

Characteristics of the Apostolic Church in Acts 2:42-47 and Its Contemporary Relevance for the Church

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Abstract

The church has been in existence for nearly 2000 years; over these years, there have been both positive and negative developments. However, there is a need to define the church and distinguish it from other movements, helping the church retain its distinctiveness and apostolic heritage and achieve its mission of being salt and light to the world. This article thus aims to exegete Acts 2:42–47 and bring to light not only the characteristics of the church and its distinctiveness as a movement but also the implications of these characteristics for the broader Christian community. The paper argues that although some summaries in Acts are prescriptive and didactic, providing models to readers across centuries, some sections are descriptive, describing unique activities that are not intended to be prescriptive but rather to convey key principles that guide their application. Therefore, the church must understand itself in light of the contextual realities in Acts 2:42–47 and the light of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In Acts, believers were filled and guided by the Holy Spirit as they devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles and fellowship. They broke bread together and were devoted to prayer. They exercised generosity and grace towards one another and those around them, which in turn enhanced their growth. The paper emphasizes that the embodiment of the characteristics displayed in Acts 2:42–47 will lead to the growth of communities that resemble what the Bible envisions as a way for Christians to live together in the world. It will also serve as a distinguishing mark that sets the church apart from any other organized group.

Keywords: Koinonia, Christian Fellowship, Apostolic Church, Early Church

Introduction

The Book of Acts is a transitional book that documents the progress of the Christian faith after Christ's life, death, and resurrection. It narrates the continuation of the work that Jesus began and the expansion of the inaugurated Kingdom. A key feature of the book is the use of



summaries, which appear either in short sentences (6:7) or in a longer paragraph (2:42–47). Parsons notes that summaries, in general, shape the story of Acts into a continuous narrative, looking back to the previous episode and anticipating the next one.¹ For instance, Peter's kerygma in 2:41 connects us forward through the mention of the temple as the meeting place of the Christians in Acts 3 and beyond. In emphasizing this point, Witherington and Parsons view 2:42–47 as the inclusion of 2:41b and 2:47b that prompts the reader to connect the actions of the 3,000 believers after their conversion and create an anticipation of how these new believers are expected to live and what they will do in the ensuing verses 2:42–47a.

More to their intended function, scholars commenting on summary passages observe that they are placed to highlight the internal characteristics of the church.² Peterson sees the summary passages in four points: documenting the growth of the church, highlighting that God is building His community and not dealing with individuals in isolation, offering an apology for the group with the intent to shape the readers' responses, and lastly, commending this lifestyle as an example.³ Schnabel sees the summaries to function in five ways: They are historical as they report what was happening; literary to indicate the passage of time; theological in pointing to the continual presence and work of God;⁴ ecclesiological in pointing to the essentials of the church; and missiological is noting continual growth of the community.⁵ There is an agreement between Peterson and Schnabel that they recognize the summaries serve not only to document facts but also to appeal to the reader to emulate this initial community. Contrary to this view, Thompson and Williams argue that the summaries in Acts are not intended to provide specific direction for Christians or the local church.⁶

However, we can agree that Luke intentionally presents this as a section, not only as a general characterization of the early church but also as an invitation to Theophilus and other readers of this text to desire to emulate this first congregation. Luke introduces us to this section with an imperfect periphrastic construction in 2:42: ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες (And they were devoting themselves). This construction serves to reinforce the idea of continuity in the practices outlined in the section. More to this, construction uses the imperfect verb to be

¹ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament)* (Baker Academic, 2008), 48.

² David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 1st edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Nottingham, England: Eerdmans, 2009), 158–59; Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 1st Edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Carlisle, U.K: Eerdmans, 1997), 83–84; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Zondervan, 2012), 175.

³ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 158.

⁴ Also see Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 1: Introduction and 1:1–247* (Baker Books, 2012), 993.

⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 175.

⁶ David J. Williams, *Acts*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Pub, 1980), 59; Richard P. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts* (t&t clark, 2006), 60–61.

ἦσαν and the present participle προσκατεροῦντες, which allows Luke to point to the idea that the actions here were not only continuous in the past (the connotation of the imperfect tense) but continued to be relevant in the present day of the reader (the connotation of the present participle).

Acts 2:41 brings to light the addition of three thousand converts. In so doing, it sets the stage for 2:42–47. Considering this, Luke sees the actions as only beginning with the first community and aimed to be passed down to future generations. If indeed this is the case, then in documenting this passage, Luke intends for readers to come to know and practice what he narrates. Peterson and Schnabel are thus right to conclude that Theophilus and other readers of this text are to set the characteristics espoused in the texts as standards for the church in each age.

Hume, citing Wendel, adds that Lukan summaries are not simply used as parenthetical texts dictating how later congregations are to structure their lives; instead, they present an ecclesial model. To this end, the summaries present a model for how God can empower congregations to live in a way that reflects biblical and missional impulses, is socially minded, and is conscious of signs and wonders.⁷

Literation Translation of Acts 2:42–47

⁴²Now they were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and the fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and the prayers. ⁴³And awe was on all souls, and many wonders and signs were happening through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all the believing ones were together and had all things in common ⁴⁵And they were selling fields and property and were distributing them to all as anyone was having need. ⁴⁶And every day (they were) attending the temple together, and breaking bread at every house, they were receiving food in each house in gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor towards all the people. And the Lord was adding to them those being saved every day.⁸

Exegesis of Acts 2:42–47

In this pericope, Luke begins by summarizing the characteristics of the church into four broad categories in verse 42. Notable in this verse is the absence of a conjunction between the first set of characteristics and the second ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς (Now they were devoting

⁷ Douglas A. Hume, *The Early Christian Community: A Narrative Analysis of Acts 2:41-47 and 4:32-35* (Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 9.

