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SHAPING CHURCH CULTURE: TABLE FELLOWSHIP,
TEACHING, AND THE SPIRIT IN LUKE–ACTS

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SHAPING CHURCH CULTURE: TABLE FELLOWSHIP,
TEACHING, AND THE SPIRIT IN LUKE–ACTS

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I dedicate this dissertation to the Lord Jesus Christ, for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things; to my beautiful wife, Amy, “a lily among thorns,” who has persevered with me through all things and consistently has encouraged me to obey and love Christ in all things; and to my four children—Jenna Marie, Austin Lee, Mackenzie Grace, and Brooklyn Elise—each one a delight to my soul.

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important developments in leadership research to aid the church in Great Commission work is the study of organizational culture. Leaders neglect the reality of their church's organizational culture to their own detriment. In fact, in his groundbreaking work on organizational culture, Edgar Schein notes, "leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin."¹ Recent research in church organization and leadership has begun to include studies in organizational culture.² Yet no research has been conducted that examines organizational culture creation in the New Testament. What does organizational culture creation look like biblically? This research study examines Luke–Acts to discover how and to what effect the culture of the early church was shaped intentionally by Jesus and early church leaders.

Introduction to the Research Problem

The subject of culture has been explored for some time as a study in the fields of anthropology and sociology, categorizing the way humans relate to one another.³ Ward

¹ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2010), 3.

² See, for instance, Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013); Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2008); Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church From the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2005); and Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2000).

³ Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2011), 18.

notes, “Wherever two or more human beings are gathered, there is culture.”⁴ A seminal definition of culture comes from anthropologists Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action.⁵

According to this definition, culture is both inherent and expressed. It can be observed by decoding certain symbols and artifacts present within groups of humans. Understood this way, culture can be present among any group of humans, whether in a nation or ethnic group bound by common language or geography, or a trans-national organization such as a business or a church. It is the latter category, culture that is present in organizations, that is the concern of this project.

Leaders in secular organizations have realized the importance of understanding and shaping organizational culture. Within an organization, culture “consists of such things as shared values, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, norms, artifacts, and patterns of behavior.”⁶ Culture can be expressed and unexpressed, often denoting “‘how things are done around here.’ It reflects the prevailing ideology that people carry inside their heads.”⁷ Naturally, organizational leaders have been concerned with how organizational culture can be created and changed as needed. Many methodologies exist, including Harvard scholar John Kotter’s eight-step process of change, which encourages strategies

⁴ Angela Joan Ward, “Church Organizational Culture: Construct Definition and Instrument Development” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 1.

⁵ Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Random House, 1952), 357.

⁶ J. Steven Ott, *The Organizational Culture Perspective* (Pacific Grove, CA: The Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1989), 1.

⁷ Cameron and Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 19.

such as creating an increased sense of urgency about what changes need to occur, successful vision-casting, communication, and the importance of creating short-term wins.⁸ The ability to understand this underlying organizational ideology is often the difference between a leader's success and failure.

As noted above, recent work has been done on church organizational culture and change, though often with an exclusively practical focus.⁹ A church's culture is "the combined effect of the interacting values, thoughts, attitudes, and actions that define the life" of the church.¹⁰ A few significant church leaders grasp the importance of understanding and shaping their church's culture.¹¹ In fact, some pastors now claim that culture is "the most important social reality" in the church.¹² Yet despite the recent progress in understanding church organizational culture from a practical perspective, little research has been done on the biblical and theological foundations of organizational culture and change.¹³ Is intentional organizational culture creation something that is

⁸ John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 6.

⁹ Though this project will rely upon scholarly sources, the nature of this research requires engaging the work of practitioners as well. Several books oriented toward praxis will be referenced throughout this dissertation due to their relevance to the subject at hand. When researching the field of church culture, it is impossible to do so without taking under consideration the experience and work of those who serve in church contexts. Organizational theory is most helpful when it reflects *real-world* experience.

¹⁰ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 7.

¹¹ Several prominent pastors have written books aimed at creating church culture, even though they may not frame their work in precisely that way. See, for instance, Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004); Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out Without Selling Out* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); and Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

¹² Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church From the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 3.

¹³ Angela Joan Ward includes a brief overview of the biblical and theological nature of organizational culture in Ward, "Church Organizational Culture," 10–29.

modeled in Scripture? While shaping church culture makes practical sense to many church leaders, does it have a biblical precedent? This dissertation seeks to fill the void in the research by exploring the degree to which intentional creation of organizational culture may be present in Luke–Acts.

The research concern for this dissertation is to examine Luke–Acts in order to explore how Jesus and the early church may have embedded organizational culture, and to suggest how to apply those methodological approaches in shaping organizational culture in the modern church. Organizational culture, as it relates to the church, will be defined as a church’s “beliefs, values, and their expression (some form of outward behavior).”¹⁴ This definition closely parallels Edgar Schein’s three-part conception of organizational culture as an organization’s artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions.¹⁵ One of the research assumptions for this project is that the nascent Christian movement in the first century A.D. in its various developments (i.e., the early disciples of Jesus, the early church, etc.) can be categorized as a formal organization with leaders, followers, and purposes, and can be examined through the rubric of beliefs, values, and behaviors.

This project will include an inductive survey of Luke–Acts. First, the Gospel of Luke will be surveyed to discover how Jesus shaped the culture among his disciples. The methodologies Jesus may have employed and their effectiveness also will be reviewed. Second, a survey of the book of Acts will be conducted to discover how the organizational culture of the early church was shaped. These texts will be explored to see what evidence exists of organizational culture creation in the first century church. Once the means of shaping culture have been identified, this dissertation will reflect on how

¹⁴ Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 20.

¹⁵ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 24.

these insights might guide leaders in shaping organizational culture in the modern church. The culture-shaping methodologies in these texts will be considered as a representative sampling of organizational culture creation methodologies in the New Testament.¹⁶ Other Old Testament and New Testament texts may be referenced but only in support of the main texts under consideration.

Specifically, the texts under consideration reflect the culture of early Christianity from an organizational perspective and demonstrate the various means employed by early Christian leaders to shape that culture. When these texts are taken together, they provide insight into the organizational culture of the early church. While these texts may not account for every aspect of the early church's cultures, they provide enough information to get a generalized understanding of the behaviors, values, and beliefs of the early church.

