

# OpenTheo

## Acts 2:40 - 2:47



### Acts - Steve Gregg

In this insightful presentation, Steve Gregg examines Acts 2:40-47, offering various key insights into the early Christian church. He emphasizes the importance of repentance, baptism, and community life, as well as the need to focus on obedience to Christ, helping the needy, and sharing with others. Through their exemplary conduct and attitudes, early Christians demonstrated their faith and attracted others to join the kingdom of God, resulting in profound transformations in individuals, communities, and even societies.

### Transcript

Looking at Acts chapter 2 again, we're very near the end of the chapter. We saw that when Peter finished his sermon, he got a response of people who were convicted deeply by his words. They were cut to the heart.

I think that's really what we want to see happen when the Gospel is preached. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit, convicting. The lost.

I think we've become accustomed to presenting the Gospel in clever ways, entertaining ways, tricky ways to get people's attention. Because we assume that people are simply not interested in the Gospel, so we have to kind of make it interesting in artificial ways. But when the Holy Spirit convicts the heart, people are desperately looking for the way to get right with God.

And that's what these people were. Now, by the way, being cut to the heart is not a guarantee that people get saved. It just means they're convicted.

We'll find in chapter 7 of Acts, when Peter preached his sermon, his crowd was convicted too. They were cut to the heart, but they didn't get converted. They stoned him to death.

So the crowd that you preach to, you want them to get convicted, but it's not clear exactly how they're going to react to conviction. They may get saved or they may kill you, but we see both in the book of Acts. But still, at least when they're cut to the heart, it means that the Holy Spirit is owning your message and convicting them and working

on them.

And that's necessary. That's the only hope of anyone ever getting saved is for the Holy Spirit to speak to them and to convert them. Now, when they said, men and brethren, what must we do? Peter's answer there in verse 38 was, Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. Now, you and your children means not just this generation, but later generations too. As many as are far off means not just people who are in Jerusalem like you are right now listening to me speak, but those who are in other places too.

Peter somehow understood that the message would someday be preached in faraway places because the promise of salvation was for all nations. Although Peter did not understand at this point, nor did anyone in the church understand the degree to which the Gentiles would come to be almost the dominant demographic in the movement. It was many years in the early days after Pentecost that the entire church was made up of Jewish people.

When Gentiles began to come into the church, it actually caused some controversy and crisis, but eventually they got over that rough spot. And that's why we're able to take it for granted that we're able to be Christians without being Jews. But that wasn't always understood, and when Peter said it's for you and your children, those who are far off, as many as the Lord your God shall call, he was probably still at this point thinking only in terms of Jewish people or Gentiles who became Jewish people, which always a possibility.

A Gentile could become a proselyte, which is a convert to Judaism, and the Jews were willing to accept proselytes as Jews. And there were also Gentiles that were not fully willing to be proselytes because of the circumcision aspect. But who feared the Jewish God, and they didn't like their pagan gods, and they would go to the synagogue, and they would try to follow more or less the Jewish way.

They were called God-fearers. Among the Gentiles, there were of course the utter pagans who were despicable to the Jews. There were the God-fearers who were not utter pagans, but they hadn't fully converted and been circumcised to become Jewish.

Then there were the proselytes who were Gentiles who did become Jewish. And Peter and the apostles, even at this point, would have had no problem with proselyte Gentiles becoming Christians, and maybe some of them did for all we know. And maybe even were a little open to the idea of God-fearers.

It's hard to know, but this was more questionable. Certainly pagan Gentiles they didn't feel could be Christians. The degree to which pagans and Gentiles in general came to be

dominant in the church is one of the streams of history that Luke traces in the book of Acts.

How it moved from being primarily a Jewish movement to much more dominantly a Gentile kind of a movement. Now, verse 40 through 47 gives us a little snippet of life in the early church in the very primitive era. That is, after the first day.

The first day, as we see, had 3,000 converts. We'll see that. And we're told something about how they lived, how their lives were changed, not just as individuals, but mostly the focus is on their life as a community.

It says, and with many other words he testified and exhorted them saying, save yourselves from this perverse generation. Interesting, he didn't say save yourself from hell, but save yourself from this perverse generation. Well, what was wrong with that generation? Well, that's the generation that Jesus had all the righteous blood from Abel to Zechariah.

He's going to come on that generation. They were going to be severely judged. Get out of here.

Get out of that generation. Save yourself out of that group. Come into our group.

Come into the kingdom of God. Come into the church, the body of Christ. Get out of that lost and condemned generation that's going to come under judgment before very long.

It's interesting how many times the Bible talks about being saved, again, without referring specifically to being saved from postmortem things. Now we all, I hope we all believe there is postmortem judgment and there is a hell and there is a heaven. And in the epistles, we read something about postmortem judgments or our ultimate eschatological judgments.

And certainly in the book of Revelation we do, but in the preaching of the gospel to unbelievers, it's amazing how that did not come up. When in many cases we almost feel like gospel preaching is compromised if there's no hellfire and damnation attached to it. But the salvation in the Bible, you know, Paul tells the Galatians, God, Christ died to save us from this present evil world.

Or he says, save yourselves from this evil generation. Or the angel said to Joseph, his name should be called Jesus. He'll save his people from their sins.

Or Peter says that we've been redeemed from the aimless conduct received by traditions from our fathers. Our aimless lives were saved from that. There's all kinds of things we're saved from, the Bible says, but it just never mentions saved from hell.