⁸ This is my translation, from: Barbara Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament, 5th ed. (UBS5) with Critical Apparatus*. Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014.

themselves in *the teaching of the apostles* and *the fellowship*, in *the breaking of bread*, and *the prayers*).⁹ Celarc opines¹⁰ that in verse 42, there is a chiasmic structure in the text with no middle part:

A: τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων (*the teaching of the Apostles*)

B: καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, (*and the fellowship*)

B¹: τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου (*the breaking of the bread*)

A¹: καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς. (*and the prayers*).

Hence, the intention seems to be to bring the two exterior parts closer together and the middle part closer as well. This implied that a community dedicated to apostolic teaching would thrive in prayer and similar functions and that fellowship and the breaking of bread were brought into proximity to indicate their relationship.¹¹ However, Marshall contends that there is no explicit parallelism in the elements of verse 42.¹²

Further, in assessing the passage, Keener agrees with Celarc's observation on chiasm. However, his focus is not on the elements of 2:42 but on the entire summary passage. He observes that B and B¹, the central bit, are the sharing of processions.¹³ This observation emphasizes that the key element in the church's life is the outward expression of their faith, which is witnessed in the voluntary and sacrificial giving in the community. This response of grace is best seen in the sharing of processions. In consideration of all positions espoused by different scholars, 2:42 and the larger text have no apparent chiasm. Schnabel notes that the passage is structured in five key parts: 1) The essentials of the church (2:42); 2) The effects of these lived-out essentials to the community around (2:43); 3) The essentials explained and illustrated (2:44–46);¹⁴ 4) Effects of the essentials to the community (2:47); and 5) The growth of the church (2:47).¹⁵ While I agree with Schnabel's assessment, the passage divided into four key parts: 1) The essentials of the church (2:42); 2) The effects of these lived-out essentials on the community around (2:43); 3) The essentials explained and illustrated (2:44–47a); and 4) Numerical growth (2:47b).

⁹ Emphasis added to indicate the two sets of characteristics under discussion.

¹⁰ Celarc, Matjaž. "Narrative Summaries in Acts of the Apostles. Reading of the First Summary Account (2:42–47)." *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia*, January 1, 2021. https://www.academia.edu/79572870/Narrative_summaries_in_Acts_of_the_Apostles_Reading_of_the_first_summary_account_2:42-47.

¹¹ Celarc, "Narrative Summaries in Acts of the Apostles, 154.

¹² Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Inter-varsity Press, 1980), 84.

¹³ Keener, *Acts*, 992.

¹⁴ Parsons, *Acts*, 48. Agrees with this assessment that these verses elaborate the characteristics given in 2:42.

¹⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, 2012, 175.

Moreover, 2:42-47a can be seen as an inclusion of 2:41b and 2:47b, both sections that focus on the numerical growth of the people.¹⁶ As such, the text endeavors to connect us to the preceding events of Peter's kerygma, which trigger the salvation of a multitude, and the later text on how this population will be perceived by those around them from Acts 3 to 8:1 before persecution breaks out and the people are scattered. However, we can extend the significance of this text to build an expectation in the reader for the kind of community they anticipate seeing throughout the Book of Acts and possibly in the broader history of the Christian faith.

A Devoted Community (2:42)

Luke ushers the reader into this section with the phrase ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες (and they were devoting themselves). The thrust of this phrase is to be seen in the periphrastic construction¹⁷ of the verb προσκατεροῦντες. While focusing on the teaching of the apostles, "The believers practiced what they heard; otherwise, they would not be persistently devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, which is the meaning of the periphrastic construction."¹⁸ This construction must be understood to apply to all four characteristics outlined in this verse. It brings focus to the deliberate actions of the community regarding the four items. Preceding προσκατεροῦντες is the imperfect verb ἦσαν, which, as earlier indicated, communicates that the actions that follow are not one-time events but instead continued. Their devotion to these events meant that they were willing and enthusiastic participants in them.¹⁹ They were entirely given to their lives together and all that was needed of them.

Teaching of the Apostles

The first distinctive that follows προσκατεροῦντες is τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων (the teaching of the apostles). The construction here, τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων, calls attention to the genitive use which allows us to understand the kind of teaching in this context. We must

¹⁶ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, 83–84; Parsons, *Acts*, 48.

¹⁷ A periphrastic construction uses a form of the verb "to be" (εἰμί) along with a participle to emphasize a continuous or ongoing action. Acts 2:42 begins with the phrase ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες that combines the verb to be ἦσαν and the participle προσκατεροῦντες creating a periphrastic construction that draws the reader into the ongoing nature of what Luke seeks to narrate. This combined with the imperfect tense show continuity and deliberate action taken to the practice of the activities stated in the text at hand.

¹⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, 2012, 177.