The first section of Scripture, the Gospel of Luke, describes how Jesus shaped the culture of his followers by clearly communicating what they should believe, what they should value, and how they should act. There are many ways Jesus embedded culture among his followers. For instance, Jesus outlined a kingdom manifesto in the Sermon on the Plain, explaining the way His disciples needed to live and creating a unique culture distinct from that of the surrounding society (Luke 6:17–49). This contrast between cultures is observable, for instance, in the way Jesus confronted the evil practices of the Pharisees (Luke 11:37–54). Additionally, Jesus corrected His disciples' wrong thinking about what involvement in the kingdom entailed. He taught them that

¹⁶ The rationale for selecting these texts is that they are broad enough to give a sweeping overview of both Jesus and the early church, but narrow enough to be thorough. Luke details the practices of the earliest Christian community. Acts is the most detailed account of early church life. Although the Pastoral Epistles and other New Testament books are helpful writings to examine, much has been written examining early church culture in these books already; see, for instance, James W. Aageson, *Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) and Gordon D. Fee, "Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, with Further Reflection on the Hermeneutics of *Ad Hoc* Documents," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 2 (June 1985): 141–51.

following Him involved serving, humility, and deference (Luke 9:46–48). This established a cultural expectation among His followers that challenged their assumptions. As this dissertation will bear out, of the many ways Jesus shaped the culture of his followers there is no more prominent means than through table fellowship. Table fellowship is a dominant motif in Luke. It was through the exertion of personal influence in the context of eating that Jesus most prominently shaped the culture of his followers.

The second section of Scripture, the book of Acts, details the life and culture of the early church. For instance, Acts 2:42–47 explains how the early church had a culture of teaching, fellowship, prayer, hospitality, unity, generosity, community, and worship. These “artifacts” of culture display the early church’s beliefs and values. Additionally, intentional culture shaping seems observable in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35). This dissertation will trace the prominence of the speeches in Acts as a primary means for shaping church culture. It will also trace the central role the Holy Spirit played in shaping early church culture.

These texts seem to describe the usage of intentional methodologies for organizational culture creation. Church culture in the New Testament was shaped through various means. In Jesus and the early church, intentional culture creation appears to be evident through embedding mechanisms such as lifestyle example (i.e., welcoming of the children to demonstrate the nature of the kingdom in Luke 18:15–17), preaching and teaching (i.e., the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, and the encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24), the written word (i.e., the letter to Gentile believers from the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:22–29), church councils (such as the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15), personal encouragement (such as the instruction of Apollos by Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18:26, and the meal at Zacchaeus’ house in Luke 19:1–11), and correction (such as Jesus’ encounter in the temple in Luke 19:45–48). This dissertation will argue that a prominent means for shaping culture in Luke is table

fellowship. It will argue that a prominent means for shaping culture in Acts is teaching. It will argue additionally that the Spirit played a critical role in shaping church culture in Acts.

Significance of the Research

The aim of this research is to explore the degree to which intentional organizational culture creation may be present in the New Testament and to describe the various methodologies employed to shape church culture. While many studies exist which treat organizational culture in general, there is a void in the literature for a biblical survey of the creation and presence of organizational culture in the New Testament. This study will provide a description of what intentional organizational culture creation may look like biblically. This is significant in several ways.

First, the principles discovered in the early teachings and practices of the early church may serve as a model for modern churches that desire to pattern themselves after the New Testament church. Should modern church leaders care about intentional organizational culture creation, and if so, how should they go about shaping organizational culture? If any culture-methodologies are present in the leadership of the early church of the New Testament, it may be beneficial to the modern church to take those methodologies into consideration.

Second, this study can prompt a paradigm shift for approaching church leadership research. Much study on church leadership in the past three decades has focused on church growth methodologies.¹⁷ Criticism of the church growth movement has included things such as “a preoccupation with ‘numbers,’ inappropriately overlaying

¹⁷ Seminal works in the church growth movement include Charles L. Chaney, *Design for Church Growth* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1978); C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984); Lyle E. Schaller, *44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987); Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); and Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1998).

‘business practices’ on the church without theological critique,” and an emphasis on “‘transfer growth’ from neighboring churches and not true ‘conversion growth.’”¹⁸ More recently, research has shifted to emphasize the importance of church health.¹⁹ The implications of the current project should prove that developing biblical organizational culture is at the heart of church health. The emphasis of church leaders should be focused more on church health through organizational culture creation and less on church growth methodologies. Healthy church growth occurs only when healthy church culture is created.²⁰

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how and to what effect Jesus and early church leaders shaped church organizational culture in the New Testament by surveying Luke–Acts in order to discover methodological application for organizational culture creation and change in the modern church.

Research Questions

The following questions are the primary research questions driving this study:

1. In what ways and through what means did Jesus and early church leaders shape the culture of the early church?
2. How and to what effect did Jesus shape early church culture through table fellowship?
3. How and to what effect did early church leaders shape early church culture through teaching?
4. How and to what effect did the Holy Spirit shape early church culture?

¹⁸ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 31.

¹⁹ One of the first books to focus on church health is Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

²⁰ Though not written with a view toward the church, Patrick Lencioni has published a work arguing that the single most important factor of an organization’s success is organizational health. See Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2012).

Delimitations of the Study

To narrow the scope of this project, the following delimitations characterize this research. First, this research will not seek to extrapolate the findings of the study to every organization. Due to the nature of the texts under consideration, the research findings will necessarily be limited to organizational culture in the context of the church. While implications from church organizational culture may be applicable to other organizations, there is not a one to one comparison between the church and other formal organizations such as a business, an institution of higher learning, a parachurch ministry, or a non-profit organization. Fundamentally, the purposes of the church are distinct from other organizations, though some similarities exist. The church is called to carry out the Great Commission (Acts 1:8), while other Christian organizations serve to support the church in the fulfillment of her mission.

Second, the proposed research project will not examine the selected texts in the New Testament in order to discover implications for leadership in general or for organizational management. Although these closely related cognate studies bear importance and relevance to the subject of organizational culture, the present study will be limited to exploring the selected texts to understand the presence and creation of church organizational culture in particular.

