

Introduction

1. Last week we saw how God used Pentecost and Peter's sermon to convict 3000 Jews and lead them to Christ for salvation
2. These early years of the Church were an exciting time as thousands and thousands of Jews were converted and added to the body of Christ
3. Today, Luke gives us a glimpse as to what life was like among those early Christians
4. Luke begins by writing that the believers in the early Church "**were continually devoting themselves**" to four things
 - a. The more literal rendering is that they "**were continuing (or persisting) in**" these things
 - b. It implies intense effort or hard work, meaning they were committed or devoted to them
5. Today we're going to examine these four commitments of the early Church and see what we can learn from them

A. First, Christians in the early Church continued in "**the Apostles' teaching**" (2:42a)

1. In Ephesians 2:19-21 Paul declared that the Church is built upon the "**foundation of the Apostles and prophets**" with Jesus serving as the chief cornerstone
2. This is because Jesus tasked the Apostles with not just being His witnesses (Acts 1:8), but with making disciples through baptism and "**teaching them to observe**" all that He had commanded them (Matthew 28:19-20):
 - a. One expectation Jesus had of the Apostles was that they teach His followers everything He had taught them in his earthy ministry and everything He would reveal to them through the Holy Spirit:
 - 1) He personally mentored them for over three years, teaching them from the OT Scriptures
 - 2) After his resurrection He spent forty days appearing to them and teaching them about the Kingdom
 - 3) After His ascension He sent the Holy Spirit to divinely reveal to them truths about this new mystery, the Church (Ephesians 3:5)
 - b. But, Jesus expected them to teach more than content—Notice that He said to "**teach them to observe all that I have commanded**"
3. When Luke wrote that the early Church "**continued**" in the Apostles teaching he didn't mean that they simply continued to believe what they taught (e.g. doctrine), but that they continued to live in obedience to what they were taught
4. This commitment to the Apostles teaching is likely what Luke was referring to when he wrote the beginning of v. 46: "**And day by day [they were] continuing with one mind in the temple...**"
 - a. Temple here likely refers to the courts around the temple (as the NET) which is where the teaching took place
 - b. They were committed enough to being taught and fed by the Apostles that they showed up every day

- c. As a result, they were of “**one mind**” meaning they were committed in their thinking and purpose to be doctrinally and behaviorally unified
- d. Part of this commitment might have been fueled by what Luke wrote in v. 43: “**And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles**”—it was clear they had the authority of Christ in their teaching!

B. Second, Christians in the early Church continued in “**fellowship**” (2:42b)

- 1. When we refer to fellowship, we generally use it as a synonym for spending time together as believers (e.g. “let’s get together for some fellowship”)
- 2. That’s certainly one aspect of fellowship but the Biblical meaning of fellowship goes much deeper than that; more precisely it means to share in common (Bock, p. 150)
- 3. We see this in how the word is used in the NT:
 - a. It’s used to refer to doing good to one another and sharing (Hebrews 13:16): “**And do not neglect doing good and sharing (fellowshipping), for with such sacrifices God is pleased.**”
 - b. It’s used to refer to contributing to the financial needs of others (Romans 15:26): “**For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution (fellowship) for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.**” (repeated in 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13)
 - c. It’s used to describe participating together in things like the Gospel (Philippians 1:5) and the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:10)
- 4. So, when Luke writes that the very first Christians “**continued...in fellowship**” he didn’t mean they simply hung out together, but rather that they sacrificially shared together and he describes this in the next few verses (READ 44-45):
 - a. Luke states here that “**all who believed were together**” and the tense he uses implies that they were continually together, meaning they spent a lot of time with one another
 - b. Luke tells us that they “**held everything in common**” and he explains what this means in v. 45 and in Acts 4:32-34:
 - 1) V. 45: “**and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.**”
 - 2) Acts 4:32-37 (READ)
 - c. So, does this mean we should sell everything we own and live communally as a church?
 - 1) Well, Jesus did tell the rich man to sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and that in doing so he would have treasures in heaven (Luke 12:33)—but this was said to a man whose possessions were more important to him than following Jesus; they were an obstacle that needed to be removed for him to come to Jesus
 - 2) The Bible never condemns owning possessions, and in fact God often blesses people through earthly possessions
 - 3) In fact, Peter told Ananias that before he sold his property it was his to do with as he pleased, and likewise the money he received when he sold it (Acts 5:4)
 - 4) However, true fellowship means that we are willing to share sacrificially with one another when there is need