¹⁹ Paul Kisau Mumo, *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi, Kenya: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 1303.

note that the genitive construction τῶν ἀποστόλων is a subjective genitive. Ultimately, the source was not the apostle but Jesus.²⁰

Schnabel observes that this persistent devotion is emphatic in their practice of the teachings they received.²¹ At the same time, Peterson states that the earliest converts sought encouragement in their faith and identification with the public preaching of the gospel.²² Hence, in his review, the persistence is in listening and hearing the teachings of the apostles. While these two interpretations differ in what exactly the periphrastic construction aims to emphasize when applied to τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων, we must recognize that both are in play here. The author intends to show that the community was committed to hearing as much as possible from the apostles and was also committed to living out these teachings, for without obedience, one could easily question the nature of their commitment. Luke endeavors to illustrate this throughout the book of Acts as various believers live out their faith and commit to a constant hearing of the gospel from the apostles. This community is birthed in teaching (2:1–41), and the same teaching must become its staple food.²³ This teaching focused on Christ and the things to which the apostles were witnesses and interpreters, as well as on the scriptures.²⁴ Seeing then that the apostles are not the content of the message, we can rightfully assess them as curators, interpreters, and communicators of what God has given through the Old Testament and revealed in His Son, Jesus.

Fellowship of Believers

Luke notes that the community of believers was devoted to one another, as expressed by the term τῇ κοινωνίᾳ in verse 42. This is the only instance in which Luke uses this word in his writings. However, he does use the term κοινά (4:32), which shares a root with κοινωνία, as

²⁰ It is worth noting that there is a possibility that this genitive can be understood as a source genitive. The idea behind this would be that the teachings are derived from the apostles. While this is quite close to the subjective genitive, a difference must be noted where, the genitive of source does not quite focus on the action of the teaching but the very teaching itself. It thus opens up the scope of understanding to include the idea that, the teachings by believers had their source as the apostles. They carried forth what they got from the apostles. Hence the emphasis broadens from simply the apostles teaching, to every teaching by the committed believers was derived from the apostles.

²¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 177.

²² Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 160.

²³ Patrick Schreiner, *Acts: The Christian Standard Commentary* (Nashville, United States: B&H Publishing Group, 2022), n.p.

²⁴ In understanding the events that happened after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the disciples are committed to the Scriptures that not only foretell the events that they had just witnessed, but clarifies the meaning and significance of these events. Thus the centrality of the scriptures was crucial to the apostolic teachings. For example, in Acts 3:11–26, he emphasizes the words of Moses, who prophesied that there would come a greater prophet than himself. Peter attests that Jesus is he who was predicted of and it would do the people well to listen to him as Moses had exhorted them to. Further, the answer by Jesus in Acts 1:8 on whether the events marked the restoration of the tent of David as per Amos 9:11-12 indicates that a proper understanding of the Scriptures was needed see: Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, (Nottingham, England : Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

seen in Acts 2:44, to express the idea of sharing possessions among them to meet the needs of this community.²⁵ Several times, Paul uses the word κοινωνία; in 1 Corinthians 1:9, he notes that we have been called into the κοινωνίαν of God's Son Jesus Christ. Noting that the Christian has been called into a common life of Christ. Thus, they share in his life and bear proximity to him, hence benefiting from him. 1 Corinthians 10:16 brings to the forefront the idea that the sharing of the Lord's table symbolizes the close association (fellowship) between believers and Christ. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul uses the same term to ask what association or collaboration light and darkness have. Again, in 2 Corinthians 8:4 and 2 Corinthians 9:13, Paul uses the term about the contributions he is appealing for, for the relief of the saints in Jerusalem, just like in Romans 15:26. Philippians 1:5, Paul notes that he is joyous because of the κοινωνία, the active participation of the Philippians in the gospel ministry of Paul through their generous giving and support (Phil 4:14–15; 2 Cor 8:15). The writer of Hebrews encourages his audience not to neglect the doing of good and κοινωνίας (sharing) since these are pleasing to God. John uses the term to refer to the common faith shared between his audience and the disciples (1 John 1:3,7), but most importantly, to the close association believers have with God through Christ (1 John 1:3, 6).

Bible writers use the term κοινωνία to speak of a shared life that was visible to the community around them. Hence, it denotes a unanimity brought about by the Spirit, where the community completely upholds the individual.²⁶ Schnabel emphasizes that fellowship should be understood as “a personal, fraternal, coherence of individual members of the congregation, the followers of Jesus who live in a community brought together by the shared experience of the Spirit.”²⁷ This implies that it is a group of people with a close association and shared interests. These interests stem from the shared experience of a revitalized life in the Spirit led by the Lord Jesus.²⁸ Their devotion to God led to a way of life that emanated from a deeper spiritual reality, which then manifested physically in their devotion to one another. Celarc agrees that κοινωνία focuses on reciprocal care and sharing within the community, as well as the spiritual and sacramental relationships that form a new kinship akin to an extended family—the family of faith.²⁹

²⁵ Acts 2:45 see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2007), 152–53.

²⁶ Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975).

²⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, 2012, 175.

²⁸ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 160–161, observes that the idea of a sharing that emanates from the shared experience in Jesus Christ is reinforced in Acts 4:32.

²⁹ Celarc, 154.

