent they did that in verse 44 & 45 - *“All the believers were together and had everything in common (koinonia). Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to any one as they had need.”* That was really caring for each other.

Now there are two senses, two levels, in our sharing together as Christians. The first is what we share in together. What we have in common is that we are all “in Christ”. As believers we each have fellowship with God. John writes in his first letter (1 John 1:3) *“...our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ”*. And Paul speaks (2Cor. 13:14) of the *“fellowship of the Holy Spirit”*. So, in other words, koinonia is a trinitarian experience. That is what we have in common. That is our shared experience. We share in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is what makes our fellowship. Not just that we are friends or mates together. Not just that we have a BBQ together or watch the football or have other common interests. This is a fellowship that is only possible for believers. Our fellowship is there because of what happened 2000 years ago, with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus was *“put to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification”* we now have fellowship. Our fellowship in Jesus means to share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is, in the sense that whatever happened to Jesus has happened to us. By the Spirit uniting us to Christ, we have died to sin. We have been raised to new life. We already sit with Jesus in the

heavenly realm- as Paul loves to put it in Ephesians 2. This is our koinonia- this is what we have in common. We share in Christ and his salvation.

Now our fellowship is not only what we share in together, it's also what we share out. The focus of koinonia is our common life in Christ. And that expresses itself in the way we act toward one another. The best way to explain this is to point you to the "one another" passages in the New Testament. There are over fifty of these passages. I'll just highlight some of them: *"Love one another... encourage one another... be devoted to one another... build up one another ... be kind to one another... accept one another... serve one another... confess your sins to one another... forgive one another... teach and admonish one another... pray for one another.."* So koinonia starts off with faith in Jesus and ends with our relationship with fellow believers. And that relationship with each other is one of deep abiding love for each other. As the song says 'Brother, sister, let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you, pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.'

The third thing we see is that the Acts 2 church was a worshipping church. Another thing the believers were devoted to in verse 42 is *"to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* In other words, they worshipped together. In the early days of the church the people would share a meal and part of that would also be the Lord's Supper. Notice the balance in their worship between the formal and the informal (:46) *"...they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."* So, we see they supplemented the temple worship with the more informal, spontaneous meetings in their homes. You notice also in the passage a balance between reverence and joy - (: 43) *"Everyone was filled with awe"* recognizing the awesome presence of Almighty God. And: 46 *"They ...ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God..."*. Here is the sense of being deeply aware of God's presence. 'God is here with us!' But also, through grace, enjoying God and each other. We too need that balance. There is the need for the dignified worship, deeply aware we come into God's holy presence. And the more informal, relaxed home meetings. And we need to balance awe and joy, both in corporate worship and in our small groups. So, singing together, learning together, sharing and caring together. And also praying together. Here with this last point we do the greatest thing we can for each other. To hold each other before the throne of grace and beg God's care.

Now there is a fourth thing that we see about the Acts 2 church. This is not found in the summary of verse 42, but at the end of verse 47. This fourth item is the result of having the first three characteristics. Note what it says. *"And the Lord added to their number daily, those who were being saved."* In other words, the church was an evangelistic

church. Having good teaching, and wonderful love and fellowship, awesome worship and prayer, was not just about being occupied with themselves. There is a real danger of Christians becoming a 'holy huddle'. Being a religious group caring only for their own. That is not the Acts model. Remember Jesus' command (in 1:8) *"Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth."* The point of the wonderful devotion that the early Christians had for studying God's Word, deeply caring for each other, having wonderful worship, was that they were equipped for witness. When they were so devoted to God and each other they were incredibly attractive to their community in Jerusalem. Note the first part of verse 47 *"praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people."* There was something about the church in Acts 2 that was very appealing. The community was drawn in. They wanted what the church had.

When we diligently study God's Word, we gain the insights we need to share the faith and answer people's questions. Too often Christians have little to share because they don't really know God and the beautiful gospel about his grace. They haven't devoted themselves to the teaching. When Christians deeply caring for each other, it provides a model to the community of how life can truly be lived under God. So many people in our communities are hungry for real relationships, to experience true love. They long for those who will listen and show gentleness and graciousness. They want commitment from family and friends. They need hope. In order for the power of the Spirit to move through us to be good witnesses, this model of the church needs to be evident with us.

Now note something. I am not saying that here we have the techniques for evangelism. Who is it that actually brings people to conversion? Look again at verse 47 *"...and the Lord added to their number those being saved"*. It is God's work. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to change a heart and bring people to faith. That is where the power is in witnessing. We are to be faithful in our devotion to the Word, to fellowship and to worship. We share what we have with others and tell the story of how God's grace has deeply affected our lives. And God will add to our number those being saved.

Also note what is said in that verse. God *"...added to their number those saved..."* The two things there remind us when a person comes to love Jesus, they also come to love the church. A believer is added to that wonderful koinonia, that deep fellowship. Christianity is not about individuals who are saved, who are basically on their own and turn up to a gathering once in a while. It's about a community, a fellowship of those saved. A people who love Jesus and belong to him and each other. A people who are devoted to the Word, who worship in awe of God, who really care for each other.

The last thing we see is that God *“added to their number daily...”* Witnessing is an everyday ongoing thing. It’s not about having a big event once a year or some other special program. It’s what we do automatically, daily as we are devoted to the Word, devoted to each other, devoted to worship. If we are really attractive, others will be drawn to what we have. They will see a community of hope; ‘Hope in the Hills’. And we will be keen to tell our story because it’s so good.