Not that hell is not a reality, it's just that that was not the focus of the early preaching as

it is with much American evangelicalism. I believe in hell. And I believe people who aren't ready to meet God when they die, that's where they're going to go.

But I just find it interesting because I was raised, frankly, I was raised Baptist. And then Calvary Chapel and, you know, very standard evangelical. And it was a surprise to me when I studied Acts to see how did Peter evangelize? How did Paul evangelize? How was it done? How was the gospel preached in the book of Acts? And it didn't do what I do at all.

They virtually never mentioned the atonement. They always mentioned Jesus died, but that's almost like just a preview to St. Enrose. He was killed, but God raised him again and again.

They say the Jews killed him, God raised him. And the significance of his death hardly comes up as a mention. Now, Paul did say when he wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15, 3, that the gospel he had preached them included that Jesus died for our sins, according to the scriptures, that he was buried and raised again the third day according to the scriptures.

So died for our sins is a reference to the atonement. It was not apparently entirely absent from evangelism, but there's an awful lot of evangelism that's recorded that doesn't speak specifically about that. And again, there's no altar calls.

There's no reference to, you know, you go to hell or heaven. Those things, I think they were left for after. You know, C.S. Lewis in his book, what's it called? Reflections on the Psalms, I think is the name of the book.

He talks about how David and people who wrote the Psalms, they didn't seem to know about heaven or hell. In the Old Testament, God never really talked about postmortem destinies. The blessings they looked for was to dwell in the temple, in the house of the God forever, to meditate in his temple and behold the beauty of the Lord there.

To be blessed in this world with long life and many grandchildren. I mean, this is the way the Jews expected the blessings of the righteous to look. There's no actual statement in the Old Testament about the eternal fate of righteous or unrighteous people.

Not that it wasn't a phenomenon, it just wasn't revealed. And C.S. Lewis was saying it's a little bit like a prince who has a great, you know, castle. And a great kingdom to offer his bride.

But he doesn't tell her until after she marries him. Because he wants her to marry him for love. He disguises himself as a pauper and woos her and wins her love.

And then he tells her, hey, I've got this great castle. You get to live with me in this mansion. And that's how God was toward the Jews.

He expected them to love him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. And love their neighbors themselves without telling them anything or without telling them much about what rewards would come from it. He didn't appeal to them on the basis of rewards, but on the basis of his love for them.

I have loved you with an everlasting love. You'll be my special treasure if you obey me. You know, it's like, it's a relational, loving relationship he's trying to nurture here.

And we sometimes might spoil that with people by saying, never mind that part, just get out of hell free. You know, in which case people are coming, they're responding to us not because they love God, but because they love themselves and they're trying to save their sorry skin. You know, they're just continuing to be what they've always been, self-centered.

There's no conversion. There's no repentance. There's no change of orientation from man to God, from self to God.

Jesus said if anyone come after you, he'll have to deny himself. That's the first thing. But we affirm people's selves.

Oh, do yourself a favor. Become a Christian. But the emphasis of the scripture is not do yourself a favor and you'll be glad you did.

The emphasis of the scripture is God is God. You're not. Jesus is the king that God has appointed.

Deal with that. That's the message. That's the message of the kingdom of God.

God has a kingdom and he's got a king on the throne right now at the right hand of God. And he expects everyone to submit to him. And there will be a judgment.

Paul does mention in Acts 17 there will be a judgment. But he doesn't say what happens after that. All right.

Now, verse 41. Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added. Now, the words to them, if you have the New King James or the King James, it says were added to them.

The words to them are not in the Greek. Likewise, in verse 47, it says at the end of verse 47, the Lord added to the church daily those who are being saved. The oldest manuscripts do not have the words to the church.

It just says the Lord added daily those who were to be saved. Now, later on, we'll find the expression many people were added to the Lord. People are being added to the body of Christ.

They're being added to Christ, to the Lord. Now, it's true the church is the body of Christ, but the term as it's found in Acts 2:47 is simply not found in the old manuscripts. People are being added to Christ.

Christ's body is growing. New members are being added. New cells, fresh cells are being added to the body of Christ.

And God is continually adding as people are converted. They're being added to the kingdom of God, and they're taken from the kingdom of darkness. Because the Christian, according to Paul, is translated out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of his own dear son.

So the kingdom is beginning to grow like a mustard seed, as Jesus said. It starts out very small, but it grows into a great plant. Or as Daniel described the kingdom of God as a stone that grows into a great mountain to fill the whole earth.

It's beginning to grow here. God's adding to it. And he keeps adding to it.

The whole book of Acts is the story of God continually to add. And this kingdom grows, and the body grows. These are different metaphors, of course, for the same thing.

And it says 3,000 were added. Apparently they're all baptized that day. Now imagine baptizing 3,000 people in one day.

And you've only got like 12 apostles to do the work. You can't just say baptism. That'd be inconvenient.

Most churches today would just say, okay, we've got three converts. We're going to have a baptism next month. Sign up, and we'll baptize you.

We're going to get around to it. We'll get around to baptizing these people someday. We've got one scheduled three months out.

And then we get saved between now and then. Think about maybe getting baptized. We've got it set for December.

They didn't do that. They didn't say, well, we've got a bunch of converts. Why don't we baptize some of these people over the next few weeks? No, they baptized them all that day.

They were added that day, and they were all baptized, it says. So just think how busy the apostles were baptizing 3,000 people in one day. But the fact that they did so, rather than stretching it out over the next few weeks, suggests that they did not consider baptism to be a trifle.