There are, therefore, three ways to understand κοινωνία. First, it is a shared life with the apostles realized through their common belief in the same risen Lord and his message. Secondly, they should experience a shared life among themselves.³⁰ Finally, the shared life must also be seen as that they have with Christ.³¹ Peterson argues that it is best to interpret Luke's idea of κοινωνία in its widest sense in 2:42, which includes contributions, table fellowship, and general friendship and unity within the community.³²

The Breaking of Bread

The phrase κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου (the breaking of bread) here in 42 and κλώντες ...ἄρτον (breaking of bread) in 46 has been surrounded by much debate on whether the breaking of bread refers to the Lord's table or just ordinary meals. Examining the two statements, one notices no significant difference in the words used. However, we must appreciate that the presence of the definite article τοῦ before ἄρτου would indicate that there is a specificity on the occasion being referred to here. This, coupled with the fact that it appears in proximity and is closely related to the other characteristics of the Early Church, that is, the teaching of the apostles, prayer, and fellowship, leads one to conclude that the meal here is the Lord's Table.

The word translated as "breaking" is the participle κλώντες. The participle that appears here is used several times to allude to various occasions that contain the breaking of bread. Some of these occasions include the Lord's Supper,³³ the sharing of a meal,³⁴ and other occasions where the person in question is eating to nourish his energies, Acts 27:35. The breaking of bread, therefore, is not simply the Lord's table; it was used more broadly, and we can only know how the context of the text used it.

This passage suggests that the breaking of bread in verse 46 takes place in the home. Yet, as we read Acts (2:46–47, 20:7), we see that the breaking of bread, related to the Lord's Supper, was done on the first day of the week when Christians gathered together for

³⁰ Ibid., 154.

³¹ Hume, *The Early Christian Community*, 100.

³² Peterson, 161.

³³ In Luke 22:19 κλώντες is the verb used by Luke as he is talking of the inauguration of the Lord's Supper. Other apostles used the term to refer to this practice of the Lord's supper: Matt 26:26, Mark 14:22. These texts in the gospels speak just like in Luke about the inauguration of the Lord's Table. Other places where the verb is used to refer to this practice are Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 10:16, 1 Cor 11:24.

³⁴ In this regard we have Luke 24:30, Matt 14:19,15:36, Mark 8:6,19, Acts 20:11 These texts use the verb κλώντες in situations that are simply sharing a meal. In Matthew and Mark the context is the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 people. In Luke the context is the sharing of an evening meal after a long travel on the road to Emmaus.

worship.³⁵ Yet, in verse 46, we are told that the location of this breaking of bread was in the home and not necessarily in the gathering of the brethren. We also see that the verb κλῶντές here serves as a subordinate of the main verb μετελάμβανον τροφῆς (were partaking food). This means that the breaking of bread must be understood as an act related to partaking of food in their homes rather than as sharing the Lord's table. Verse 46, then, highlights the nature of hospitality that was characteristic of the early church. The scope of breaking bread in the two verses is thus different.

In verse 42, we have the Lord's Supper, and in verse 46, we have the practice of hospitality in this new community, where they share their food. Notably, the two descriptions highlight aspects of fellowship that characterized the Holy Spirit-led community. First, fellowship with the risen Lord, who was present serving the Lord's table. Just as he inaugurated the first Lord's Supper, it was a visible representation of the relationship with Jesus and with each other through the remembrance of what Christ had done through his life, death, and resurrection.³⁶ In remembering Christ, they were reminded that Christ had purchased the very means by which they were made members of this family. This increased their awareness of how they were to live as a community of believers. Verse 42 lends meaning to their open hospitality in verse 46 and the constant longing to care for and share with other believers, as seen in the text.

This pattern is similar to the Passover in the Old Testament. The sharing of this sacred meal was inaugurated during the Passover. Christ is the culmination and fulfillment of all that the Old Testament talked about (Matt 5:17–20), so we see that the Passover, which was meant for the remembrance of the deliverance that the Israelites encountered in Egypt,³⁷ receives fuller meaning in Christ, for in the institution of the Lord's table he gives all who are his an ordinance to help them remember what he (Christ) did for them. Hence, their response to the sharing of this meal ought to be an increased devotion to the risen Lord and an unrelenting love for each other as he has commanded.

Furthermore, some scholars have suggested that the phrase “breaking bread” is Luke's use of an ancient Palestinian term for the Lord's Supper in its proper sense.³⁸ However, Rackham indicates that this matter cannot be narrowly described as only a eucharistic meal;

³⁵ See Acts 20:7. Notice that the concept of gathering was a prerequisite for having the Lord's supper as well articulated in 1 Corinthians 11:17–23.

³⁶ Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24 mention that the very essence of the communion is the remembrance of Christ.

³⁷ Deuteronomy 16:1–8 points out clearly that all the actions that they were to do during the Passover was a reminder of God's great deliverance to the nation of Israel from Egypt. This remembrance is to continually motivate allegiance to the Lord and his Law. It was aimed to help them in the walk of faith.

³⁸ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, 83.

we must also accommodate what he terms an agape meal, which, as the name suggests, is a meal shared out of love for the brethren in pursuit of fellowship.³⁹ Schnabel believes that the breaking of bread refers to the ordinary meals that Christians share.⁴⁰ He further observes that in the sharing of these ordinary meals, Christ was remembered.