Third, the proposed research project will not examine the biblical text as a whole, but only Luke–Acts, which describes both the life and teachings of Jesus and the history of the early church.²¹ Due to the limitations of the current project, this dissertation will narrow the focus to selected texts in the New Testament by surveying Luke–Acts to explore the degree to which intentional culture creation may be present in the teaching

²¹ The rationale for selecting these texts for examination is that they are representative of the teaching and praxis of Jesus and the early church. These texts are a representative sample of organizational culture creation in the New Testament. Conducting a survey of every book of the New Testament is not within the scope of this project. Luke–Acts is unique in that together they are broad enough to cover both Jesus and the early church. Additionally, they are penned by one author, so they contain a consistent perspective on Jesus and the early church.

and praxis of Jesus and the early church. Future research may be needed to evaluate the presence of organizational culture in the Old Testament or in other New Testament texts. Further research also may be needed to understand organizational culture from a strictly theological or biblical–theological perspective.²²

Limitation of Generalization of Research Findings

The selected texts are representative of the teaching of the rest of the New Testament generally, since it takes into consideration Jesus and the early church. Therefore, the research findings in the selected texts will be generalized to represent the teaching of the New Testament as a whole. Furthermore, although this project does not include an analysis of Old Testament texts, and although it is assumed that organizational culture in the Old Testament bears some significant differences from organizational culture in the New Testament, the generalization of this research should be considered as representative of a “biblical” model of church organizational culture, since Scripture does not contradict Scripture. The church is a unique creation, but no principles that guide the organizational practice of the church in the New Testament contradict any teaching of the Old Testament. Lastly, since the present research is an examination of both prescriptive and descriptive biblical texts, the application of the research will be considered pertinent for understanding the organizational culture of the modern church.

Terminology and Definitions

There are several core terms that are used throughout this study. For the sake of clarity and consistency, the following definitions will be utilized.

Behaviors. Behaviors are the expressions of culture. Expression of culture

²² A theological approach to this field of study might include the determination of the implications of the Doctrine of Man for organizational culture. A biblical–theological approach might trace the “horizontal” theme of the *people of God* to discover its impact on a Christian understanding of organizational culture.

“consists of its overt behavior or actions and artifacts (the results of behavior).”²³ This definition corresponds closely to Schein’s category of “artifacts.” Artifacts are the “visible products of the group.”²⁴

Beliefs. A church’s beliefs are convictions or opinions “that a person holds to be true . . . as based on limited proof.”²⁵ Beliefs are presuppositional assumptions. Beliefs correspond closely to Schein’s category of “basic underlying assumptions.” These assumptions “tell group members how to perceive, think about, and feel about things.”²⁶

Church. The church has both an invisible and visible manifestation. As an invisible entity, “the church is the community of all true believers for all time.”²⁷ In this way, the church has a universal scope. As a visible entity,

The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit . . . Local churches are led by pastors (also called elders) and served by deacons, possess and pursue purity and unity, exercise church discipline, develop strong connections with other churches, and celebrate the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.²⁸

It is the local manifestation of the church that is within the interest and scope of the current project.²⁹

Church organizational culture. Also called *congregational culture*, church organizational culture includes “beliefs, values, and their expression (some form of

²³ Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 26.

²⁴ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 23.

²⁵ Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 60.

²⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 28.

²⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 853.

²⁸ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 29–30.

²⁹ Mark Dever gives a more succinct definition of the church: “The church is the body of people called by God’s grace through faith in Christ to glorify him together by serving him in his world.” Mark E. Dever, “The Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 768.

outward behavior).”³⁰ These categories correspond closely to Schein’s three-part definition of organizational culture. A church’s culture is “the combined effect of the interacting values, thoughts, attitudes, and actions that define the life” of the church.³¹

Culture. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn,

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action.³²

Organization. An organization has leaders, followers, and purposes. According to Robbins,

An organization is the planned coordination of the collective activities of two or more people who, functioning on a relatively continuous basis and through division of labor and a hierarchy of authority, seek to achieve a common goal or set of goals.³³

Organizational culture. Organizational culture includes an organization’s artifacts (observed behavior), espoused beliefs and values (ideals, goals, ideologies), and basic underlying assumptions (unconscious beliefs).³⁴

Organizational culture creation. Organizational culture creation is the intentional or unintentional shaping of an organization’s beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Teaching. Teaching is used as a sub-category of the preaching ministry of the church. Specifically, teaching is used in this dissertation to describe the five paraenetic sermons in Acts that are given to provide *instruction* to the believing community.³⁵ C. H.

³⁰ Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 20.

³¹ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 7.

³² Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *Culture*, 357.

³³ Stephen P. Robbins, *Organizational Theory: The Structure and Design of Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 5.

³⁴ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 24.

³⁵ The use of “teaching” in this manner does not imply that preaching is the only form of

Dodd differentiates between preaching the gospel to the lost (*kerygma*) and teaching that instructed the church (*didache*).³⁶ As he defines it, *preaching* is “the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world,” whereas *teaching* involves ethical instruction and sometimes the exposition of doctrine.³⁷ Teaching is addressed to “a congregation already established in the faith.”³⁸ While Dodd distinguishes between preaching and teaching, the terms will be used interchangeably in this dissertation. Teaching is used here, however, to distinguish between the paraenetic sermons that are addressed to the believing community and the kerygmatic sermons wherein the gospel is preached to the lost. Teaching refers to *paraenesis*, a kind of sermonic proclamation addressed “to *believers* for purposes of encouragement, edification, and/or instruction.”³⁹

Values. A church’s values are “the constant, passionate shared core beliefs that drive and guide the culture.”⁴⁰ Values differ from beliefs in that values are beliefs the organization actually acts on.⁴¹ Values correspond closely to Schein’s category of “espoused beliefs and values.” Espoused beliefs and values express an organization’s “sense of what ought to be, as distinct from what it is.”⁴²

teaching in the New Testament or even in Acts. Other teaching methodologies exist in the practice of the early church, but the scope of this dissertation is to examine only the teaching sermons in Acts.

³⁶ C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), 50–51.

³⁷ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 7.

³⁸ Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 8.

³⁹ C. Richard Wells and A. Boyd Luter, *Inspired Preaching: A Survey of Preaching Found in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2002), 78. Emphasis original. For a survey of other terms used in the New Testament to describe preaching, see Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical–Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017).

⁴⁰ Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 40.

⁴¹ Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 41.

⁴² Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 25.

Research Assumptions

The research assumptions include a belief that the Bible is authoritative. To the degree the texts under consideration are interpreted correctly, the conclusions of the research for developing a biblical understanding of culture are not limited in terms of generalization for the church. A presupposition to this research is that the Scriptures are inerrant and provide sufficient evidence for determining the practices of organizational culture creation in Jesus and the early church.⁴³

It is also assumed that the church in the New Testament can be classified as a formal organization with leaders, followers, purposes, and goals. Although it has important differences from other organizations such as businesses or governments, for the purpose of this study the church will be classified as an organization. Yet, while the conclusions of this research may have some relevance for other formal organizations, the research project is designed for application to the church in particular. As a formal organization, it is assumed that elements of church organizational culture were present in the early church and that the culture of the church was shaped by Jesus and early church leaders.

General Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 has served as an introduction to the research problem. Thus far, the research problem has been defined, the research purpose and questions have been stated and delimited, and the assumptions, definitions, and significance of the research have been outlined. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the relevance of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 will review the most pertinent precedent literature in the field of organizational culture, situating the current dissertation within the literature and

⁴³ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references used in this dissertation are from the *Christian Standard Bible*.

synthesizing the research that has been done on the topic up to the present. Specifically, the chapter will review works on organizational culture and change, with a particular view toward the church, and review briefly the pertinent works on the selected New Testament texts, focusing on research that gives background information on Luke–Acts. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the void in the research on organizational culture and identify how the current dissertation fills the void. This chapter will explain additionally the methodology employed in this project. The methodology employed for the research will be an inductive survey of the texts under consideration. The research questions will be applied both to Luke and Acts and discussed in separate chapters.

Chapter 3 will commence the research into the text of Scripture itself. The Gospel of Luke will be surveyed to discover if evidence exists that Jesus intentionally shaped the organizational culture of his followers. The text will also be explored to discover the methodologies of culture creation that Jesus may have employed and whether or not they were successful. This chapter will analyze eleven key meal scenes in Luke’s gospel and draw implications for an understanding of how church culture is shaped around the dinner table. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how Jesus used table fellowship to shape the culture of his followers.

Chapter 4 will examine the book of Acts to explore the presence and creation of organizational culture in the early church. The chapter will survey Acts to discover how and to what effect early church leaders may have shaped the organizational culture of the early church. This chapter will analyze five paraenetic sermons in Acts to discover the role these sermons played in shaping early church culture. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how early church leaders used teaching to shape the culture of the early church.

Chapter 5 will be a continuation of a study on the book of Acts. The chapter will describe the role the Holy Spirit played in shaping the culture of the early church.

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the role the Spirit played in shaping church culture. The chapter will include a general overview of the Spirit's role in Acts, a ten-part categorization of the Spirit's activity in the church, as well as two case studies of culture change in which the Spirit's role was central. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the Holy Spirit's central role in shaping the culture of the early church. Healthy church culture change, therefore, will rely upon the wisdom, guidance, and power of the Spirit.

Chapter 6 will conclude the dissertation by summarizing the discoveries of the research. It will summarize the contribution this dissertation made to the precedent literature and outline areas for future research. It will also make application of the research results and outline implications for the modern church. The purpose of this chapter is to conclude the research project.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this chapter is to review the relevant precedent literature on organizational culture and situate the current research dissertation within that literature. This chapter will demonstrate that a void exists in the current literature on organizational culture because the biblical text has yet to be examined to determine the ways in which culture may have been embedded among Jesus' followers and the early church.¹ Since the field of organizational culture is a relatively new area of study, the existing methodologies of organizational theorists are modern. Therefore, there is value in examining the biblical material, particularly Luke–Acts, to see in what ways and to what effect Jesus and early church leaders shaped the organizational culture of the early church.²

This chapter also will include a description of the research methodology of this project. Rather than taking a modern theory of organizational culture creation and

¹ Several works approach church organizational culture from a practical perspective, but no substantive biblical–theological foundational work on organizational culture exists. Angela Joan Ward provides a section in her doctoral dissertation in which she briefly surveys the concept of organizational culture from a biblical–theological perspective, but it is not exhaustive or sufficient for the purposes of the present research. See Angela Joan Ward, “Church Organizational Culture: Construct Definition and Instrument Development” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 10–29. Andy Crouch argues that Jesus intentionally created culture, but his focus is on culture in general, not on organizational culture. Further, while Crouch briefly mentions some ways Jesus created culture, he does not examine thoroughly the means Jesus used to shape culture. See Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

² One of the research assumptions for this project is that the Bible is inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient for all things pertaining to life, including how organizational life is conducted. From a Christian perspective, understanding a biblical model of culture creation is important because the text of Scripture bears weight for how a Christian lives. If a particular model of culture creation is present in the text, it should influence how churches think about organizational culture creation. However, care needs to be exercised in approaching the text, especially narrative, to differentiate between what is prescriptive for the church and what is merely descriptive.

imposing it onto the text to discover if the model is present, the text will be approached on its own terms. An inductive survey methodology will be employed as Luke–Acts is examined to identify any potential culture creation methodologies in the first century church. This methodology will aid in preventing an anachronistic or eisegetical approach to the text.³

There are several important developments in the field of organizational culture. Organizational culture creation in the church and other organizations is grounded in an understanding of organizational culture itself, and the study of organizational culture is itself rooted in an understanding of culture. Each of these areas will be explored in order to attain a thorough comprehension of the current research on organizational culture as well as demonstrate the need for the current research.

Culture

Culture is everywhere. Ward notes, “Wherever two or more human beings are gathered, there is culture Culture is pervasive.”⁴ In his classic work on the subject of a Christian’s place in culture, Richard Niebuhr referred to culture as

that total process of human activity and that total result of such activity to which now the name *culture*, now the name *civilization*, is applied in common speech It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values.⁵

Niebuhr described several characteristics of culture. He argued that since culture is “bound up with man’s life in society, it is always *social*.”⁶ Therefore, although

³ This is not to say that certain elements of culture creation are not present in the text. For instance, a common culture creation method is to create a sense of urgency. Jesus did this often, such as in his use of eschatological parables (e.g., Luke 12:35–40). However, if the current research hypothesis was to identify the presence of a particular organizational culture creation model as a whole in Luke–Acts, it would not be corroborated by the text.

⁴ Ward, “Church Organizational Culture,” 1.

⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 32.

⁶ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32.

culture is obviously a study in anthropology, it must also be understood as a study in sociology, categorizing the way humans relate to one another.⁷ Schein made a similar observation: “Culture can be thought of as the foundation of the social order that we live in and of the rules we abide by.”⁸ Fundamentally, culture is created as humans interact with one another. Culture is not static in that regard because as human relations change, culture changes.