It was not like optional. Now, again, I say, I believe there are people in heaven who have

not been baptized. I don't think baptism is what commends us to God.

But baptism was the formal passageway through the doorway into the body of Christ. It was the means by which a person who now was a child of God entered the family gathering and identified oneself as belonging to that family. And that is, I think, why they consider it so important.

Now, verse 42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and the breaking of bread and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Now all who believed were together and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all as anyone had need. So, continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added daily those who were being saved. Now, this little piece, this little paragraph about early church life is very intriguing. It's charming, for one thing.

It makes you feel like you wish you were there. Man, that would be some kind of a group. They're meeting daily.

You know, there's people who say, you know, we should be meeting on the Sabbath. You know, Saturday is the Sabbath. We're obligated to meet on the Sabbath.

Others say, no, the Sabbath's been changed to Sunday. We should meet on Sunday. The church didn't talk like that.

They said, let's get together every day. Daily, they met in the temple and broke bread daily from house to house. And they continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayers, apparently steadfastly and continuously.

Now, this doesn't sound unrealistic to me because I was in the Jesus movement. And that's what happened in the Jesus movement. People were excited about God.

They got saved and they wanted to be with other Christians all the time. They couldn't be all the time, but they were as often as they could be. There were Bible studies every night.

Calvary Chapel had Bible studies every night. And if you didn't go there, there were Bible studies in hundreds of homes you could attend. Or you could just start one.

And people would show up. I remember in the early 70s, if someone said, could you teach a Bible study in our home? I was 16 years old. And I say, well, I guess so.

And I'd go there. And within three weeks, the home was crowded to capacity. We'd have to find a bigger place.

We moved to a bigger place. And within a few weeks, it was crowded to capacity. One time, we had to move three different times to bigger homes.

But that wasn't because of me. It was because of the revival. It was because people were just starving for God, hungry for God.

And they wanted teaching. They wanted to fellowship. There was nothing more enjoyable.

A lot of these people who got saved were hippies who got saved out of drugs and stuff. And when they got saved, their friends said, what do you do for fun now? Oh, we go to Bible studies. We praise God and stuff like that.

Their unsaved friends was like, what? How boring can that be? They must have been thinking about modern church, what it's like. But, you know, most people, it's hard to get people to go to many church meetings a week. In fact, most churches don't even have a Sunday night service anymore.

They used to always have that, Sunday morning and Sunday night. I used to go to both. But churches can't get enough people to come out two nights a week, Wednesday night.

You know, getting people to come to church is hard when there's no revival. But when there's a revival, people are excited about God. They're excited about Christ.

They're excited about fellowship. And they want to learn. And it says, the first thing they continued and said was the apostles doctrine.

Now, the word doctrine, we probably think of the word doctrine in terms of theological concepts, like all of the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of justification by faith, the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of heaven and hell, the doctrine of whatever, the deity of Christ. These are doctrines. In fact, these are what we often consider to be the more important kinds of doctrines.

But the word doctrine doesn't mean theological proposition. Theological propositions can be part of doctrine. But the word doctrine is just in the Greek word that means, in the Greek, behind the English word doctrine, it means teaching.

It's just teaching. It does not tell us what the content of the teaching was. They just sat regularly under the teaching of the apostles.

Now, what did the apostles teach? Well, I'm not sure. But we know that Jesus told them. He told them what to teach.



Because when Jesus gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20, he said, all authority in heaven and earth is given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And teach them to observe everything I have commanded you. Now, teaching, that must be what the apostles taught. They taught people how to obey everything Jesus commanded.

That's not the curriculum of very many churches I've been in. Usually, they want to make sure you know all the specific doctrines of their denomination. And very little of that has to do with obeying what Jesus said.

It has more to do with concepts. Do you believe in one saved, all is saved? Do you believe in water baptism, or sprinkling, or pouring, or immersion? What are your doctrines about this? Our group stands for this. What do you think about predestination? What do you think about the rapture? Once you get all those concepts right, you're accepted.

But just to make sure you don't drift, they keep teaching those concepts over and over and over again. Do they ever get around to teach you how to observe everything Jesus commanded? Well, if they do, very few people in the church have gotten the memo. Because I don't find very many Christians in the church who have learned very much about keeping all the commandments that Jesus gave.

You see, we have understood the teaching of the church to be mostly conceptual, theological precepts, and so forth. But Jesus, when he taught his disciples, it was not, you know, devoid of theological concept. You talk about God as your father, and so forth.

But he was always teaching, now here's what you do. You love one another. You turn the other cheek.

You don't divorce. You don't lust after your neighbor's wife. You don't get angry at your brother without a cause.

You don't be like the hypocrites showing off when you're doing religious stuff. You don't worry about money. You're more like the flowers of the field and the birds of the air.

God takes care of them. You'd be like that. Jesus' teaching to his disciples was how to live differently for the glory of God.

What God wanted them to do. Now, sure, God wants you to believe things, too. But it's interesting how the focus of Jesus' teaching, if you happen to read it in the Gospels, is about forgive people.

Don't be a hypocrite. Be humble. Take the lower seats, not the high seats.

You see, that's essentially, read what Jesus taught. He taught to live a certain way characterized by love for your neighbor, love for God, humility, genuineness, no hypocrisy, forgiveness, mercy. That's, is that the curriculum of most churches? Well, that I think was probably the curriculum of the early apostles because Jesus told them, teach these people to observe everything I've commanded you.

Well, observing what Jesus commanded is a different thing than processing difficult theological concepts. Like the Trinity. Now, by the way, I believe in the Trinity.

