

The Visible Fingerprints of the Invisible Church

Chapter Two

Audio lesson: New Testament 32



Objective: To understand how the invisible universal church is expressed in the local visible church.



They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

—Acts 2:42

The second chapter of Acts begins by describing the Day of Pentecost, which was the birthday of the church. On that day, the risen Christ began to build the church in order to evangelize the world with Him and for Him. Anytime the Holy Spirit came upon people in the book of Acts, it was always related to the purpose given to the church in the Great Commission: for them to be Jesus' witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

As you study the book of Acts, observe the patterns that emerge in the first generation of the church. These are "the visible fingerprints of the Invisible church." The fellowship of believers each of us belongs to in a community is to be a local, visible expression of the invisible, universal Church the risen Christ is building in this world. Just as our fingerprints can identify where we have been and what we have touched, the church can be identified by "fingerprints." In Acts, the church was known by several fingerprints—evidence that God's Spirit was at work. These include evangelism, teaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, unity, diversity, plurality of leaders, empathy (or love), and equality. These also measure the health of a church today. When we see these characteristics in our churches, we can measure the degree to which our church is a visible expression of the universal church Jesus is building.

1. True or false? All Christians have the same spiritual gifts.
2. True or false? Everyone who is born again is a member of the invisible, universal church.
3. True or false? The church is really the church when it is reaching out and evangelizing.
4. True or false? When the Holy Spirit lives inside of a person, that person does not need to be taught anymore.
5. True or false? It is impossible to have diversity and unity in the same group of people.



Unless otherwise noted, choose one answer for each question.

6. Why did the apostles appoint people to fulfill some of the practical needs of the church?
- They were too important to do common labor.
 - They were not concerned for the physical needs of people.
 - They needed to devote themselves to the Word of God and to prayer.
 - They had to isolate themselves from other people in order to keep themselves pure.
7. Which of the following are the “fingerprints” of the invisible church in its visible expression? (choose all that apply)
- Dramatic miracles
 - Fellowship
 - Prayer
 - Wealth
 - Empathy, or love
 - A large church building
 - Worship
 - Professional ministers
 - Unity
 - Diversity
 - Evangelism
 - Long pilgrimages
 - Extreme self-denial
 - Plurality
 - Equality
 - Tolerance for all paths to God
 - Poverty
 - Teaching

8. Why is evangelism an important ministry of the church?
 - a. Bringing people to Christ is part of the Great Commission.
 - b. The church needs to grow in order to influence society.
 - c. The church needs to grow in order to receive more donations.
 - d. It is important for Christians to outnumber people of other religions.

9. What should the church do for those who receive the gospel and join the congregation?
 - a. Nothing—they have all they need.
 - b. Teach them and help them grow as disciples.
 - c. Require them to donate their entire income to the church.
 - d. Test them for at least a year before accepting them into the church to see if their faith is genuine.

10. Which of the following is true of the early believers in Acts?
 - a. They all spoke the same language and looked alike.
 - b. They were all from Jerusalem.
 - c. They all believed exactly the same things.
 - d. They were very diverse but united in their faith in Jesus.

11. Who is responsible for ministry in the church?
 - a. Only one pastor
 - b. Only those who are paid for their work
 - c. Everyone—multiple pastors and elders as well as common members
 - d. Only those who prove they know the scriptures extremely well

12. How are the members of the church related to each other?
 - a. We are all members of one body.
 - b. We are required to live in the same community.
 - c. We are commanded to serve the pastor together.
 - d. We are related only by similar beliefs but have no other bond.



Which “fingerprints” of the church do you see most clearly in the Christians you know? Which ones are the most difficult for human beings to fulfill without the Spirit’s power? How does the Holy Spirit help us fulfill the Great Commission and serve others with our spiritual gifts? In what ways can you serve God in your local church?



Thank God for the visible expression of the body of Christ—the church. Thank Him for choosing to come to people who will love and serve Him. Ask Him to give you opportunities to minister to Him and to others by the power of His Spirit. Ask Him especially to help you share the good news of Jesus with others.



Going Deeper

1. Relate the importance of small groups as a context in which to apply many of the fingerprints mentioned in this commentary on the book of Acts – especially fellowship. _____

2. Why is it that we must maintain our diversity while achieving and experiencing unity? _____

3. Why should the diversity of individuals in the Church be celebrated rather than resolved? _____

4. Since the Greek word for pastor is always in the plural when we read about the New Testament Church, what would it take to have a plurality of pastors in our churches today? _____

5. When we think of the ring fingerprint of empathy on the left hand of the Church, how might we relate that to the ring fingerprint of worship on the right hand of a Biblical Church? _____

6. Jesus gave a New Commandment as He was finishing His three years with the apostles (John 13: 34, 35). How can you relate this statement to that commandment: “The best way to reach out is to reach in”? _____

7. According to Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, who was responsible for all the signs and wonders and the thousands of conversions in response to his sermon? _____