It follows that Schnabel would see no point in making a case for the Lord's supper from Acts 2. However, as for Marshall and Rackham, there is every right to view the breaking of bread in v. 42 as referring to the Lord's supper. Witherington argues that Luke uses the term "breaking bread," given the experiences well known to Theophilus based on his first account. He notes,

...Theophilus will already have heard about the Last Supper in the first volume, and perhaps more importantly about the recognition of Jesus at the breaking of bread (for Luke) in the crucial Emmaus Road resurrection appearance story (Luke 24:35), which suggests Luke emphasizes the connection between Jesus' presence and such meals (Luke 24:41–42; Acts 1:4; 10:41). Furthermore, texts like Luke 2:42,46 and 20:7,11 all suggest that this sort of breaking bread was part of an act of worship that involved eating, praying, teaching and singing...⁴¹

While I agree with Witherington on the context of breaking bread in 2:42, I hold that there is a difference between 2:42 and 2:46.

Acts 2:42 highlights what is expanded upon in the entire section of this text, focusing more on the community's religious activities that continued after Pentecost, which fueled their social outlook and behavior. With this in mind, we can postulate that the breaking of bread in v. 42 is to be understood as the Lord's Supper. Moreover, Williams notes that the definite article preceding "breaking bread" may be pointing to a more specific meal, which in this case would be the Lord's Supper.⁴² In this verse, then we have the Lord's supper in view, and the community was devoted to this practice of sharing in the Lord's supper, remembering his death and resurrection and all that it achieved.

Prayer

Luke notes that this new community, which is empowered, devotes itself to προσευχαῖς (prayers) (2:42). This is evident as the act of προσκαρτεροῦντες (devoting themselves) that appears in a periphrastic construction applies to all the distinct characteristics of this community. The idea here is to emphasize that the people are intentionally dedicated and committed to these features. They are a praying people.

³⁹ Richard Belward Rackham, *Acts of the Apostles* (London: Methuen, 1925), 35–40.

⁴⁰ Schnabel, 2012, 179.

⁴¹ Witherington, 160–61.

⁴² Williams, 60.

Prayer is a key theme in the Lukan narrative. Luke, in his narrative, paints Christ as a man of prayer. When recording the baptism of Jesus, Luke observes that after Jesus had been baptized and was praying, the heavens opened, and testimony from the Father about the Son was heard. After this, his ministry started (Luke 3:21–23). The ministry of Jesus begins with prayer and is sustained in prayer. Luke records in Luke 5:16 that Jesus used to withdraw to places for prayer.⁴³ Luke 6:12, 9:18, 9:28–29, 11:1, 22:41–46 are texts that show the continual nature of the discipline narrated to us in Luke 5:16.

Not only did Jesus pray, but he also taught the disciples about prayer deliberately. His teachings can be seen to start from his commitment to prayer. He first demonstrated it to them. This demonstration raised the capacity of his followers to follow in his footsteps, and they inquired about how they could pray effectively.⁴⁴ The effectiveness of prayer depends on God, who answers prayers according to his will (Luke 11:5–13). In Luke 18:1–9, Jesus narrates a parable that contrasts a judge who is unjust and yet grants justice after being pressured by God, who is a just king and does not deny justice in any way. Hence, the disciples must rely on God's consistent character when they pray. Moreover, Jesus adds a lesson on how prayer should be conducted. He notes that the disciples must be humble (Luke 18:10–14).

Luke continues with this theme even in the Book of Acts. In retrospect, the life of Christ, prayer, and its teachings demonstrate the disciples' obedience to Christ's words through their devotion to prayer. Just as Jesus, their ministry begins in a place of prayer (Acts 1:2) and is sustained by prayer. It is, therefore, necessary to examine several aspects of the apostles' prayers, as presented in the book of Acts by Luke. Likely, the prayer in focus here is the communal prayer rather than the personal prayer. This proposition is evidenced by the fact that this summary statement tends to put weight on what the new, Holy Spirit-empowered community was characterized by. This does not ignore the individual characteristics of these members but tends to focus more on communal practices.

Response of the People (2:43)

Luke informs his readers that the reaction from *πάση ψυχῇ* (every soul) to the early church's life marked by a devotion to the four essentials laid out in v. 42 was φόβος (awe).⁴⁵ In Luke's

⁴³ The verb *ὑποχωρῶν* (to withdraw) bears the effect of an action that was done from time to time. It is the same effect that *προσευχόμενος* (praying) bears in this text. The idea communicated is that Jesus had a habit (discipline) of withdrawing and praying during his earthly ministry.

⁴⁴ Luke 11:1–13

⁴⁵ Bruce and Peterson agree that the reaction of fear seen in all men is because of the proclamation made by Peter and the results that it bore. Reflected in their statements is the fact that the proclamation is captured under the

writing, φόβος is used to describe the feeling of terror that comes upon the unbelieving onlookers after spectacular encounters (Luke 1:65, 2:9, 5:26, 7:16, 8:37; Acts 19:17). The terror that falls upon them is from the realization that what they have witnessed is not in the scope of man to do but only a supernatural intervention can achieve these miracles. Indeed, it is a terrifying place to be, knowing that they are in the presence of an all-powerful deity whom they do not believe in. Yet the call was clear to all the unbelieving, as Peter shared in 2:38: repent and be baptized. A similar call is made in Psalm 2:12 when he addresses the nations, saying, “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” We, therefore, observe that it is only right when terror ceases the unbelieving for being against this mighty God.