I hope everyone knows that I believe in the Trinity. But I have to say it's a difficult theological concept. Almost everybody finds it so.

Some people have found a way to describe it that makes them feel OK with it, but it's still difficult. It's three in one. It's difficult.

It's a difficult concept. And we don't ever find Jesus sitting down and describing it to the disciples. Or frankly, we don't find anyone in the New Testament sitting down and describing it.

It's a concept that we have reached by comparing scriptures from here and there and everywhere. And we come up with the synthesis that is the Trinity doctrine. And I think it's correct.

But what's interesting is you don't find Jesus sitting down and teaching the doctrine of the Trinity or the doctrine of this or the doctrine of that. He teaches them how to please God in their lives. In the early church, people were considered Christians because they loved Jesus, they believed in Jesus, and they loved one another.

That's what Jesus said. This is how people know you're my disciples if you love one another. Not if you can recite this creed.

Not if you can pass a test on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Not if you have, you know, all these theological propositions squared away. But if you love one another, that's how men will know you're my disciples.

And in the early church for the several centuries, there was really no other way to determine if someone was a Christian. I mean, there were some heresies that came in that people like Gnostics and stuff they had to correct. But mostly, if you were a lover of the brethren and a lover of God and of Jesus, you were a brother.

Eventually, there began to be creeds formed by the ecumenical councils. The first was in 325 A.D., then there were a whole bunch of them after that. Each one began to define concepts, theological concepts, that people had to agree with or else be called a heretic.

And so the church evolved from a community of people who were characterized by

loving interaction and obedience to Jesus and holy living to a community of people who could say the right words about the right concepts and pass a test of orthodoxy. And you know what happened to the church after that? They found out that a whole bunch of people can learn those theology without even being saved. And so you had bishops and popes and so forth.

They could recite the theology, but they couldn't love their neighbor. They couldn't live a holy life. They weren't saved.

They weren't followers of Christ. The early church, you know, when Paul gives qualifications for leaders, they're all about character and behavior. The church has shifted its emphasis from following Jesus, which is what disciples were originally called to do and being like him and obeying him, to being able to say the right things about him.

Saying the right words is now what is the test of orthodoxy, not living the right life. And that's why the early church was different than our modern church, because for centuries now, you're considered to be orthodox or not based on if you agree with the concepts of your group, whether you're Catholic, Protestant, it doesn't matter. You know, each group has their own special concepts.

Very few of them have to do with being a holy person. Some of them do. Most of them have to do with other things.

Now, when the early church sat under the apostles' teaching regularly, the teaching was what? What is sound doctrine? Let me show you what Paul identified as sound doctrine. If you look at what he said to Timothy, excuse me, Titus, chapter 2, verse 1. But as for you, Titus, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine. Okay, so Paul's going to give an example of what he considers to be sound doctrine.

Does he talk about the doctrine of atonement, the doctrine of hell, the doctrine of the deity of Christ? No. Look what he calls sound doctrine. Older men should be sober, reverent, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and patience.

That sounds behavioral to me. That the older women likewise may be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they may admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemy. Is this sound doctrine? There's not a word in their theology.

It's all about you women be chaste, love your husbands, love your children. Don't drink too much. I mean, this is behavior, isn't it? This is what Paul called sound doctrine.

Now, I wanted to just show you one other passage about this. In 1 Timothy 1, verse 8 and following, he says, But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless, insubordinate,

for the ungodly, for the sinners, for the unholy, for the profane, for murderers of fathers, murderers of mothers. This gets pretty bad.

For manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for purgers, and if there's any other thing contrary to sound doctrine. Notice, what is contrary to sound doctrine? Well, killing your mother. That's contrary to sound doctrine.

Killing your father, perjuring yourself, lying, being a sodomite. These are all behavioral things. Those are contrary to sound doctrine.

That is sound teaching. The word doctrine just means teaching. The teaching of the church was primarily, don't kill your mom and dad.

Don't be a sodomite. Don't purge yourself. Don't lie.

You young women, raise your kids. Be homemakers. You old women, be sober.

You old men, be sober. Be patient. You see, what was characterizing the teaching of the apostles, including Paul, and no doubt the early apostles too, was just what Jesus said they should teach.

Teach them to observe everything I commanded you. Now, does this mean theology is not important? Of course not. Theology is quite important, but not as important as some other things.

Remember Paul said, if I understand all mysteries and have all knowledge, but I don't love people, it's worthless. You may understand all the mysteries of theology, and that's fine. I hope I do.

I'm trying. I'm interested in them. But if I get all of those squared away, but I don't love, I'm worthless.

That's the value of it. If you don't love, love is the life of the Christian in Christ, who's the fruit of the Spirit, is love. And therefore, our loving behavior, our moral behavior, our love for God, our righteous attempts to live a holy life for God.

Now, it's not success in this endeavor that saves us. You're not saved because you managed to live a holy life. You're saved because you trust God, because you have a faith in Christ.

You're loyal to Him. He's your Lord. He may be your Lord, and you may not be a perfect servant, but you're still His servant.

God may be your Father, and you're not a perfect child, but you're still His child. You're not saved by your perfection. You're not saved by your performance.

But as a child or as a servant, you recognize my responsibility is to serve, to obey. And that's what my life is defined by. My identity is not found in being a privileged white male.

My identity is not found in being a black or a woman or a gay person or whatever else people identify with. Our identity is, I'm a child of God. And if that's my identity, then that means I obey my Father, right? I'm a servant of Christ.

