



Acts 2:42-47

How To Choose a Church: Power

Summary: The early church was marked by seven key characteristics we should look for in a good church today.

We're making our way through the book of Acts, the history book of the early Church and we've stopped to do a little in-depth analysis. We asked: What were some of the key features of the early Church? And identified at least seven of them.

I'll read to you from the Scriptures and then give you that list:

Acts 2:42 And they [the early Church] continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. **43** Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. **44** Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, **45** and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. **46** 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, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

So here are seven observations about the early church – things you should look for when you look for a new church, or that you should look for in your current church.

1. There was prayer
2. There was preaching and teaching – specifically, the apostles' doctrine
3. There was praise – they spoke highly of God - what He was doing and had done in their lives, and they sang about it too, to Him and to one another
4. There was power – all these things involved people, but ultimately it was God at work through them, He was pouring out His Spirit, empowering people to serve and minister, and adding people to the church - God was in control
5. There was unity and fellowship – among a diverse group of people
6. There was a spirit of service - they met one another's needs
7. There was perseverance – they kept doing these things, even when it was hard.

Churches come in a lot of sizes and flavors today, but a good church will still include all seven of these features, and if you sense there's something off about a church – it's probably because one or more of these features is missing or is being overshadowed by something else.

This morning we're focusing on power and I'm going to put forward a pretty bold claim: that if you're bored with church, if you're bored with your Christian faith, if you're

wondering if any of this matters or makes a difference, it's probably because you're not experiencing God's power in your life or seeing it in the lives of others.

It's easy to get bored if you think you're just a spectator, if you're just here to watch other people do things and listen to other people talk about religious stuff. Things feel different if you're watching from the stands than they do if you're actually playing in the game. So, let me ask: when it comes to the Christian faith are you a spectator or are you actively engaged?

Because here's what happens if you get engaged in actively serving and living for God – you learn there are tremendous challenges to the Christian life, and you are your own worst enemy.

You've been born again, saved by faith in Christ, but you still fight against all sorts of desires, temptations and tendencies. You don't suddenly turn into this passive little princess of prayer and praise that never feels angry, never wants what someone else has, never feels a desire for anyone else. No, as a Christian you *still* struggle to resist all the stuff other people give in to or are overwhelmed by.

And you're surrounded by a bunch of other people that are experiencing the same things. So, as a Christian, you're still going to have conflict with other people – even other Christians. And people that aren't Christian are going to have all kinds of ideas about you. Some will think you're just quaint, a little old-fashioned, but nostalgic and harmless, like the Amish. Others will think you're completely out of touch with reality. They'll sneer and mock at you: "This is 2019 after all! What do you mean you believe all this religious stuff!?"

But listen, Jesus said,

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated you*.
19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

So,

- there are people in the world who will hate you *because* they hate Jesus
- you'll have difficulty getting along with other people, even Christians at times, and
- you'll still feel temptations, desires, and the pull toward sinful choices.

But it gets worse.

We live in a physical world influenced by spiritual forces. There is a real Satan and there are real demons and they actively oppose the Kingdom of God and it's servants including you and me.

Again, just reading to you from Scripture here, the Apostle Peter writes:

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1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

The Christian faith is less like a sunny stroll in the park on a nice summer day, and more like a deployment to an active combat zone – there is opposition everywhere, including *inside my own heart and mind*.

So, how is anyone supposed to do this? How is anyone supposed to survive, succeed and actually grow in their faith?

The answer is: by depending on:
God's Word for guidance,
God's Son for forgiveness, and
God's Spirit for strength.

You see, this is critical, absolutely critical for you to understand. All religions have a list of do's and don'ts. Do this, don't do that.

And if you do things you shouldn't or don't do things you should, most religions have a way to make that right. Make this sacrifice, do this penance, offer this prayer, climb that mountain. It's kind of like a sport where you're trying to score enough points to make up for all the points against you.

Here is where Christianity is unique. Here is what makes Christianity different. God says, you're never going to be able to score enough points on your own, so I'm going to let Jesus play for you. He's going to ensure you win.

But, I'm also not going to sit you on the bench. I'm going to keep you in the game, and I'm going to give you increasing power and strength to be able to play through the Holy Spirit living in you and coming upon you.

So think about this: you don't have to wonder what to do and not do in life: God tells you in His Word, in the Bible. But, you're never going to be able to do it all on your own, so He sends Jesus to save you. And then, He gives you power to live for Him and with Him through the Holy Spirit.

It's that power we want to talk about this morning: have you experienced it in your life?

