

“THE HABITS OF A GROWING CHURCH”

Acts 2:42-47 (Part 2)

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INTRODUCTION

Last week we saw the first good habit of the early church: the believers **demonstrated their devotion** to the Lord in **four ways**: continually adhering to 1) *Apostolic teaching*, 2) *Fellowship* with God and brethren, 3) *Breaking of Bread*, and 4) *Prayer*. **New Testament churches today must continually maintain the same four practices.**

There is much talk in Christendom about “apostolic succession”; the only apostolic succession known in the New Testament is the **succession of churches continuing in the apostolic teaching!** The apostles were not replaced when they died; but their teachings continue through the Scriptures to all generations of believers.

Many believers seem to value “fellowship” with their *sports buddies* or their *work partners* or their *school friends* or their extended circle of *neighbors and friends* more than they value fellowship with fellow Christians. **The early church was always “hanging out” together!**

The art of “eating together”—whether in our homes or at the church—does not seem to have nearly the importance that it had for these early Christians. Of course, included in these common meals was the observance of the *Lord’s Supper*.

It is likely that the *fourth* demonstration of the devotion of the early church has the starkest contrast to the contemporary church—**devotion to prayer**. It seems that the importance of regular and extended times of prayer has largely disappeared from the contemporary church.

If our church wants to experience evidence of the power and blessing of the Lord upon our congregation, then we must more fully participate in devotion to these four practices.

Moreover, we also noted that the believers practiced all these in the **fear of God**, with **unity of mind**, with **exuberant joy**, and with **genuineness of heart**. OH THAT WE COULD BE MORE LIKE THE EARLY CHRISTIANS!

But, **demonstration of devotion** in these four ways is only the first of **three habitual practices** of the early church; the other two are **the demonstration of love** and the **demonstration of power**.

WHEN BELIEVERS HABITUALLY DEMONSTRATE SUCH ACTS OF DEVOTION, LOVE, AND POWER [of course only through the power of the Holy Spirit], God also habitually manifests His abundant blessings upon the church.

I. THE HABITS OF BELIEVERS

A. Demonstration of Devotion in Teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer {*Last week*}

B. Demonstration of Love (44-45): *Community of Goods*

1. According to the need (45)
2. Voluntary nature (e.g. Barnabas and Ananias—ch. 4 & 5)
3. No attempt at equality
4. Not motivated by a wild enthusiasm over the second coming
5. Patterned after Christ's example
6. Not the reason for the later poverty of the Jerusalem; poverty was largely caused by the sharp persecution of and exclusion of Christians by their Jewish neighbors.

The early Christians were notorious for the great love that they had for one another.

C. Demonstration of Power (43b)—“Many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.” [Cf. John Wimber’s *Power Evangelism* and the Vineyard Church movement.]

These kinds of miracles were limited to the apostolic church—“through the apostles”. Power today centers upon power of the Gospel to change lives.

Now, when believers and churches demonstrate devotion, love, and power, habitually, God also has a habit:

II. THE HABIT OF GOD (43, 47)

- A. Stirring *fear* and *awe*. (43a)—Do we have such awe and respect from the world today?
- B. Giving favor with the people (47a)—stop trying to do it all yourself. Divine influence is the key.
- C. Adding to the Church (47b)—**daily, their number (membership rolls); those who were being saved (saved church membership.) God does the saving and true adding; we acknowledge and receive these new believers.**

CONCLUSION

Are these habits your habits?

- Devoted to Bible Study
- Devoted to Fellowship
- Devoted to Breaking of bread and the Lord's Supper
- Devoted to times of prayer
- Generosity to God's work and people who have needs
- Manifestation of God's power in your life and witness

If so, God will give us a growing church.