What's that mean? It means I obey Christ. I don't do any of those things perfectly, and God is very gracious. He knows my desire.

He knows my sincerity. And He knows our frame, that we are but dust. Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him.

And we need that pity because we're failures at many levels. But the point is, being a Christian means being a person assigned to obey and please our Master. And that has a lot to do with how we behave, a lot more than some of the opinions we have.

I don't think God cares what you believe about the timing of a rapture. You know, I don't know that when you go to heaven, God's going to ask you what you thought about predestination. I don't think that's even going to be on the test.

Now there is something true in those categories, and some people have it right and some have it wrong. But I don't think that's going to be on the test. The test is, I was hungry, did you feed me? I was naked, did you clothe me? I was sick and in prison, did you visit me? And some will say, I don't remember having that opportunity.

So when you did or didn't do it to my brethren, that's when you did or didn't do it to me. That's the judgment day. And so, I think that our, as evangelicals, I've always been an evangelical, not a Catholic or a mainstream, you know, Lutheran or Presbyterian, Episcopal, Protestant.

I've always been a Baptist or charismatic or whatever. I have to say, American evangelicalism has emphasized believing the right statements. And if you can make the right statements, you're in.

And usually those have to do with statements of theological content. Whereas in the Bible, it's based on, do you love God? Do you love your neighbor? Are you following Jesus? And the apostles are assigned to teach how to do that. Teach them to observe everything I've commanded, Jesus said.

And that's no doubt what these disciples are sitting under, which is why we read their behavior was so different than other people's. Because they were being taught to obey Jesus. And so, they continued daily or steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and in fellowship.

Now, fellowship, koinonia is the Greek word. It just means sharing in common. This may have a reference to the sharing of their goods, as mentioned a couple verses later.

Or it may have to do with sharing simply in the life, the spiritual life and experience of being in Christ. We usually think of fellowship as an event. You know, I'm going to go to fellowship.

You know, we're going to do some fellowshipping, you know. And that's how the term has evolved. But the word fellowship, koinonia, just means having in common.

Koinonia is like koinia Greek. Koinia Greek is common Greek. Koinia means common in Greek.

Koinonia is sharing in common. Usually the life of Christ. We have the fellowship of Christ.

The fellowship of the Spirit. We share in the same Holy Spirit. That's why we're one body.

And we share in other ways, too. And these early Christians, they shared in tangible ways. That was part of their listing on the short list of things that made them different.

One of them was they listened to the apostles all the time. The other is that they shared. They had a shared life.

They were not, what should we say, radically individualistic people. They had their own individual lives and relationship with God. But they didn't see those as having any disconnect from the life of all other Christians, which they were cells in one body, members of one body.

The concerns of one are the concerns of all. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, when one member suffers, all suffer. When one member is exalted, all rejoice.

My fate is not disconnected from the fate of every other part of the body to which I belong. And that fellowship was a phenomenon they experienced through the Spirit, by sharing the Spirit, and they had a shared life, too, as a result of that. And in the breaking of bread.

Now, most commentators believe this is referring to taking communion, which it might have involved. Breaking of bread, of course, is a common term for eating. Remember Jesus, when He traveled on the road to Emmaus with those two guys, and He sat down with them, they didn't know Him until He broke bread.

He sat down to eat with them. They invited Him to a meal, they broke bread. And in the breaking of bread, they recognized Him.

They weren't taking a Eucharistic meal. They weren't taking communion. They were

having a meal, a regular meal.

Breaking bread just means having a meal. But that doesn't mean they weren't taking communion, too, because in the early church, communion was a meal. We think of communion as a little tag on at the end of certain services, once a month or however often our church does it, once a week or whatever, that you have the sermon and the final song, or maybe not yet the final song, it's time for the communion first, and there's a ritual involved, taking a little bit of a cracker, a little bit of a drink, and fine.

I mean, I'm not trying to mock. I'm just saying this is what I have grown up with as my experience of taking communion in church. It's sort of a tag on to otherwise a theater-seated event.

Now, in the early church, communion was at a meal, at a table with other people around a dining table. In fact, the early church had a major part of their fellowship at meals. They had what they called the agape feast or the agape.

The church fathers mentioned it, but even Jude mentions it. Jude mentions that these false teachers, they are like spots invading your love feasts and carousing there. Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11, where we have really probably the most thorough description of a communion service intimated in the Bible, is besides the last supper, of course, Paul said, when you guys come together to eat, you're not really eating the Lord's supper like you should be, because everyone's taking his food ahead of everyone else, and one goes away hungry, and another goes away drunk.

That doesn't sound like, we couldn't do that in the Baptist church I was raised in. Hey, give me all those crackers, that little silver charger. I want them all, I'm hungry, you know.

No one else in this row gets any of those. And give me all those little cups, you know, I want to drink. That's not even refreshing, that little thimble full of juice there.

I want the whole thing. Now, of course, you couldn't really do that in our modern way of taking communion, but in the early church, because it was a meal, self-serve, they were expected to serve each other, to break bread like Jesus did and hand out the food to each other. They were there to enjoy a meal together in remembrance of Christ.

As they ate the bread, they would remember Jesus is the bread of life. As they drank the wine, they're supposed to remember that Jesus' blood was shed, and Jesus said, whenever you do this, do it in remembrance of me. The breaking of bread probably was a meal, and it probably was communion, because I think the early church, before they transformed communion into a brief ritual at the end of a sit-down, theater-seated meeting, where nobody ate enough food to nourish them, or drank enough wine to get drunk, not that anyone should get drunk.