It is even clearer that Luke is using the phrase πάση ψυχῇ to refer to unbelievers, as seen in verse 44, where he addresses the believers using the phrase πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες (the believing ones). Here, he creates a contrast between how the believers react to the powerful move of God and the φόβος (awe), which is a continued commitment to fellowship. Yet Luke does not see the awe as the ultimate end of the signs and wonders but as the spread of God’s fame to the people.

He begins by stating that awe came upon all who were present and then mentions the miracles that occurred through the apostles. This indicates that Luke does not have in mind the idea of the miracles performed by the apostles as the source of this awe as in Acts 19:17. However, as in the Gospel of Luke, φόβος characterizes the feeling and expression of people who witness a supernatural event that has the fingerprints of God all over, propagating his glory. Witherington comments that Luke believes in the evidential value and effect of miracles in attesting to the authenticity of God’s work in the lives of Jesus’ followers.⁴⁶

Therefore, in verse 43, the cause of this awe is a thoroughly transformed people who are genuinely and deeply committed to this new belief. A transformation that is unexplainable apart from the supernatural work of Christ in the hearts of these men reflected in their lifestyle, in Luke’s language, can only cause awe among those who are there. In this intentional arrangement of events, it seems plausible to say that Luke draws Theophilus to reflect on the fact that a transformed life based on the essential commitments of the Christian faith, summarized in 2:42, is the greatest miracle.

Luke then mentions the wonders and signs that continued to be performed by the apostles. Notable is the inverted order of these words, as opposed to the regular way he uses

apostles teaching and the response is covered by the life lived in devoted obedience. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 73; Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 162.

⁴⁶ Witherington, 161.

them in other passages, that is, starting with signs and then wonders. As such, we can conclude that he is alluding back to 2:19 and 22. In 2:19, the words τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα (wonders and signs) are an allusion to Joel 2:30. These works, though accomplished through the apostles, are the work of the risen Lord in fulfilling what was foretold of the last days by Joel.⁴⁷ As such, he intends to communicate that the works of Jesus are the same ones being done by the apostles, with the same intent as focused on in 2:22, which is to attest to the truthfulness and reliability of Christ's teachings, which the apostles were now carrying.⁴⁸ Therefore, these signs authenticated the apostle's message and the radical transformation of all who followed what they taught. These wonders and signs are seen as the narrative unfolds, and they include: deliverance from demons (8:6–8; 16:16–18), healing of the sick (Acts 3:1–10; 5:14–16; 9:32–25; 14:7–10), raising people from the dead (9:35–42; 20:9–12), and instant judgment (Acts 5:1–11; 8:20–22). These wonders and signs sustain the awe that could easily be lost as people become accustomed to this community of believers and their way of life.

In this first summary paragraph in Acts, Luke provides a turning point that should cause us to view and interpret all other signs and wonders in light of this. They are supposed to show forth the works of the risen Lord so that many would turn from their sin and ultimately be transformed by the Spirit to live this countercultural life committed and obedient to a man who died a shameful death on the cross.

A Caring Community (2:44–45)

Open and shared life in the community consequently led to the sharing of material goods to meet the needs of each community member. Luke notes in 2:44, πάντες δὲ οἱ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά and 4:32 ἦν αὐτοῖς πάντα κοινά. That the people had all things in common and explained in 2:45 and 4:34–35 that this practice of having things in common was expressed in the practice of κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον (2:44) selling of individual possessions and κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον (4:35), availing the resources gained to the apostles to cater for the needs in the community.⁴⁹ Luke intentionally highlights that selling possessions and distributing resources to the community's needy was not a one-time affair. He deliberately uses the imperfect tense for the verbs ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον (selling and distributing, 2:45). Longman and Garland observe that the imperfect tense illustrates that this sharing of goods, including κτήματα (pieces of land) and ὑπάρξεις

⁴⁷ Carl R. Holladay, *Acts : A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky : Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 109.

⁴⁸ Schnabel, 180–81; Marshall, 84.

⁴⁹ Peterson, 162–63.

(other belongings), was a practice widely adopted by the early community.⁵⁰ Conzelman notes that the description of Luke bears resemblance to the descriptions of other Jewish groups that practiced the sharing of goods, such as the Qumran community.⁵¹ However, we must acknowledge notable differences in the sharing of goods in Acts and the surrender of all goods and property among the Qumran community.⁵² Luke paints an image that shows believers still owning property and utilizing it for ministry, for example, in verse 46, as opposed to the Qumran community, which ceded personal ownership of goods and property to the community.⁵³

So ingrained and central was this practice that Luke contrasts the sale of two parcels of land by two individuals in this community in Acts 4:36–5:11. Barnabas, in 4:36–37, exemplifies the proper manner of practicing this sharing of goods. He sold the field and brought the proceeds, as the intention of selling it was to support the needs of the poor. However, Luke immediately contrasts this with Ananias and Sapphira, who sell a portion but keep some for themselves instead of availing all the proceeds. Stott observes that the problem with Ananias and Sapphira is deceit.⁵⁴ As observed in the narrative, Peter probes and asks, “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?” (Acts 5:4). This indicates that the act of selling this property was not forced but voluntary; hence, selling, keeping part of the produce, and presenting the remainder as if it is all that the piece was sold at amounted to deceit. In this community, truth and honesty were to be upheld. Helping the needy was a response to God’s great grace shown to individuals in the community.⁵⁵

The picture of a community where no one is lacking is an echo of God’s ideal community. He promised the Israelites in Deuteronomy 15:4–5⁵⁶ that there would be no poor among them if they kept the commandments. The idea here is not that they would all own a similar amount of wealth, but rather that those in the community who had more would willingly avail their God-given provisions to serve the poor and the vulnerable (Lev 19:9–10, 23:22). The obedience to these laws was anchored on the premise that Yahweh was their Lord, evoking memories of how He had related to the people of Israel from the very

⁵⁰ *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 758.