Niebuhr further noted, “the world of culture is a *world of values*.”⁹ Culture is concerned with both the realization and the conservation of values.¹⁰ The importance of values in culture (both in general and organizationally) cannot be overstated, especially as it relates to the import of organizational culture creation in Luke–Acts. Culture influences what people believe and value, and how they behave. In this way, culture is about the ultimate nature of reality and thus shapes a person’s worldview. The renowned missiologist Lesslie Newbigin corroborates this point:

By the word culture we have to understand the sum total ways of living developed by a group of human beings and handed on from generation to generation . . . And one must also include in culture, and as fundamental to any culture, a set of beliefs, experiences, and practices that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which gives shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty.¹¹

If Jesus and early church leaders intentionally sought to create cultural norms among the nascent church, it is important to realize that they were in reality making claims about where their followers’ loyalties should lie. This is important for the

⁷ Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2011), 18. Cameron and Quinn note that the sociological perspective on cultural studies is the predominant one.

⁸ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2010), 3.

⁹ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 34. Italics original.

¹⁰ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 36–37.

¹¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3.

contemporary church because if a biblical model of organizational culture creation can be established, it has bearing on the church today. Jesus and early church leaders were making claims that affected people's allegiance. They created cultural norms that had not only social implications, but also moral and religious implications. They were making claims that vied for the loyalty of their followers. Thus, if Jesus created a culture of love among his followers, for instance, to reject that culture would be a rejection of his lordship and claim over their lives.

Though Niebuhr approaches the field of culture from a theological perspective, his definition of culture coincides with the secular theories on culture, which are numerous.¹² Geert Hofstede, a pioneer in the study of how culture influences the work place, stated that culture is "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another."¹³ One of the more precise definitions of culture approached from a secular perspective is given by anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn, who thoroughly summarize culture this way:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as producers of action, on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action.¹⁴

Their definition represents a common understanding of culture.¹⁵ Importantly, their definition includes several elements of culture that are central to an understanding of organizational culture. First, culture manifests itself behaviorally. Second, culture is

¹² Cameron and Quinn observe that as far back as early studies on culture in the 1950s, there were more than 160 definitions of culture. Cameron and Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 18.

¹³ Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1984), 21.

¹⁴ Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Random House, 1952), 357.

¹⁵ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 2.

embodied in artifacts that can be observed. Third, culture is about ideas or beliefs and their accompanying values.

Organizational Culture

Every organization has a culture embedded within it. Leaders who ignore the realities of culture do so to their detriment. There is a close relationship between an organization's culture and its identity.¹⁶ Culture in one sense defines an organization's identity. Culture "reflects the prevailing ideology that people carry inside their heads."¹⁷ Therefore, if a leader wants to transform the identity of the organization, the change must be approached at the level of culture. To this end, an understanding of the complexities of organizational culture is in order.

Elements of Organizational Culture

Theorists outline various approaches for delineating the specific elements of an organization's culture, but several common elements emerge in the literature. Ott lists seventy-three words and phrases used to describe organizational culture from fifty-eight major sources.¹⁸ In the early years of research, there were two major schools of thought for understanding organizational culture: the *adaptationist* school, which understood culture as observed behavior and things, and the *ideationalist* school, which understood culture as ideas, meanings, and values that are shared between members of a group.¹⁹

¹⁶ Mats Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 39–41.

¹⁷ Cameron and Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 19.

¹⁸ J. Steven Ott, *The Organizational Culture Perspective* (Pacific Grove, CA: The Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1989), 52–53. These include words such as assumptions, beliefs, celebration, customs, expectations, habits, identity, ideologies, meanings, norms, philosophy, purpose, rites, roots, sentiments, spirit, stories, style, symbols, thinking, traditions, understandings, values, vision, way, and worldviews.

¹⁹ Ott, *The Organizational Culture Perspective*, 54. Ott's observation is based on the work of R. M. Keesing. See R. M. Keesing, "Theories of Culture," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3 (1974): 73–79.

Schein, considered by many to be the “father of organizational studies,”²⁰ refined the conception of culture by synthesizing the two schools of thought. His analysis of organizational culture remains as the definitive approach in the literature.²¹ He classified organizational culture according to three basic elements: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. *Artifacts* are “the visible products of the group,” including such things as an organization’s physical environment, language, products, style, stories, behaviors, and observable rituals.²² Artifacts are “easy to see but hard to interpret without an understanding of the other [two] levels [of culture].”²³ *Espoused beliefs and values* are the ideals and aspirations of an organization. These are “confirmed only by the shared social experience of a group.”²⁴ These beliefs and values express “what ought to be, as distinct from what is.”²⁵ *Basic underlying assumptions* are an organization’s “unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values” that “determine behavior, perception, thought, and feeling.”²⁶ Because these assumptions develop at the level of the unconscious, they are difficult to change. This level of culture shapes worldview and can even provide a group’s members with “a basic sense of identity.”²⁷ According to Schein, an organization’s artifacts, beliefs and values, and assumptions comprise the major elements of its culture.

²⁰ Ward, “Church Organizational Culture,” 2.

²¹ Ott says, “Schein’s three-level model provides the most useful typology published . . . for classifying elements of organizational culture into usable groupings.” Ott, *The Organizational Culture Perspective*, 61.

²² Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 23–24.

²³ Vijay Sathe, *Culture and Related Corporate Realities: Text, Cases, and Readings on Organizational Entry, Establishment, and Change* (Homewood, IL: Irwin, 1985), 10.

²⁴ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 26.

²⁵ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 25. “What is” is contained in an organization’s artifacts.

²⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 24.

²⁷ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 29.

Cameron and Quinn have a similar analysis of organizational culture. They state that the majority of writers view organizational culture as “the taken-for-granted values, underlying assumptions, expectations, and definitions that characterize organizations and their members.”²⁸ This is consistent with Ott’s taxonomy of culture, wherein culture “consists of such things as shared values, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, norms, artifacts, and patterns of behavior.”²⁹

The central elements of assumptions, beliefs, values, and behaviors are common classifications of organizational culture. Bolman and Deal include other features common in the research literature, such as stories, heroes, and rituals.³⁰ These are important symbols that help create organizational culture.

Although the categories classified above mark the most salient features of organizational culture, there are less prominent elements of culture as well. For instance, Alvesson states that culture can be formed in an organization by such things as “jokes, coffee breaks, the way people dress, the functions or consequences of the corporation’s Christmas party, seating arrangements at meetings,” etc.³¹ Schein observed that an organization’s culture could be shaped by things such as the architecture of the organization’s building, the clothing of the employees, and even the technology used by the organization.³²

Research has been conducted on many of the sub-features of organizational culture. For instance, theorists have explored the impact of language on organizational

²⁸ Cameron and Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 18.

²⁹ Ott, *The Organizational Culture Perspective*, 1.

³⁰ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, & Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 248–62.

