

Acts chapter 2 records a most wonderful event – the Holy Spirit being poured out on the church at Pentecost.

There once was a time when the Holy Spirit only came upon particular people, for a particular purpose. But at Pentecost, that all changed. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the **whole church**. And Peter explained to the crowds, what was going on. He told them that we are **now**, living in “the last days”.

Now, **we** don't know how long “the last days” will go on for (they end when Jesus returns), but in this period of history called “The last days”, The Lord fills His disciples (ordinary people) with His Holy Spirit....

Now, when **you** think about the Holy Spirit, what do you think of? Often we just think of the ‘super-spiritual’ happenings and gifts and signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit. And some people are frightened away by these things, and others of us might find ourselves wondering, “Well, maybe **I'm** not filled with the Holy Spirit, because I can't do any of these things....” And if so, today's reading's pretty important for us, because it gives us a glimpse of the characteristics of a Spirit-filled life, and you may be surprised to discover “Hey, the Holy Spirit actually **is** in me”. Or maybe you might discover that some ‘super-spiritual’ sorts of people aren't really demonstrating the characteristics of a Spirit-filled life...

Acts Chapter 2 is describing the heady days of the church of Jesus Christ, bursting into life, with all of the excitement and love, and miracles, and signs and wonders – thousands of

conversions happening in a day... The fellowship of the believers – the common purpose –..... The Spirit Filled Church – in full flight.....

And ever since then, Christians throughout history have read this 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Acts, and have longed for these same exciting times.... Or have we????

We long for excitement... The resources of a mega-church can generate excitement, with professional programs, and world-class, concert quality music every Sunday. Really entertaining speakers. Some churches provide **great** excitement, and wow, don't they attract the numbers...

We crave signs and wonders... That's why blokes like Benny Hinn are so popular, and attract millions of followers in TV-land.

We crave community – in a world that's becoming increasingly interconnected with media and social networks, there remains **one thing** that most people still crave – community. *Have you noticed lately, that any youth organisations who are trying to project a “cool” image will somehow work the word “tribe” into their name, or into their activities???* Young people are looking for a ‘tribe’. They want to belong to a group. They crave community... *And “tribe” is a cool way of saying it.*

We long for **these** things. But do we really long to experience them, in the same way the early church experienced them? The early church experienced them as part of its Spirit-filled life. They weren't programs. They

weren't generated through excellence in church staff or church management... They were the experience of a Spirit-filled life.

So, what are the characteristics of a Spirit-Filled life, or for that matter, a Spirit-filled church???

1. Well, the first characteristic, is a **hunger** for God's word – but even more than that – a hunger for apostolic teaching.

<sup>v42</sup>... they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching....

The Greek word our Bibles translate as “devoted”, means a constancy, or filled with purpose<sup>i</sup>. When someone is filled with the Holy Spirit, they have a desire to constantly receive good teaching. And if at first they don't understand what's being taught, they don't give up – they devoted themselves to receiving this teaching.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit, produces a **hunger** for God's word. You'll **want** to read the Bible. You will **want** to get together with other Christians to study the Bible ... And it won't just be a one-off “Ok, I've got that now, I don't need to be taught any more.”.... It'll be an ongoing, consistent desire for teaching – you are devoted to it.

But it's not just **any** kind of teaching – the spirit-filled life craves “apostolic teaching”... While the flesh craves fleshly teaching, 2 Timothy 4:<sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves

teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Alright, that's the flesh craving fleshly teaching. But the Spirit-filled life, craves the teachings of the apostles... But, where can we get that now? The apostles are all dead. They don't have any podcasts I can subscribe to and download onto my iphone....

Where do I find the apostle's teaching? Well, what the apostles taught, is right there in your bibles. Read the New Testament, and you will find apostolic teaching.

Sadly, in many churches today, much teaching, although popular, is certainly **not** what the apostles taught.

Liberal churches may teach a social gospel – (where you don't repent of sin – you just do good stuff, or stand **for** good stuff)

Some people who consider themselves more academic, may take it even further, and teach a so-called “progressive” theology – and I'm not sure what they believe, but I can tell you what they don't believe. They teach that God did not create the world. Jesus was not born of a virgin. Jesus did not rise from the dead. Jesus died, but not for our sins, because God would never send his son to die. And basically they strip away everything that is supernatural and powerful about God. I don't know why they bother calling themselves “Christian”, because there's nothing Christian about what they believe.

And then in some other churches, you get the self-help type teaching, where bible verses are really an optional extra,

used sometimes to Christianise a basically humanistic or psychological message. *In fact, the largest church in the United States is a very good example of this. 43 500 people attend Joel Osteen's church in Houston, Tx (we can get it on our televisions here). And he says he just wants to lift people up. And his message is a motivational message – be the best that you can be – visualise yourself how you want to be, and you will become like that. It's all about positive thinking.... And absolutely **not** the teaching of the apostles. He shies away from teaching about the repentance of sin, and instead, he appeals to a culture who are caught up in materialism and a desire for personal success.*

The sign of a Spirit-filled church, is a church who are dedicated to receiving apostolic teaching.