The point is, the early church took communion in such a way that if people abused the situation, they could end up drunk. And then the last thing it says, they continued were prayers. Now, we're told in verse 46 that their prayers, many of their prayers were taking place in the temple, and the breaking of bread was from house to house.

So, we're talking about the four things that Luke says characterized the daily life of the early Christians on the day of Pentecost and following, when the church had grown from 120 to 3,120 persons in a single day. Obviously, they would either go their separate ways, or they would have some kind of a dynamic corporate community life, and that's exactly the way it went, as it should. And the four things they continued are the apostles' teaching, and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and prayers.

Now, one thing that's very important in the book of Acts and in life is prayers, the prayers of the church. And we don't know exactly what they were praying for primarily at this time, but there's a number of things they might have had shared concerns about. But we do see later on specific prayers.

In the Bible. And a lot of times these prayers were offered very fervently in times of crisis. Something we don't have as much of as some churches in some parts of the world historically have had, persecution and times like that.

We don't know much of that, and therefore, sometimes our prayers might not be desperate until you get old enough that you've got all kinds of health issues, and then you learn to pray desperately, which is good. But the thing is that prayer is something that the early church apparently felt was very necessary. They approached the Day of Pentecost for 10 days praying, and now they continued daily in prayer after they were filled with the Spirit.

And we know that there are special prayers offered on special occasions, but there was corporate prayer on a regular basis. Now, it says in verse 46 that these prayers and the breaking of bread were taking place every day. Probably the teaching was every day too.

Why not? I mean, I would want it to be if I were there, and if I was one of the apostles, I'd want to teach every day to this crowd. But it says their prayers, they were praying in the temple. They no doubt had smaller prayer meetings and so forth too, but apparently the temple was a place where they initially were probably able to gather in largest numbers for prayer.

When you got 3,000 people, they probably wouldn't fit in the upper room anymore or in anyone's home. So these were probably large prayer gatherings in the temple. And then from house to house, which would be smaller venues, they were breaking bread, which of course, again, would not simply mean taking communion, it would mean they're having actual meals.



Table fellowship was a very important aspect of unity in the Bible. In fact, this was something that was reflected even in the Jewish sensitivities before Christ came is that the Jews would not have table fellowship with Gentiles. That's too much intimacy, eating a meal together.

In fact, Peter got into trouble when he first had table fellowship with Cornelius. And the church afterwards, you know, in Jerusalem thought he'd done something scandalous. You ate with these people.

Eating with people was simply the leisurely way to enjoy the company of other people and converse, and it still pretty much is. Although, of course, we live in a time where even families don't always eat together. Used to be that families would eat together more and they'd stick together more.

But nowadays, people are more, there's fast food and there's, you know, microwave things. You can just fix yourself something and never sit down at a meal with anybody sometimes. But also relationships have drawn further apart in modern times in our society too because, I think, of this lack of breaking bread together.

It was a very important daily thing from house to house. And I'm sure they took communion or remembered Christ in the eating and the drinking as they met together as well. And their prayers.

Now, it says in verse 43, then fear came upon every soul. Now, that's a good thing. You know, I think fear, that's a bad thing.

Now, it's obviously referring to the fear of God. When people become aware that God is present in the Bible, they always get afraid. Or even not God, even an angel.

Whenever an angel appears, the first thing they have to say is, don't be afraid. Because the first impulse of somebody seeing something like an angel, or we might think of seeing a ghost or something like that, or certainly, suddenly realizing God is there. Actually, like Jacob, when he had his dream.

He was fleeing from Esau. He had a dream of the ladder and God was at the top. And the foot of the ladder is where he was in Bethel.

And he woke up and he was terrified. He said, God is in this place and I didn't know it. It just suddenly when you realize, whoa, I think God is here.

The fear of God just kind of excites you in a way that makes you like, oh, I'm not sure I'm prepared. I'm not sure how to act. I'm not sure I'm dressed for the occasion.

You know, God is here. And I think what it's saying is that because the presence of God in the company of the believers was so palpable that people who had contact with this

community were struck. Wow, God is in your midst.

You know, Paul talks about that happening in 1 Corinthians 14. When he's talking about regulating the gifts, the spirit of the church in particular. He says in 1 Corinthians 14, 24 and 25.

It says, but if all people in the church meeting, if all are prophesying and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is judged by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed. And so falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Paul felt that they were in a proper meeting of Christians and things that would take place or should, which would cause an unbeliever who happened to wander in to say, whoa, what am I in here? God is here. And they'd fall on their face and say, God is in your midst. Now, I don't know how many people have done that at your church recently.

They walk into the church and say, wow, God is here. And they fall down and say, I'm prostate, prostate, excuse me. At my age, we say prostate more than prostrate.

It is hard to remember which word is which. But they fall down prostrate. Now, I don't know how often that actually happened, but Paul spoke of it as a reality.

You know, if things are being done right instead of wrong in the church, he was talking about if you're all speaking in tongues, that ain't going to happen. Unbelievers are just going to think you're nuts. But if you're all prophesying, they're going to say, wow, God is here.

And so I think that's how the early church affected unbelievers. The fear of God came in, wow, God is here. They realized that there is a God, you know, he's really here.

And so fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now, we might be accustomed to this idea that the apostles worked wonders, but this is the first time it's mentioned. Jesus, of course, had worked wonders and signs.