³¹ Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, 124.

³² Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 23.

culture.³³ The influence of organizational stories and scripts on culture has also been studied, as well as the importance of rituals and ceremonies.³⁴ Even the physical arrangements of organizational environments have been researched.³⁵ These and many other sub-features contribute to the development and composition of organizational culture, and can individually be categorized under one of the other three major culture elements.

Types of Organizational Cultures

While the elements of organizational culture can be classified on a micro-level, there are several types of organizational cultures that can be analyzed on a macro-level. Each of these macro-types also has the micro-elements of artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. These organizational macro-types are helpful in understanding what kind of organization it is whose culture is being analyzed. Schein traced three major organizational typologies: that of Harrison, Goffee and Jones, and Cameron and Quinn.³⁶

Harrison observed four different types of organizational cultures: power oriented, achievement oriented, role oriented, and support oriented. Power oriented organizations are characterized by authoritative leaders. Achievement oriented organizations focus on accomplishing results. Role oriented organizations are typically

³³ See for instance, M. Edelman, *Political Language: Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

³⁴ On stories and scripts, see J. Martin, "Stories and Scripts in Organizational Settings," in *Cognitive Social Psychology*, ed. A. H. Hastorf and A. M. Isen (New York: Elsevier/North-Holland, 1982), 255–305; A. L. Wilkins, "Organizational Stories as Symbols Which Control the Organization," in *Organizational Symbolism*, ed. L. R. Pondy, P. J. Frost, G. Morgan, and T. C. Dandridge (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1983), 81–92. On rites and ceremonies, see R. P. Gephart, "Status Degradation and Organizational Succession: An Ethno-Methodological Approach," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (December 1978): 553–81.

³⁵ F. I. Steele and S. Jenks, *The Feel of the Work Place* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1977).

³⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 166–68.

public bureaucracies. Support oriented organizations are nonprofit or religious organizations, such as churches.³⁷

Goffee and Jones identified organizational culture types based on the degree to which the organization upheld the virtues of solidarity (unity around the organization's mission) and sociability (camaraderie among the members of the organization). Using these dimensions, Goffee and Jones classified the following four organizational culture types: fragmented (wherein both the solidarity and sociability factors were low), mercenary (wherein the organization had more solidarity than sociability), communal (wherein the organization had more sociability than solidarity), and networked (wherein both the solidarity and sociability factors were high).³⁸

Cameron and Quinn found that there are four kinds of organizations, based on two dimensions: the degree of stability and flexibility within the organization and the degree to which the organization is externally or internally focused. On that basis, an organization can be characterized either as a hierarchy (internally focused and stable), a market (externally focused and stable), a clan (internally focused and flexible), or an adhocracy (externally focused and flexible).³⁹ Hierarchies typically are controlling cultures. Markets typically are competitive cultures. Clans typically are collaborative cultures. Adhocracies typically are creative cultures.⁴⁰

Martin approaches types of organizational culture from a different perspective than the three major typologies outlined above. She presents three views on organizational culture: integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. The integration

³⁷ R. Harrison, "Understanding Your Organization's Character," *Harvard Business Review* 57, no. 5 (1979): 119–28.

³⁸ R. Goffee and G. Jones, *The Character of a Corporation* (New York: Harper Business, 1998).

³⁹ Brody Heritage, Clare Pollock, and Lynne Roberts, "Validation of the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument," *PLoS ONE* 9, no. 3 (March 2014): 2.

⁴⁰ Cameron and Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 41–51.

perspective values egalitarianism, innovation, and employee well-being.⁴¹ The differentiation perspective questions egalitarianism and places less of an emphasis on innovation and employee well-being than the integration perspective does, but can be more efficient than the integration approach is.⁴² The fragmentation perspective values ambiguity and diversified methods in the organization, which can result in confusion about egalitarianism, innovation, and well-being.⁴³ Each perspective brings organizational merits and deficiencies.

The typologies listed above have some relevance for the current research project, but perhaps approaching organizational culture this way obscures more than clarifies. For the purpose of the present research, it is most helpful to differentiate between the organizational culture in businesses and governments, and church organizational culture. While the church in the New Testament can be classified as a formal organization with leaders, followers, purposes, and goals, it has important differences from other formal organizations. For instance, while businesses and governments can coerce cooperation to some degree, participation in a church is voluntary. While organizational culture analysis for businesses and governments must address employee–employer relationships, the church must address pastor–member relationships. These distinctions, among others, should not be overlooked.

Therefore, while the typologies described above may very well describe certain aspects of the church, it is important to classify church organizational culture as a separate type of organizational culture from businesses or governments. The present research may have some relevance for other formal organizations, but it is designed primarily for application to the church. As the research progresses through Luke–Acts,

⁴¹ Joanne Martin, *Cultures in Organizations: Three Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), loc. 1129–1722, Kindle.

⁴² Martin, *Cultures in Organizations*, loc. 2001–2780.

⁴³ Martin, *Cultures in Organizations*, loc. 3118–3993.

elements of organizational culture may be expected to differ significantly from that which is found in the literature base, which addresses organizations of a different type than the church.⁴⁴

Origin of Organizational Culture

Where does organizational culture originate? Ott traced three general sources of organizational culture: “the broader societal culture in which an organization resides, the nature of an organization’s business or business environment, and the beliefs, values, and basic assumptions held by the founder(s) or other early dominant leader(s).”⁴⁵ Ott believed organizational culture could be shaped externally (by environments or society in general) or internally (by the inherent nature of the organization or the influence of the founder or other leaders). There certainly are external influences on organizational culture. This is observed when a company adapts a product based on the market or the competition, for instance. However, the development of the organizational culture is driven more directly by internal influences such as leadership.

Schein classified the sources of culture differently. He focused more on the internal influences of the organization on shaping culture, although he recognized that new members or leaders in the organization may also bring an external influence with them into the organization. Schein says,

Cultures basically spring from three sources: (1) the beliefs, values, and assumptions of founders of organizations; (2) the learning experiences of group members as their organization evolves; and (3) new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and new leaders.⁴⁶

Both Ott and Schein mention the centrality of leadership in shaping culture. It

⁴⁴ This is true even of the practical literature on organizational culture. For an example of a practical approach to organizational culture for a business, see James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: Harper Business, 1994).

⁴⁵ Ott, *The Organizational Culture Perspective*, 75.

