



## The Unity of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:42-47)

Commentary: Week Six

*\*\*Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.  
This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between  
the verse range listed in our series and the commentary notes provided in our Scripture Studies.*

### New American Commentary<sup>1</sup>

#### 9. The Common Life of the Community [2:42–47](#)

[2:42](#) This section comprises the first extensive “summary” in Acts. Luke perhaps provided two summaries here: v. [42](#) pictures the community life in itself and has much in common with the more extensive treatment beginning in v. [43](#). Quite possibly v. [42](#) should be viewed separately, as a conclusion to the Pentecost narrative. Thus viewed, it provides a glimpse into the manner in which the new converts were incorporated into the believing community. Verses [43–46](#) thus would appear to introduce a new section that deals with the life of the whole Christian community and to prepare for the narratives of the witness in Jerusalem that follow in chaps. [3–5](#). That this is so is supported by the fact that the latter summary begins with a reference to the apostolic miracles (v. [43](#)), one of which follows immediately after the summary ([3:1–10](#)).

In v. [42](#) the believers are said to have “devoted themselves” to four practices in their new life together. First was the teaching of the apostles. Just as the apostles had been instructed by Jesus, so they passed along that instruction to the new Christians. In keeping with Jesus’ teaching to them (chap. [1](#)), this would have included such subjects as his resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and surely their own reminiscences of Jesus’ earthly ministry and teachings. The second activity to which they devoted themselves was “the fellowship.” The Greek word used here (*koinōnia*) is one Paul often employed, but it appears only here in all of Luke-Acts. Its basic meaning is “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.” In secular Greek it could involve the sharing of goods, and Paul seems to have used it this way in [2 Cor 9:13](#). It was also used of communion with a god, especially in the context of a sacred meal; and Paul used it in that sense in [1 Cor 10:16](#). Since it appears in a list in [Acts 2:42](#), it is not easy to determine its exact nuance in this context. The key may be to see the terms “breaking of bread” and “prayer” in apposition to “fellowship.” The meaning would then be that they devoted themselves to a fellowship that was expressed in their mutual meals and in their prayer life together. If this is so, then the meaning of the third element, “the breaking of bread,” would be further clarified. Joined with fellowship, it would likely carry the cultic sense of sharing a meal with the Lord, participating in the Lord’s Supper. It probably also involved as well their participation in a main *agapē* meal together. The fourth and final element of their life together, another expression of their fellowship, was “the prayers” (RSV). The presence of the article in the Greek text before prayers has led some interpreters to see this as a reference to their keeping the formal prayer hours of Judaism in the temple. They may well have done so to some extent, for their faithfulness in attending temple worship is noted in [2:46](#) and [3:1](#). The reference, however, is probably much broader and involves primarily their sharing in prayer together in their private house worship.

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1. John B. Polhill, *New American Commentary – Volume 26: Acts*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 117-121.

[2:43](#) The longer summary gives a fuller description of the life of the entire Christian community. It begins in v. [43](#) by referring to the miracles performed by the apostles. The miracles are described with the characteristic combination “signs” and “wonders.” The same phrase continues to be used of the apostles’ miracle-working in [4:30](#) and [5:12](#) and is applied to others as well: Jesus ([2:22](#)), Stephen ([6:8](#)), Moses ([7:36](#)), Philip ([8:13](#)), and Paul and Barnabas ([14:3](#); [15:12](#)). It is interesting to note that the phrase is no longer used after chap. [15](#), although Paul continued to work miracles.

An example of one such miraculous sign is given in [3:1–10](#). Luke’s summary statement would indicate that this healing story is only one example of many miracles worked by the apostles in this early stage of their ministry. The response of the people is a reverent fear (*phobos*, “awe,” NIV). “Everyone” probably refers to those outside the Christian community who were awed by apostolic miracles (cf. [5:12–13](#)).

[2:44–45](#) Verse [44](#) elaborates on the fellowship enjoyed by the Christians. The word *koinōnia* is not used, but other terms express the same reality. First, they are said to have been “together” (*epi to auto*). This Greek phrase is notoriously difficult to translate, occurring five times in Acts ([1:15](#); [2:1](#), [44](#), [47](#); [4:26](#)). It seems to depict the gathered community, with a strong emphasis on their unity. This unity is further expressed by their holding “everything in common” (which is described in v. [45](#) as selling their goods for the benefit of others whenever a need arose).

Here two ideals for a community of goods seem to be combined. First is the Greek ideal of a community in which everything is held in common and shared equally. It is a basically utopian concept, which can be traced as far back as the Pythagorean communities and is often expressed by the same phrase Luke employed in v. [44](#), “holding all in common” (*echein hapanta koina*). Verse [45](#), however, speaks against the early Christian community adopting a practice of community ownership. The imperfect tense is used, indicating that this was a recurrent, continuing practice: their practice was to sell their property and goods and apportion the proceeds whenever a need arose. This is much more in keeping with the Old Testament ideal of community equality, of sharing with the needy so that “there will be no poor among you” ([Deut 15:4f.](#)).

[2:46–47](#) Verse [46](#) sets forth the dual locale of their life together. They remained faithful to their Jewish worship, devoting themselves “with one accord” (“together”) in the temple. The word translated “with one accord” (*homothymadon*) is commonly used in Acts to express unity of purpose and particularly applies to the “one heart and mind” ([4:32](#)) of the Christian fellowship (cf. [1:14](#); [2:1](#); [4:24](#); [5:12](#); [15:25](#)). F. Stagg, however, points out that single-mindedness is not always a good thing. The same word is used of the angry mobs that rushed upon Stephen ([7:57](#)) and Paul ([19:29](#)). For the Christian community, fellowship and unity of purpose are salutary only when rooted in fellowship with Christ and in the unity of his Spirit. The structure of Acts should remind us of this—the unity of the Christian community derives from and is guided by the gift of the Spirit that lies at the heart of its life together.

The Christian presence in the temple testifies not only to their remaining faithful to their Jewish heritage but also evidences their zeal for witness. In Jerusalem the temple was the primary place where crowds would be found, and there the Christians went to bear their witness ([3:11–12](#); [5:21](#), [42](#)). If the temple was the place of witness, homes were the place for fellowship. In the intimacy of the home setting, a common meal was shared together, probably including the Lord’s Supper as well. It was a time marked by rejoicing in their fellowship with one another and with the Spirit and by their own openness and sincerity (*aphelotēs*). On the giving end, they expressed their joy by praising God for his presence in their life together (v. [47](#)). On the receiving end, they experienced the favor of the nonbelieving Jewish community in Jerusalem. God responded to their faith and blessed the young community, adding new converts daily. Indeed, as with the young Jesus, so it was for the growing church—favor with God and favor with humanity ([Luke 2:52](#)).

Verses [43–46](#) give an ideal portrait of the young Christian community, witnessing the Spirit's presence in the miracles of the apostles, sharing their possessions with the needy among them, sharing their witness in the temple, sharing themselves in the intimacy of their table fellowship. Their common life was marked by praise of God, joy in the faith, and sincerity of heart. And in it all they experienced the favor of the nonbelievers and continual blessings of God-given growth. It was an ideal, almost blissful time marked by the joy of their life together and the warmth of the Spirit's presence among them. It could almost be described as the young church's "age of innocence." The subsequent narrative of Acts will show that it did not always remain so. Sincerity sometimes gave way to dishonesty, joy was blotched by rifts in the fellowship, and the favor of the people was overshadowed by persecutions from the Jewish officials. Luke's summaries present an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew if it is to have that unity of spirit and purpose essential for an effective witness.