But now we read that the same thing Jesus did supernaturally was being done by the apostles. Now, notice it says it was, in fact, the apostles that were doing it. When I first came into charismatic circles in 1970, and I began to realize, wow, there is a manifestation of the spirit in the church in these times because it was a revival time.

I remember reading the book of Acts and thinking, well, these early Christians, they were just doing miracles all the time. This supernatural dimension of the Christian life is the norm. And everyone's supposed to be out doing miracles, healing people, cast out demons, maybe raise the dead.

It just seemed to me reading the book of Acts, this was the normal Christian life doing

these signs and wonders. It wasn't until I was older and read it more carefully, I found that in the book of Acts, the people who did the signs and wonders were almost always the apostles. There were 3,000 Christians, but signs and wonders were done by the apostles, that's 12 guys.

What were the other 3,000 doing? Listening to the apostles teach, breaking bread, fellowshiping, praying together. The apostles were out doing miracles. Now, there are some others besides the apostles that work miracles, not many mentioned.

Philip did. He was called Philip the Evangelist. He was not an apostle, but he had miracles.

And of course, Stephen did. Stephen, we might call an apologist today. He was a defender of the faith, and he worked wonders.

Neither of them were apostles. They were both kind of among the seven that were chosen to serve tables, but God gave them also gifts to do miraculous things. And so, since the book of Acts focuses largely on these people who happen to do miracles, one could get the impression, I think falsely, that everyone in the church was running around doing miracles.

And there is a major movement in Northern California today, it's founded there and all over the world, that is teaching schools of supernatural ministry and teaching every Christian how to go and raise the dead and heal the sick and do miracles, as if that's the normal Christian life. It isn't. At least, it wasn't in the apostolic period.

It was not normal for everyone to be working miracles. And I think when we read the book of Acts, again, it focuses on a few characters who are miracle-working people. But in the background, you've got the 3,000, then the 5,000, then the untold thousands of Christians who aren't going around working miracles.

It's not the normal Christian life. It's the normal apostolic Christian life. The apostles did that.

And a few others. It's not necessary to say only apostles did it, because that would be untrue. There are a few others did, but not many.

And so we read about the apostles were working signs and wonders. And then we have pretty much a focus on the economic, internal community life of sharing material goods. Now, I have to say, we probably can't relate with this completely, because we don't have extremely poor people among us.

In the ancient world, before the Industrial Revolution, there were a few rich people, and everyone else was dirt poor. There was no middle class. Most of us, I'm assuming, are middle class.

But look, we can afford to go on a cruise. I mean, that's not very poor. We're not poor people.

Now, I know some people who are kind of poor, by American standards, but they're still living in far more luxury than King Solomon had, in the sense that they have indoor plumbing, climate control in their homes. They can drive a car and go 60 miles in an hour. I mean, let's face it, even the poorest among us have luxuries and comforts that the richest kings in the past never dreamed of.

We don't have much poverty here. Now, there's still poverty in the world, to be sure, and there's occasional poverty in the United States, too, but there's a lot of programs, usually government programs, unfortunately, that make it unnecessary for people to face starvation or homelessness, things like that. Those who do are usually neglecting certain opportunities.

We still have a world where there's a lot of poor people, but we don't see them very often, except on World Vision specials on TV or in the brochures that Compassion International or Mercy Ship send us, but they are there. But in the old days, before the Industrial Revolution, before everyone was middle class, everyone was poor, except for the rich, and that disparity between the two was huge, and the poor were really poor. A lot of times they had no way to live except to beg, and the Christian numbers in the early church were made up far more of the poor than of the rich.

Remember, Jesus said it's difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The gospel didn't appeal to the rich as much as to the poor. Remember when Paul said to the Corinthians, notice your group, there's not many noble, not many great people, not many wise among you.

They're not the great people of the world, mostly the little people of the world were coming in. So there were a lot of poor people getting saved, and only probably relatively few rich. And a rich person was somebody who might own a separate piece of land besides the home he lived in or something like that, or he might own three or four changes of clothes.

That was a rich man. But because the poor were truly poor, the rich who had been touched by the Holy Spirit and changed realized that they could not live in luxury while their brothers and sisters, who were loved by God as much as they themselves, were living in poverty. Now someone might say, but if God loved them as much as the poor, he could provide for them just like he did for me.

Yes, or he could provide for them through you. That may be what he had in mind by giving you so much. Remember, Paul was talking about the Corinthian church needing to take up a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem in 2 Corinthians 8. He said it's sort of like it was in the wilderness for the Israelites when they gathered manna.

He that gathered much had no extra, and he that gathered little had no lack. He said that's how God kind of works things out to make sure everybody has something. Talking about this same practice of the early Christians in Acts 4, it comes back to it.

Apparently Luke was so impressed about it, he mentioned it twice. If you look at it in chapter 4, verse 32, Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common, and with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Great grace was upon them.

Verse 34, Now there was not anyone among them who lacked, for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet, and they distributed to each as anyone had need. Now, some people say that sounds like communism. Well, it isn't.

Communism is a system that tries artificially by government intervention to bring about a circumstance that the early church had naturally because they were spiritually motivated, loving people, they shared. Communism is imposed on a society where people aren't voluntarily sharing because it's not in their heart to do so, and therefore, their money is taken by force, by taxation, and redistributed against their wishes. Now, of course, we've learned to resign ourselves to it.

I can't say that when somebody gets welfare and I realize that my taxes help pay for their own, I'm not saying, boy, I don't approve of that. There's a sense I don't approve of that policy, but I don't begrudge the money being given to people because I would have gladly given it to someone who's poor anyway without the government intervention. The problem is when the government takes it, it's not generosity on your part.