C. Third, Christians in the early Church continued in “**the breaking of bread**” (2:42:c)

- 1. Another aspect of their fellowship was sharing their meals together:

- a. Outside of the actual Lord's Supper in the Gospels, there are mainly four references to the breaking of bread in the NT:
 - b. In one (1 Corinthians 10:16), Paul uses the phrase to refer to celebrating the Lord's Supper, but in the context of a larger meal
 - c. The other three simply refer to sharing meals together (Acts 2:46; 20:7; Luke 24:30), but may have also included the Lord's supper at times (like in 1 Corinthians 11)
 - d. Based on the context, Luke is primarily referring to the latter (sharing meals together)
2. Luke says that this is something the early Church did every day (READ 46-47a):
- a. This is something they initially did daily: "**day by day**" applies to both meeting in the temple and sharing meals (Luke refers to the "**daily serving of food**" in Acts 6)
 - b. According to Jude, they even had a name for such meals: "**love feasts**" (Jude 1:12)
 - c. Luke writes that they shared these meals "**with gladness and sincerity of heart**":
 - 1) The word translated gladness refers to a state of intense joy, sometimes implying verbal expressions and bodily movement (same word Elizabeth used when unborn John leapt in her womb when she met pregnant Mary)
 - 2) The phrase sincerity of heart refers to a humility associated with simplicity of life
 - 3) In other words, they LOVED sharing meals together and the time was marked by incredible joy and remarkable humility
 - d. How long this daily tradition continued is unknown, but we know that by Paul's third missionary journey they were still sharing meals together at least once a week on Sundays (Acts 20:11)
 - e. Though Paul had to chastise the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11 because much of what's described above was missing from their love feasts
3. Sharing meals together served a variety of purposes:
- a. One was obviously to eat, though based on Paul's chastisement of the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11 that wasn't the primary purpose
 - b. Acts 6 suggests the meals provided opportunity to meet the needs of the less fortunate like widows
 - c. Sharing meals together also provided opportunities to show hospitality, socialize, encourage one another, and build camaraderie
 - d. The early Church also used such times to study the Word of God, to pray, and to worship (notice v. 47, "**praising God**")

D. Forth and finally, Christians in the early Church continued in " prayer " (2:42d)

1. I don't think it's a coincidence that Luke began Acts with the Apostles gathering together and devoting themselves to prayer
 - a. Luke mentions prayer 29 times in the book (just over once per chapter) which gives us a pretty good idea of the value he placed on prayer and its importance to the success of the early Church
 - b. This is echoed in the NT as a whole because prayer is mentioned in all but five of the NT books
2. Why is prayer so important? (from my notes on Acts 1:12-26)

- a. It aligns our will with God's (Matthew 6:9): **"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."**
- b. It reminds us of our dependence on Him and of His provision (Matthew 6:11): **"Give us this day our daily bread."**
- c. It helps us not lose heart (Luke 18:1): **"Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,"**
- d. It helps us deal with temptation (Luke 22:40): **"When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."**
- e. It helps us deal with our enemies (Luke 6:28): **"27 But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."**
- f. It keeps us alert (Ephesian 6:18): **"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,"**
- g. James even wrote that it helps us overcome weariness and at times even physical sickness (ref. James 5)

Conclusion

The last two things we read in our passage today are the two results of these four commitments and they are related to one another—the early Church had **"having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." (47):

1. We see these two themes repeated in Acts:
 - a. They were held in high regard (5:13; 9:31)
 - b. God added to their numbers (4:4; 6:7; 5:14; 11:21-24; 14:1; 16:5)
2. This is exactly what we would expect in the early Church because it was filled with new converts who were excited and growing in their new found faith
3. They were likely exuding the fruits of the Spirit: things like love, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc.
4. Have you ever noticed how infectious new faith in Christ is? It's a shame we lose that
5. When Jesus addressed the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7, he praised them for their hard work, perseverance, and intolerance of evil men and false apostles. However, he chastised them for losing their first love (e.g. the love and affection they had for Him when they first came to Him)
6. I fear many Christians today, maybe the Church as a whole, has lost that first love and maybe that's why the American Church is shrinking so rapidly and losing its influence