*You know, I've heard it said ( quite a few times) "I really enjoy kids stories in church. I get more out of the kids story than I do out of the sermon." That statement makes me really sad.*

*That statement tells me that either the preacher needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to teach what the apostles taught.... **Or** the **listener** needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so they will actually begin to crave and consistently seek apostolic teaching. The Spirit-filled life, will not be content with a "kids story" ... Those who are filled with the Spirit, are devoted to apostolic teaching...*

So, how do we **identify** apostolic teaching? Well, I've already told you it's what the apostles taught. So, when a bible teacher teaches what the Bible is **clearly** saying (without trying to twist it), well that's apostolic teaching.

And one thing I've noticed, as I read the New Testament, is the apostles were always pointing people away from themselves, and toward Jesus Christ. And so apostolic teaching, is also a **Christ-centred** teaching.

And that's what they craved.

2. The second characteristic, is they didn't only devote themselves to the **teaching** of the Apostles – they also devoted themselves to what the Greeks called **κοινωνία** (koinonia). Our Bibles translate it as “fellowship”. They were devoted to fellowship. What is koinonia? What is “fellowship”?

*An elderly couple went into McDonalds, and they bought themselves one, burger; a small chips; and a drink. And they found themselves a seat, where they sat down, and carefully cut the burger in two, and divvied up the chips. A man at the table beside them notices this, and he offered to buy the wife her own meal.*

*“It's all right,” the wife says. “We share everything.”*

*A few minutes later, the man notices that the lady hasn't taken a bite. “I really don't mind buying you folks an extra meal,” he says.*

*“No No. It's OK. We share everything.”*

*“Please. I don't mind. I don't like to see you sitting there, not eating”*

*“Oh, she’ll eat,” the husband assured him. “We share everything.”*

*Unconvinced, the man begs: “Please let me buy you something. Why aren’t you eating?”*

*To which she replied, “We share everything, and I’m just waiting for him to finish with the teeth!”*

Koinonia is translated as “fellowship”. But in the Greek, “koinōnia expresses something more than “fellowship”. *It denotes the unanimity and unity brought about by the Spirit.*”<sup>ii</sup>. What that means, is they were together in this. They were in unity in what they believed. They had a unity of purpose – a unity of calling. And they **shared** – they shared life together. When somebody was in need, they shared their resources...

Fellowship, is **much** deeper than friendship. It can take a lot of time to develop a friendship. But a Christian can visit another church, in a different town, or a different country, And when a Spirit-filled Christian meets another Spirit-filled Christian, you can have instant fellowship – deeper than a friendship. You are unified in Christ – unified in the Spirit.

*You know, I don’t like moving, but I’ve had to do it a few times. And whenever I have moved to another town, I found an instant group of people to fellowship with – a people who love me and care for me and pray for me... Instant fellowship... Has anyone here ever experienced that? And I see how difficult it is, for people who are not Christians, to*

try and fit in to a new community, and sometimes they never do...

Well, that's fellowship, and they were devoted to fellowship. And when a church is filled with the Spirit, there will be **fellowship** – more than friendship – fellowship – a bond of sharing in life and ministry.

3. The third characteristic of a spirit-filled life, is "communion".

V42 says that they were devoted to "the breaking of bread".

When you're filled with the Holy Spirit, communion is **not** an empty, meaningless act. Communion, is an act of fellowship. Communing with your brothers and sisters in Christ, and communing with Christ Himself.

When the Holy Spirit has filled you, communion is not a religious duty – it's an essential part of our togetherness – of our fellowship. – we join together in this act of "breaking bread".

And that's why, in Corinth, when communion was falling apart, Paul could see that there was something deeply wrong with that church.

So, they were devoted to "the breaking of bread."

4. The fourth characteristic is, they were devoted to prayer.



V42 says they were devoted to “**the prayers**”. Now, that tells me that it was more than just personal prayer – they prayed together. It probably also included the set daily prayers at the temple, because they were meeting at the temple, daily. And that’s the thing – when you’re filled with Holy Spirit, even **written** prayers that you once used to feel were dry and wooden – take on a life and a beauty, and suddenly they mean something to you... And you can pray them from your heart, instead of just mouthing empty words.

5. The fifth characteristic of a Spirit-filled church, is the presence of signs and wonders.

Now, I want you to note here, **not everybody** were doing these signs and wonders – V43 says “and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

I’m not going to deal with this in detail now, because we’re going to encounter it in a few weeks time. But just be aware that through the Holy Spirit, Wonders and signs are still happening today – but not by everybody. We don’t all have that gift – in fact, it seems to be quite rare.

So, don’t get down on yourself, and say “I mustn’t be filled with the Holy Spirit, because I can’t do signs and wonders”... But because you don’t do them, don’t say that they don’t happen.