It's forced from you. When the government gives it, it's not generosity on their part because they're giving somebody else's money, not their own. There's nothing about communism that resembles the early church except that they have the stated principle from each according to his ability and to each according to his need.

Those two phrases both come from the Book of Acts, and Karl Marx borrowed them and made them into the ideal governmental policy. But as soon as you make it governmental policy, it's a different animal because these people were sharing because they loved each other. Nobody was making them do it.

It was not required. It was not a command of Christ that Christians live communally and share everything they have equally. It was what they wanted to do because they saw their brothers had desperate needs, and they said, hey, I'm in good shape here.

I don't need all of this. I can sell this extra piece of land, this extra house, this income property. I can help that person.

And that's what they just did spontaneously. And, of course, the result was, it says there was no one who had any lack. Imagine a countercultural community that the world could look on and see there's no one there who lacks, even though most of the converts are poor people.

But it turns out once they're in, they have everything they need. Maybe very few people have anything more than what they need, but no one lacks what they need. Now, it says that the people did not.

In Chapter 4, it says, no one said that the things he possessed were his own. This is an important point because Jesus said in Luke 14, 33, unless you forsake all that you have, you cannot be my disciple. But forsaking all you have doesn't mean you liquidate it.

It means you transfer the title to God. To say nothing I have is my own doesn't mean it's yours. It means it's God's.

By coming to Christ, I surrender myself and all I have. And all I am to God. He owns all my stuff.

It's not mine. I can't say that anything I possess is my own. It belongs to the Lord.

Now, the next thing is, what would he do with his stuff? What does he want me to do with his stuff that I am a steward of? And often the answer is, help a poor person. Though, as I said, we don't run into really genuinely and legitimately poor people very often. Not like in third world times, where we have the same mentality that what we own does belong to the Lord.

In their situation, they thought, well, the Lord owns my stuff. He would want to help my brother here, who is also one of his children, like me. And that is how things happen.

Now, this was, first of all, voluntary. Secondly, it was not automatic. Both passages, in Acts chapter 2 and Acts chapter 4 that both describe this, they do not say that a person who became Christian automatically had to sell his houses to distribute.

It says, as anyone had need, those who had houses and lands were selling them. That's the tense of the verb in the Greek. It doesn't say they got saved and sold everything they had.

But they were selling things as people had need. They held on to their stuff. They were stewards of it.

As they saw needs arise, they would liquidate something to help with those needs. They were people who had stuff, but that wasn't theirs. Therefore, as needs arose, they were willing to liquidate things and help with other people's needs.

It was spontaneous. It was occasional. And it was voluntary.

And so, it did not resemble any modern communism or socialism. It really resembled a family. And that's just the point.

The early church was not a religious institution. It was a family. A bunch of people had the same father.

A bunch of people had the same king. It was a kingdom. Christianity is a kingdom and a family.

It's not a religion per se. Yeah, it stands in contrast to other great religions in the world. There are religious practices Christians do, but it's not in essence a religion.

It's in essence a family, the family of God. And people related to each other including like your brothers or your sisters, probably among the first people you might approach if you have good relations with them, if you had a special need. Hey, can you loan me some money? I'm in a pinch.

You wouldn't go to a stranger as quickly as you'd go to a family member. That's how it was. They were family, and that's what they understood.

These people of need, they're my brothers. And so, I'm going to look out for them. I've got their back.

I've got all the people. And the Lord added daily those that were being saved. Now, the Lord added to the church daily, probably through the apostles preaching primarily, but also the community of Christians was a light on a hill.

It was hard to miss this group. They were a countercultural group of people in the city of Jerusalem who lived differently than all the other people did. And there was a big number of them, so it's hard to not see them.

And they didn't divorce, and they didn't get drunk, and they didn't cheat on their wives, and they didn't do the things that other people were doing. And it was favorable. The people said, this is good.

They had favor with all the people. Now, later they were persecuted, but not by all the people, but by the power brokers who saw themselves challenged by this group that wasn't doing it their way. But the people were drawn to the church, and they were added to the church on a daily basis because the community of Christians were attractive because God's kingdom is in fact attractive.

Now, because of this, they didn't need a lot of preachers. The 12 apostles were out there and witnessed publicly, and the community of Christians bore witness by their lives. When the early preachers preached, they were preaching about how it is modeled for you.

This is what it looks like when people follow Jesus. Their lives are different. Their relations are different.

The community of the saints is different than the community outside. It's a countercultural, different kind of a thing, and it's a good thing. What would you think people today would think of the church if every time they met a Christian, they met somebody who was unselfish who didn't contemplate divorce when they had any kind of problems in their marriage, who laid down their life and served other people.

If every Christian people met was like that, the church might have favor with people now, too. Instead, people usually think of the church as a bunch of sanctimonious, judgmental hypocrites. Not that that's a fair assertion because most Christians I know are not like that.

But apparently, worldly people have met enough Christians like that, or they've seen them depicted in movies that way or something, that's what they think. But even whatever they'd see in movies, if they met real Christians all the time, it is always the case these people were loving, humble, sincere, trustworthy people. They make a promise.

They keep their promises. They're generous. And then the preaching of the gospel might not fall on hard soil as much as it does in our day.

But when people hear the preaching of the gospel, they think of the Christians they know. They think of the churches they know. And in many cases, it's not a positive impression they have.

And that was different back when things were done as they were in the days of the apostles. Well, we're going to stop there. Thank you.