⁵¹ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles : A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2024.

⁵² Schnabel, *Acts*, 2012, 181.

⁵³ Iain M. Duguid et al., *ESV Expository Commentary (Volume 9): John-Acts* (Wheaton, United States: Crossway, 2019), 522.

⁵⁴ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 84.

⁵⁵ Peterson, 161–163.

⁵⁶ Keener, 994. Observes that there is a possibility that Luke aims to portray the new community as fulfilling God’s plan in the Old Testament.

beginning. He had delivered them and shown them compassion when they were faithless and provided for their needs.⁵⁷ As a result, they were then mandated to reflect His character in these provisions. Whereas Israel failed, the new community is portrayed as successful, largely due to the preceding event of Pentecost. Therefore, they can reflect God more fully because God resides in them through the agency of the Holy Spirit, equipping them with the capacity to reflect Him more accurately than the Old Testament saints.

The description of this shared goods community is not a prescription of a political ideology. The community practices voluntary sharing of goods, as opposed to political ideologies that compel their citizens to surrender a portion of their wealth for distribution.⁵⁸ The concern for others does not lead to the sharing of goods prescribed in political ideologies, but rather, it is attributed to coercion by the government. These people lived a life guided by the Spirit, where nothing could be withheld from God. While this response had the reality of the return of Christ in mind, the Early Church was not simply disposing of all they owned and remaining with nothing in anticipation of Christ's return. Instead, Luke portrays these believers as those who disposed of portions of their wealth to provide the proceeds to meet the needs of others.⁵⁹ This was necessitated by the situation after Pentecost, where some of the 3,000 people who were converted remained in Jerusalem.

Luke does not, therefore, endeavor to provide the best economic models but rather the best understanding of redeeming grace. Bock summarizes it well when he notes that Luke endeavors to show that when the early church said God cared, the care they showed to one another demonstrated this.⁶⁰ This commitment to care for their own speaks to the fact that they begin to live for others and not solely for themselves.⁶¹ In narrating the practicalities of this shared life in 2:45, Luke endeavors to give us snippets of κοινωμία. The shared life is marked by ὁμοθυμαδὸν (unity, togetherness) in their attendance at common worship in the temple and their homes, as well as in sharing meals done in unity (v. 46).

⁵⁷ God provides for material needs through the sharing of the community. No one is anxious about their day-to-day survival. The common life of the church is the means whereby God provides. For Luke God provides for the faithful (cf. Luke 12): Ronald J. Allen, ed., *Acts of the Apostles*, Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013). notes that the shared life of the community is the means through which God provides.

⁵⁸ It is not that the Early Church was intending to propagate a socialist ideology over capitalism. Far from it. They were a joyous people responding obediently to the risen Lord and availing all they had for his purposes, hence acknowledging the grace extended to them by extending it to others in form of provisions.

⁵⁹ Bock, *Acts*, 153. notes that the reason given by Luke in regard to the selling of property is not an eschatological one but a social one. They are concerned for the need of the community.

⁶⁰ Bock, 155.

⁶¹ Duguid et al., *ESV Expository Commentary (Volume 9)*, 522.

A Gracious and Rejoicing Community (2:46–47a)

The generous community continues to demonstrate its generosity by selling its properties and opening up its personal spaces for use by the saints. In this verse, we get to see that the believers were καθ' ἡμέραν (daily) in 2:46, attending the temple together and receiving their meals with thanksgiving. This description καθ' ἡμέραν draws the reader to the intense nature of their commitment to this new society. Their lives essentially would not be divorced from lived-out Christianity; thus, their commitment to the meetings was a daily affair.

Moreover, they were meeting in the temple ὁμοθυμαδὸν (together) 2:46. As Keener rightly notes, the theme of togetherness as applies to believers is notable in Luke's depiction of their character, so much so that when later there appears to be division among the believers, the Holy Spirit draws them back to their togetherness (15:25).⁶² It is worth noting that this display of togetherness, is to be understood both in their temple meetings and home meetings. Not only are they together, but they receive their meals with ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας (glad and generous hearts). This posture of their hearts reveals their understanding that what is available for their partaking is provided by the hand of God; hence, they are glad not only to partake in the meal but also to enjoy the fellowship of their fellow believers.

Hearts that were open to sharing all that was availed to them, knowing well that others were worth more than the food in their storehouses. This is not only a display of how God uses believers as His hands to show mercy, but it is also an expression of trust in the God who provides. It is even more an emulation of the God who saved them, who did not withhold anything but gave even his very Son to die on the cross for their sin. It is this realization that could cause the heart to burst out in praise, just as it did in 2:47. Following this description of a praising, glad, and generous community is the phrase ἔχοντες χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν. In most English versions, the translation is rendered as "...having favour with the people."