⁴⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 219.

is intuitive to recognize that “an organization’s culture derives from its antecedent leadership.”⁴⁷ Lencioni correctly argues that members of an organization will imitate the actions and attitudes of the leaders.⁴⁸ Kane–Urrabazo agrees: “The attitudes, values and behaviors of an institution begin with its leadership.”⁴⁹ There is no more important influence in shaping an organization’s culture than the leadership of the organization.

Yet while leaders play an important role in shaping organizational culture, leadership is not the only influence on the development of the culture. Bolman and Deal introduce an important conundrum by stating, “There is a long-standing controversy about the relationship between culture and leadership. Do leaders shape culture, or are they shaped by it?”⁵⁰ In a sense, the leader exists in a reciprocal relationship with the organization wherein the leader both shapes and is shaped by the culture. An organization’s culture can even determine the kind of leader the organization acquires.⁵¹ Beyond this, an organization’s culture can shape and change the leader. For instance, if a new pastor attempts to lead his congregation through a change process and consistently encounters resistance, over time this may cause him to forsake future change initiatives. Organizational culture occurs through both leadership and “socialization.”⁵²

In this regard, culture can be shaped not only from “top–down” leadership but

⁴⁷ Bernard M. Bass and Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Management Applications* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 749.

⁴⁸ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2002), 219–20.

⁴⁹ Christine Kane–Urrabazo, “Management’s Role in Shaping Organizational Culture,” *Journal of Nursing Management* 14, no. 3 (April 2006): 193.

⁵⁰ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 264.

⁵¹ Bass and Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 754.

⁵² Sergiu Mateiu, Vasile Puiu, and George–Constantin Puiu, “A Possible Design Model of the Organizational Culture,” *Revista Academiei Fortelor Terestre* 70, no. 2 (2013): 173.

also from “bottom-up” influences.⁵³ That is, collective members can have significant influence in shaping the culture of an organization, and even the leader of the organization. In some sense, organizational culture is “socially constructed—created and preserved—by groups of people who work together for an organization.”⁵⁴ The truth of this observation is demonstrated, for instance, when a leader leaves an organization but the culture remains intact. This elevates the influence of an organization’s members in shaping and perpetuating culture. Indeed, one of the proofs that the culture of an organization has changed is if the change continues among the members of the organization after the leader has left.

However culture is created, the most important observation at this point is that even though organizational culture will evolve naturally due to internal and external influences, it can be shaped intentionally. Leaders and members of the organization have the opportunity to shape, change, and perpetuate culture through means that will be explored later. This is important because every organization faces influences that shape culture both intentionally and unintentionally. The most effective leaders intentionally shape the culture of their organization, even in the church. It is the thesis of this research project that Jesus and early church leaders intentionally shaped the organizational culture of the nascent Christian church.

Church Organizational Culture

Because churches are unique organizations, one might assume that the traits of organizational culture in general are absent from the church. However, “culture is the most important social reality in [the] church.”⁵⁵ Like organizations of other kinds,

⁵³ Christiane Demers, *Organizational Change Theories: A Synthesis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 146.

⁵⁴ Richard J. Black, “Organisational Culture: Creating the Influence Needed for Strategic Success” (MBA diss., Henley Management College, 2004), 16.

⁵⁵ Robert Lewis and Warne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the*
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churches have a unique culture. This culture may be difficult to discern, but it plays an important role in everything the church does. Therefore, pastors need to realize the importance of organizational culture and understand that as a leader of an organization they play an important role in “forming, changing, and managing the culture of the organizations they lead . . . Pastors must understand that they usually are not just spiritual shepherds, but leaders of an organization that has its own culture and subcultures.”⁵⁶

Malphurs adapts Schein’s description of organizational culture by explaining that congregational culture is exhibited in a church’s behavior (artifacts), values (espoused beliefs and values), and beliefs (basic underlying assumptions). A church’s *behavior* includes “all that you would see, hear, and feel as you first encounter the congregation.”⁵⁷ Worship style, the nature of the sermon, the ways in which members interact with each other, church signage, etc., are all behavioral artifacts of the church’s culture. A church’s *values* are “its beliefs that it actually acts on.”⁵⁸ If the church believes evangelism is important, it only becomes a value when church members actually evangelize. Values denote what the church cares about the most. A church’s *beliefs* are presuppositional in nature. Malphurs says, “a belief is a conviction or opinion that a person holds to be true about the church and its world as based on limited proof.”⁵⁹ Significantly, the church may not always act on its beliefs (when beliefs are acted upon they become values), but they all have beliefs. Beliefs form the deepest layer of culture. Any organizational change in values and behaviors must occur at the level of a church’s

Inside Out (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 3.

⁵⁶ Ward, “Church Organizational Culture,” 3.

⁵⁷ Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 27.

⁵⁸ Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 41.

⁵⁹ Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 60.

beliefs or assumptions, which is the most difficult level to change.⁶⁰

Lewis and Cordeiro note that a church's culture can be discovered by analyzing the church's leadership, values, vision statement, symbols, ceremonies, and celebrations.⁶¹ Mancini says that a church's culture is "the combined effect of the interacting values, thoughts, attitudes, and actions that define the life [of the church]."⁶² He lists things such as leaders, gifts, heritage, experiences, tradition, values, personality, and motivation as parts of a church's culture.⁶³ Every church's culture is "unmistakably unique and incomparably different."⁶⁴ It is the role of church leaders to discover the unique culture of their church and move toward clarifying, articulating, and advancing a vision that captures the church's unique potential.

There are several practical works that equip churches to develop healthy church organizational culture.⁶⁵ One of the first books of this kind was written by mega-church pastor Rick Warren, who stated that the most important issue facing the church was developing church health.⁶⁶ For Warren, church health resulted from aligning the church's purposes with five biblical priorities: worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship.⁶⁷ Not only do these priorities provide a structure for the ministries and

⁶⁰ Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 57.

⁶¹ Lewis and Cordeiro, *Culture Shift*, 48.

⁶² Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 7.

⁶³ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 8–9.

⁶⁴ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 6.

⁶⁵ As noted in the previous chapter, the contribution of practitioners needs to be considered in research of this kind. Organizational theory must be wedded to organizational praxis. Thus, praxis-oriented books are relevant for consideration in this dissertation because these practitioners are seeking to understand and shape church culture in *real-world* environments.

⁶⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 17.

⁶⁷ Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, 103–6.

staff alignment of the church, they give shape to the church's "clear-cut identity."⁶⁸ The church's culture was built around alignment to the five purposes for the church.