If you are a Christian, the answer should be yes. It could be yes soon even if it's no right now. But you'll need to ask, and keep asking, knock on the door of heaven, and keep knocking, seek, and keep seeking as Jesus said. Declare to God your desire to be increasingly available to Him, and declare your helplessness and weakness without Him – ask God to give you the strength to live the life He wants for you. Come down out of the bleachers and get into the game and you'll discover very quickly that you need His help and

power for each play.

That's what we see happening here in Acts. Jesus had told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem because

Acts 1:8 [they would] receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

And then we see the Spirit poured out at Pentecost and the birth of the church. But we also see that the Spirit of God did not leave them as orphans, He remained with them, empowering the work they were doing, and as we read in **Acts 2:47**, "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." God was clearly at work by, with, and through them, empowering them for life and ministry *in the Spirit* as they participated in what He was doing.

Now, that's important to note, because these men God used, the disciples – had already been with Jesus for years. They had the knowledge they needed to share – they had content for their preaching and teaching. And, they had already been born-again.

They had received the Holy Spirit – you find that in John 20, when Jesus visited them in the Upper Room after His resurrection, the night when Thomas was not there Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." That was several weeks before the events of Pentecost. But they still weren't ready for ministry, they weren't ready for God to use them, they needed the empowering Jesus had promised.

That happened at Pentecost. They received the power of the Holy Spirit; He was no longer just in them, now He was also upon them, and they saw extraordinary things happen as a result.

I want to make the case that the same thing still happens today. God still pours out the power of His Holy Spirit on individual Christians and whole congregations to accomplish His purposes and display His glory.

That can happen when you're waiting for it, seeking it, asking for it, like the disciples pre-Pentecost, or even when you're not – think of the example of the Apostle Paul. He was not looking for God when Jesus radically derailed His life and said, "I want to use you for My purposes." Jesus blindsided Paul. He never saw it coming; but once he recognized what was happening Paul surrendered completely and spent the rest of his life serving Christ and the Church while depending on the Holy Spirit's power, guidance, and strength.

You'll find this experience referred to in different ways. Some call it the baptism of the Spirit, some call it being filled with the Spirit, some call it walking in the Spirit. Don't get tangled up in the terminology – simply ask yourself this: have I ever had an experience where I had no other explanation for what I said, or knew, or did, except: God did that. Can

you point to any experience or knowledge in your life and say, that's not me all by myself; that was God?

Remember, one of the things we're learning in Acts is that God's plan is: people, reaching people, with power. So, what does that power look like in our lives? What does the Holy Spirit do in our lives individually and as a Church?

Well, **first** of all, it is the power of God that brings us to Christ. At some point, He captures our attention, convicts us of our sin, allows us to hear and understand the gospel, and then provokes us to respond. God is the author and finisher of our salvation (Heb 12:2).

And when we receive salvation one of the many benefits in the package is the Holy Spirit who now lives inside of us, assuring us of our salvation.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God

So, let me ask: do you have that witness, do you have the assurance of your salvation? My friend, salvation is not something you should ever have to worry or wonder about. Yes, there are times when we do. We can go through seasons when all seems dark and we question everything, but there should still be the testimony of Scripture, of other people in your life, and of the Spirit of God Himself bearing witness that you are saved, not because of anything you have done, but by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ. And if you have been adopted as a child of God, He promises He will never, by any means, cast you out.

In fact, the Spirit actually prays for us:

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

You need to know that – you need to know that you are not alone. God knows, and He cares, and He wants to help you. Thank Him for that, praise Him for that. Trust Him.

The Holy Spirit also makes God's presence real to us. He gives us courage, support and strength (John 14:16-17). He helps us overcome the power and schemes of Satan. He gives us victory over sin. He guides our prayers, gives us discernment. He shapes and molds our lives to be more like Christ.

The Spirit produces evidence of salvation in your life:

Galatians 5: 22-23 “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

These things begin to grow in your life as a Christian. You may start off with a pretty small crop, but over time, there should be more and more of this coming out of you as a result of Who is in you. This is what God has for you, this is what He's trying to do with you, and it's good.



These things should be occurring in the life of every Christian. It is natural that you would produce spiritual fruit. These are all things that happen *as a result of salvation*, as a result of being born again and having the Spirit in you.

But what we're talking about here at Pentecost is *the experience of having the Spirit come upon you, with power.*

What happens when the Holy Spirit adds fertilizer to your garden? What happens when Acts 1:8 kicks in and the Holy Spirit makes you a witness for God by giving you supernatural insight, abilities, or outcomes *in order to* bless the church or reach the lost? You don't just produce fruit, you produce supernatural fruit.