6. Sixthly, a Spirit-filled church, acts out of concern.

**V<sup>44</sup>** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

And when some people read that, they say “That’s communism”. “The early church was the first experiment with communism”... But it’s certainly **not** communism – What it is, is **concern**. When one of their number were doing it tough, of course they were concerned for the other person... Because that’s what fellowship does – it makes us concerned for the other... And their concern, translated into actions.

If one of the other disciples was in need, they’d sell off some of their possessions to help them out. Their concern for their brother or sister in Christ, was greater than their desire for possessions.

7. The 7<sup>th</sup> Characteristic of a Spirit-filled life, is daily devotion. They didn’t just pray or worship, or seek God’s word one or two days a week – it was a **daily** devotion. And when you’re filled with the Spirit, you’ll find that one day a week won’t be enough for you...

8. The 8<sup>th</sup> characteristic, is praise.

They praised God. You know, I sometimes hear people say *“I can’t praise God in that church. They need better songs. They need better musicians. They’re really nice people, but I just can’t praise God there....”*

Well, that tells me that person needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit-filled life overflows in praise, and it doesn't matter where you are. It doesn't require the right atmosphere or surroundings. The apostle Paul used to praise God, even while he was in chains in a dungeon – that's what the Spirit does.

9. The next characteristic of a Spirit-filled church, is those who are **not** a part of it, won't really know how to take these strange Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus Christ. In v43, it says and awe [or fear] came upon every soul. And then in v47, it says that they had favour with all the people.

So, these two statements don't surprise me. When a bunch of Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit, the activity of God will be apparent... And those outside of that church, will see that something's going on. And so, some of it's really good to them, and some of it's frightening to them. Good deeds get done, and "Wow, you're a good bunch of people". But then after a while, people begin to realise that this gospel message, actually demands a response from them, and so they can be filled with apprehension. (and that apprehension can later turn to persecution).

10. And finally, the 10<sup>th</sup> characteristic of a Spirit-filled church, is people were regularly being saved.

Now, if they're the characteristics of a Spirit-filled life, or a Spirit-filled church, what do you reckon? "How do we stack up?" Are they the characteristics of my life? Are they the

characteristics of your life? Are they the characteristics of this church????

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Is this describing us???

Some of you would say "No". Some of you would say "Partly"... But I don't think any of us would say "That was written about us. It's a mirror of our church.".....

Why???? What's missing? If the Holy Spirit still fills us today – If Jesus has told us that when we ask for Holy Spirit, and keep on asking for Holy Spirit, He will fill us with Holy Spirit.... What's missing? Why aren't we like that?????.....

Could it be, that God has answered our prayer – we **are** filled with the Holy Spirit, but we don't allow ourselves to be carried along by the **wind** of the Spirit?

Let me explain:

When a Christian brother or sister is in need, and you get an inner urge, "I should help them"... Where does that urge come from? Holy Spirit.

But then you think better of it, "No, they need more help than I can give them. I've been taught the **responsible** thing, is to save up for a rainy day (or for when it **doesn't** rain)"... And so we don't sell our possessions to help them.... We convince ourselves "Well, that's not the 'done thing'... That'd be reckless... And so we extend ourselves to help them out to the extent that we can really afford.... The Holy Spirit has given us that urge, but then we've trodden Him down.

Or when you're talking with someone... and you get a feeling "I should invite them to church"... Or "I should tell them about Jesus"... Or "I should tell them that they need to repent of their sin"... Where does that feeling come from? Holy Spirit. But then you think better of it... "Nah, they won't appreciate that". The Holy Spirit has given us an urge, and we've trodden it down.

Or maybe you've felt "I should pray more" .. That's the Holy Spirit... But you've trodden it down, because you might miss your favourite TV show.

Or maybe you've felt this thing called "Koinonia" (fellowship), and felt a need to share with someone, deeper than friendship. Maybe you've felt that you should invite

someone from church to your home, and share a meal with them... Where does that feeling come from??? That's the Holy Spirit..... But then you've thought "No, that's invading that other person's space" .... Or "My home's not nice enough. My cooking's too basic"... And we've trodden the Spirit down again???

Could it be, that God has answered our prayer, and Holy Spirit **is** living inside of us, but we've never allowed ourselves to get carried along by the wind of the Spirit????

What if?

What if next time we were to have an urge of the Holy Spirit.... What if we just went with it...

What sort of a church would we be then???

Maybe we'd be the sort of church that we read about in Acts chapter 2.....

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<sup>i</sup> Similarly after Pentecost "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). In the early church the experience of Pentecost produced Christians of great constancy and purpose.

Brown, C., 1986. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.

<sup>ii</sup> (also: *The individual was completely upheld by the community. The Hellenist Luke clearly had in mind the Pythagoreans and the Essenes. The educated reader would have got the impression that here the Greek ideal of society had been realized*) Schattenmann, J., 1986. κοινονία L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.