However, the preposition πρὸς makes it difficult to justify this rendering since there is nowhere in the NT that it carries the meaning of "from" or "with" when in this construction, i.e., with an accusative noun as the object.⁶³ Scholars have proposed various interpretations of this passage. Williams argues that there is a possibility of a similar translation in this verse, which would read, "having (God's) favour before all the people."⁶⁴ Yet, it further

⁶² Keener, 1029.

⁶³ Richard Thompson, *NBBC, Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City, United States: The Foundry Publishing, 2015), 97.

⁶⁴ Williams, 62.

acknowledges the possibility of the term being used for human goodwill, especially in Acts 7:10.⁶⁵ However, there is nothing grammatically in the phrase that warrants this translation unless Williams sees the preposition here to be *πρό* (before). Thompson renders the phrase “having goodwill (grace) towards the people” to this end.⁶⁶ Peterson supports his point by referring to the term *λαόν* (people) that Luke uses primarily to describe the Jews. One will notice that as the book of Luke progresses and the focus shifts to the Gentile world, the term is rarely used; where it is used, *λαόν* and its forms refer to the Jewish people. Hence, the people who praise God favorably treat the Israelites around them. These gracious actions would then contribute to the conversion of many believers, leading to the growth in numbers.⁶⁷

The context of the text here would favor the rendering of *ἔχοντες χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν* as “having favour with all the people” since the writer is moving in a similar fashion that he did in 2:42 and 43, whereby he outlines the life of the believers and then the response of the people. Therefore, we could say that here in 2:47, he is moving to the people’s and God’s response to the life led by believers after conversion. Hence, the favor they are enjoying is from the people, a product of a united social life filled with joy.

A similar argument could also be made that Luke is endorsing the believers’ way of life by noting that they extended grace to the community around them, and the result of a faithful life is God adding to the number of those being saved.⁶⁸

God’s Response (2:47b)

Last, we see how God responded to the faithfulness that Luke illustrates in this passage. He was adding to their number. Luke’s use of the imperfect *προσέτιθει* (was adding) coupled with *καθ’ ἡμέραν* (day by day) reinforces the idea that this addition was continual. It was thus a reward from God on a daily basis for the faithfulness of this community. It is a show of success. The mission of displaying God to the masses around them, just as the Israelites were to do but failed, was now successful because the Spirit led the people. He dwelt not iteratively among them as in the Old Testament, but now he does so permanently and internally. People beheld a transformed community and heard the message that transformed them, and just like the first congregation in Acts 2:1–41, they yearned to know what they had

⁶⁵ Williams, 62.

⁶⁶ Peterson, 183.

⁶⁷ Peterson, 184.

⁶⁸ The people characterised by this term, refer to those who had heard the preaching of the good news of Jesus from the apostle and repented and were not considered followers of Jesus Christ. Thus the addition was not only in numbers but most importantly it was an addition of people with similar conviction and devotion to a distinct life.

to do to experience this transformation through repentance. The presence and witness of this new community were infectious.⁶⁹ The people who joined the community authentically were characterized as those who were being saved. As Luke used a similar verb in 2:21, the hearers had to call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. This act of calling upon the Lord was not simply a matter of naming God's name but realizing that there was no other way to salvation except through Him.

Therefore, this characteristic indicates that they had been saved from the sin that pervades human nature and were now transformed people. The use of the passive σφζομένου (2:47) demonstrates that this work was being done to/in them. This agrees with Paul's thought in Ephesians 2:8 that it is not the doing of any one of them. Only the risen Lord can accomplish this work. Williams observed that the participle also gives the sense that they were being maintained in the state they had already come from.⁷⁰ As Peter would put it in 1 Peter 1:5, "who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit-led Early Church community was a willing and enthusiastic people committed to a distinct way of life that entailed learning from the apostles, who in turn were dedicated to their practice of teaching, focused on Jesus, and grounded in Scripture. With a church in Africa often described as a mile wide and an inch deep, meaning its members have a shallow understanding of the faith, there is a need to focus on commitment to teaching, both by the laity and the clergy. The church in Africa must resist populist teachings and be grounded in Scripture, which provides a clear understanding of the faith.

Furthermore, the Early Church was characterized by a strong sense of fellowship. This aspect of shared life and friendly partnerships was essential for the church, as it fostered a unity that is essential in serving and worshiping God. The church must shun individualism and seek to realize that they are called to be a body that partners together. The church must strive to be a distinct people and community in the pursuit of unity and worship. Such a community, then, that is united, can participate in both common, shared meals with one another and the Lord's Supper as they celebrate union with each other and, above all, union in the body.

Moreover, the church, in 2:42–47, was committed to prayer. They prayed as Jesus taught them; they prayed together. This commitment is evident throughout the book of Acts,

⁶⁹ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

⁷⁰ Williams, *Acts*, 62.

with various characters offering prayers to the Lord, seeking His help and intervention. These wonders and signs sustain the awe that could easily be lost as people become accustomed to this community of believers and their way of life.

Ultimately, the Early Church was known for its generosity and graciousness. The poor among them did not lack; the rich sold their possessions to help the needy. With the high rate of poverty, believers with means are called not to sell their property but to show generosity by not only praying for the needs of other believers but also by meeting those needs as the Lord has provided resources. As the Early Church pursued godliness, the Lord added to their numbers each day.

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