What if you're not just saved *from* something, but you're saved *for* something? What if God has something supernatural, something spiritual He wants to do through your life? What if part of my job is help you see that your day job is not your real job but you're actually being recruited to participate in the work of the kingdom of God wherever you go, whatever you do, whoever provides your paycheck?

The Scriptures say quite clearly:

Phil 2:13 *it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

In other words, God, through the Holy Spirit, is putting ideas in your head. Things you could say, things you could do, to grow spiritually, or to help others and glorify Him. They could seem like small ordinary things like, 'Maybe I should buy two of these and then give one to so and so.' Or, 'I haven't see what's his name in while, maybe I should reach out and see how they're doing.' Or maybe it's something that feels insane like, 'Maybe we should start a ministry or move to Morocco; or maybe we need to move to Morocco and start a ministry.'

Christian, **God is at work in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.** *Are you listening?*

In the coming weeks we're going to talk about the unity and service that were present in the early Church – *those things don't happen unless we follow God's plan*: people reaching people, with power. The church grows and thrives when people start saying Yes to God's leading in their lives.

In Acts 13 we find the church having a time of prayer, worship and fasting, and the Holy Spirit spoke and said:

Acts 13:2 “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which *I have called them.*”

Christian, God does this. He calls you to do things, to serve Him, and He empowers you to do the things He’s calling you to – will you go? Will you do it? Will you say, ‘Yes Lord, have Your way in me?’ Will you come down out of the stands and get into the game?

You have a part to play, literally, in the Body of Christ. Do you know what it is? Do you know what God is calling you to? And listen, I’m not just talking about serving in what you think of as traditional ministry. God wants to use all of us in extraordinary ways.

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit called and empowered a man named Bezalel to do construction and work as an artisan. God said he gave the man wisdom, understanding, and knowledge:

Ex 31:4 in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver in bronze, 5 in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood and to work in all manner of workmanship.

This man, and many others, worked with his hands to the glory of God.

In just a few chapters we’ll find a little crisis in the church in Acts 6. They had conflict over how food-relief was being distributed. And the apostles said, ‘you know what we need to do? We need to appoint some deacons, some people with very practical ministry skills to oversee this project.’ And do you know what the requirements were for the position? They had to be people who had ‘a good reputation and who were *full of the Holy Spirit* and wisdom.’

Now, I can understand why you’re looking for people with a good reputation and wisdom when you’re trying to solve an issue involving fairness. But why this requirement to be full of the Holy Spirit? Why is that a requirement for someone already *in the church*? All Christians have the Holy Spirit.

Ah, yes, but not all Christians are full of the Spirit, surrendered to the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit for the work God wants to do. Are you?

We’re not talking about a life on spiritual auto-pilot. We’re talking about a life of being out of the bleachers and on the field where you strain and struggle and sweat, but where you also see glorious things happen and celebrate and rejoice as plays come together and points are scored.

I'm asking you to allow the Holy Spirit to convince you, rebuke you, exhort you and encourage you to keep God's kingdom and righteousness the first priority of your life in practical ways; to strive to know God more fully each day and understand His plans for your life.

I'm asking you to humbly submit to God and recognize His authority by yielding to the Holy Spirit. To allow God to direct, control, empower and influence every area of your life, to commit to obey His Word and seek His will AS A WAY OF LIFE.

I'm asking you to cooperate with God as He seeks to manifest His fruit in your life; to make yourself increasingly available to God for His glory and the good of others - seeking to live in the strength and enabling, the empowering of the Spirit. Let Him pour Miracle Grow all over the garden of your soul that you don't just produce enough food for yourself and your family, you produce enough to feed an army.

But look, you're likely to resist this if you've seen or heard about people acting crazy in the name of the Holy Spirit - barking like a dog, laughing uncontrollably, rolling around the floor, running around the room - we're not talking about any of that - Read 1 Corinthians 14, a sure sign of the reality of the Holy Spirit is that things are done decently and in order. God is not a God of confusion or chaos. But He is a God of miraculous plans and supernatural power. He is a God who exercises options we never saw, thought up, or dreamed of. He is a God who produces giant fruit.

My challenge to you is: are you available to Him? Are you available to be His hands and feet in this body - in this place and at this moment in history?

As RA Torrey once said, "The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not primarily intended to make believers happy or holy, but to make them useful."

We want to be a church that relies on the leadership and power of God, through His Word and His Spirit working together. You can draw a crowd with management, marketing, and slick media - but we want a congregation - a group of people connected to God and each other, growing in our relationships for the benefit of all.

We believe the first church was fueled by the power of God. Is that true of us?

Well, only if it's true of you, and of me, because together, we make up this church. If God is going to work, it's going to be through us. And that's the plan, remember: people, reaching people, with power.

Let's pray.