

Lesson 8

Filled with Awe

Acts 2.43

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles.

Introduction

In his book *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kent Hughes has written:

What happens in the church where the Spirit reigns? There is a radically wonderful reorientation of essential relationships.

Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to the Word—teaching. Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to each other—*koinonia*. Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to God—worship. Where the Spirit reigns, believers relate to the world—evangelism.³¹

This is a great summary of the life of the earliest Christians. They were believers in full cooperation with the Spirit. We have just finished a four-lesson study on Acts 2.42 which describes the spiritual life of the first Christians. The entire section (2.42-47) describes the ideal church that God designed. This is what God did for them ... it is what He wants to do for us ... as we do what He wants for Him.

The work of the Spirit here is noteworthy. Besides His work of regeneration & transformation, His work on making us one with others who have been transformed is on display as well. This is what makes the church different from any other group. Lloyd Ogilvie in his writing on Acts³² reminds us that human relationships, apart from the Spirit are based on the barter of mutual needs, interests, causes, or fears. Our earthly relationships are not typically driven by a desire for togetherness, but rather selfishness. Unless there is something we need either to get or provide, we are not drawn into friendship or partnership. Again, at our core, humans are fundamentally selfish. Ogilvie continues, “loneliness drives people into one place, but that does not mean that they are *together*, really.”

What we see among the first Christians is God’s purpose for His people, i.e., that they become one, with Him, and one with each other. The Spirit’s work of transformation inside of us yields the fruit of unselfish love. What we see in Acts 2.42-47 is an unfolding of that love as it was meant to be inside the church. A simple way to define the church is this:

the fellowship of those given by Christ to be to each other what He has been to them, so that together they can be to the world a demonstration of the new humanity He died and lives to make possible.³³

What happened to cause local churches to lose sight of and experience the ideal? What can we do to get back this *unblemished authenticity* in the fellowship inside our congregations today?

³¹ Hughes, R. Kent. *Acts: The Church Afire*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996, p. 50.

³² Ogilvie, Lloyd J., and Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *Acts*. Vol. 28 of *The Preacher’s Commentary Series*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1983, p. 71.

³³ Ogilvie, p. 72.

Regaining a Sense of Awe

Here the original word refers to a holy fear or reverence for the divine presence. It describes the feeling produced when one realizes God is at hand.³⁴ Luke liked to use the term to describe how the fear and astonishment generated a positive response. We see it in his gospel:

- Luke 1:65: *Fear came on all those who lived around them, and all these things were being talked about throughout the hill country of Judea.*
- Luke 5:26: *Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they were filled with awe and said, "We have seen incredible things today."*
- Luke 7:16: *Then fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us," and "God has visited his people."*

We also see it here in Acts. Besides 2.43 we also have this passage:

So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily, Acts 19.20 ESV.

Because of the wonders and signs mentioned in the second half of verse 43, many commentators want to make a distinction that the people filled with awe to which Luke references are those outside of the church, i.e., nonbelievers. They think verse 43 is set up to contrast the actions of the believers in verse 44. Certainly, the power of the miracles the apostles were working would have produced a healthy fear of the Lord for those Jews who had yet to come to Christ. The better view here is to let the wording speak for itself. *Everyone* was filled with awe ... believers and nonbelievers.

There are some more negative events in the life of the early church that provoked the people to a sense of fear and awe:

- Judgment on Ananias and Sapphira (5.5, 11). It is said that *great fear* came upon the church because of this.
- The demonic overpowering of the seven sons of Sceva. When this became known, it resulted in: *everyone who lived in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, [becoming] afraid, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high esteem (17.17).*

There is more here than just amazement over miracles and wonders

Modern readers living in an age when supernatural spiritual gifts worked by men have ceased may be quick to read over verse 43. The awe was not only in reaction to the miracles. There was more! Every Christian ... was amazed at how everything was working together to demonstrate that God was with them.

No miracles, signs, or wonders were required to know it. All the people had to do was look around and see the incredible oneness resulting from the Spirit's work of salvation. They all shared a common joy emanating from the forgiveness found in the Messiahs' sacrifice for their sin. They all knew what they deserved. They all knew what they had been given. This moved them all to a deep sense of holiness ...

³⁴ MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*, Vol. 1, p. 85.

and awe/reverence of being in the presence of God. The Jewish sect they had come out of didn't matter. Jews from every walk of life, every different social background and class, and every educational level all were one. Togetherness like this wasn't the product of some human scheme ... it was the work of God, and they all knew it!

This is what we need today! What a revival our churches would experience if we rekindled that sense of awe before our holy God, bound together with our own sense of unworthiness. Later this text will describe their *joyful and sincere hearts*, 2.46. It was "unaffected joy." It was "exulting gladness."³⁵

Their awe wasn't over the physical. It wasn't about buildings, church programs, or their own ability ... it was over the work of God going on inside of them and outside in their community.

What are some things we can be in awe about today?

- God's presence in us for the purpose of sanctification and transformation, Acts 5.32; 2 Corinthians 3.18... despite our human frailty and sinfulness, Romans 7.23-25.
- God's work through the Spirit to make us one, Galatians 3.28; Colossians 3.11.
- God's work in fulfilling His purpose of reaching the lost through us, Matthew 28.18-20. We are nothing more than clay pots, 2 Timothy 2.20-21.
- God's sustaining power that helps us through the most severe of trials, 2 Corinthians 4.7-5.7; Ephesians 6.10-18.
- God's endless supply of hope that sustains us as we cope with the loss of our loved ones, and our own impending death, 1 Corinthians 15.51-58.

What are some other things that fill your heart with awe and joy when you think of God's amazing blessings?

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³⁵ Thomas Walker, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), p. 61