More recently, Dever has defined nine marks of healthy church culture, including expository preaching, biblical theology, biblical church discipline, a concern for discipleship and growth, biblical church leadership, and a correct understanding of the gospel, conversion, evangelism, and church membership.⁶⁹ Stetzer and Rainer developed a "scorecard" for assessing healthy church culture, marking the degree to which a church has a missionary mentality, vibrant leadership, relational intentionality, prayerful dependence, worship, community, and mission.⁷⁰ Montgomery and Cosper have created a "Faithmapping" plan for creating healthy church culture. Their model centers on showing how "the gospel, the church, and our mission are a coherent, organic, interrelated whole."⁷¹ They focus on developing church members' identities as worshipers, family, servants, disciples, and witnesses.⁷² Matthew McCraw traced how seven intentional practices were present among churches that had created a healthy church culture, including such elements as an emphasis on the gospel, community, Scripture, and a commitment to values such as training and humility.⁷³

There are several models for understanding church organizational culture. Yet

⁶⁸ Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, 82.

⁶⁹ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

⁷⁰ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010).

⁷¹ Daniel Montgomery and Mike Cosper, *Faithmapping: A Gospel Atlas for Your Spiritual Journey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2013), 26.

⁷² Montgomery and Cosper, *Faithmapping*, 103.

⁷³ McCraw summarizes the seven practices present among churches with a healthy church culture as following: Community, Gospel, Bible, Training/Education, Empower, Humility, and Model/Example. See Matthew Curtis McCraw, "Intentionally Creating Healthy Organizational Culture in the Local Church: A Multiple Case Study" (EdD Thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

despite these practical approaches to church culture, no thorough treatment of the biblical foundations of organizational culture has been made. There has been some important research on creating organizational culture, both in secular organizations and in the church, but a biblical approach for organizational culture creation has yet to be developed. Before conducting research into a biblical model, however, it is important to overview previous research in organizational culture creation.

Organizational Culture Creation

There are several different perspectives on how organizational culture is created, as has been briefly mentioned previously. However, before examining those perspectives, it is important to note that the church should engage culture. In Niebuhr's classification of how Christ and culture interact, he noted that Christ transforms culture.⁷⁴ In this view, the gospel was not about "the establishing of a new society so much as the conversion of existent society."⁷⁵ Christ enacted "the conversion of mankind from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness."⁷⁶ Christ engaged existing cultures and transformed them to demonstrate the reign of God. Demers notes that "actors and the processes through which they construct the organization" often change an organization's culture.⁷⁷

As this dissertation will bear out, Christ is the "Actor" behind the "actors" who enacts change within the church. Therefore, changing or creating organizational culture can be an act of discipleship, as church leaders imitate the example of Christ in seeking to bring Christ-centered culture into existence. Andy Crouch helpfully states, "The only

⁷⁴ Niebuhr classified five models that he perceived throughout church history: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture. For more detail, see Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, xliii–lv.

⁷⁵ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, liv.

⁷⁶ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 225.

⁷⁷ Demers, *Organizational Change Theories*, 232.

way to change culture is to create more of it.”⁷⁸ According to Crouch, joining God in His culture–shaping mission is an integral part of discipleship.⁷⁹ With that observation taken into consideration, what is the manner in which organizational culture should be shaped?⁸⁰

There are several seminal works in the field of organizational culture creation.⁸¹ Kurt Lewin developed one of the foundational theories on shaping organizational culture. He described three steps: “unfreezing” the cultural norms, developing new behaviors and values in the organization, and “refreezing” the new cultural norms by reinforcing them through policies, structures, etc.⁸² An example of where this methodology reflects what occurs in the biblical text can be seen in Jesus’ correction of the Pharisees’ view of the Sabbath (Luke 14:1–6). He “unfreezes” their previous ideas and enculturates them with a new understanding of the Sabbath, “refreezing” a new cultural norm among his followers.

Edgar Schein believed culture formation was a result of both the influence of leadership and the shared experiences of the group. Leaders shape culture through “embedding mechanisms,” such as how leaders allocate resources, how they allocate rewards and status, how they recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate, how they react to organizational crises, what they pay attention to, measure, and control, and through

⁷⁸ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 67.

⁷⁹ Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, 201.

⁸⁰ It is important to note that organizational culture creation processes are closely related to organizational change processes because organizational culture is not created *ex nihilo*. Culture creation occurs as a previous cultural norms shift into new cultural norms. In other words, new cultures do not appear in isolation from the already existent cultural norms. To that end, most of the literature about culture creation lists embedding mechanisms, etc., as a subtopic of organizational change.

⁸¹ There are several practical works on shaping organizational culture and change. For an example, see Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

⁸² Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

deliberate teaching and coaching.⁸³ Schein remarks, “Culture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated by leaders.”⁸⁴ At the same time, culture emerges as the group develops a “shared history,” whereby the beliefs and values of the organization are “confirmed only by the shared social experience of a group.”⁸⁵ These shared experiences happen through “originating event[s]” and “marker events” that give the organization meaning.⁸⁶ As the group shares experiences, they begin to develop shared assumptions ranging from the nature of their core mission to the kinds of acceptable and unacceptable behavior they expect from members of the group. The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–41) is an example of an originating event for the early church.

Laurie Lewis developed a different pathway for creating organizational change. She argues for a strategic communication approach. Every organization has *stakeholders*, “those who have a stake in an organization’s processes and or outputs.”⁸⁷ Lewis’ thesis is that by communicating with these stakeholders, organizational change can take place most effectively. Specifically, change “implementers” must communicate with stakeholders by interacting with their perspectives on the organization. Internal and external stakeholders will buy in to the vision for change as leaders or implementers create a narrative that resonates with the values and desires of the stakeholders. Her model is important because research indicates that a key for the success of one organization over another is the level to which the organization has “committed human forces.”⁸⁸ Communicating with key stakeholders enables a greater level of human

⁸³ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 236.

⁸⁴ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3.

⁸⁵ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 26–32.

⁸⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 198.

⁸⁷ Laurie K. Lewis, *Organizational Change: Creating Change through Strategic Communication* (Chichester, UK: Wiley–Blackwell, 2011), 8.

⁸⁸ Masoud Ghorbanhosseini, “The Effect of Organizational Culture, Teamwork and

commitment within the organization, especially in the case of a church, as a premium is set on the importance of communication between church leaders and stakeholders within the church, such as deacons and small group leaders. Jesus' extended teaching discourses in the Gospel of Luke (e.g. Luke 6:20–49) are good examples of Lewis' model.

Cameron and Quinn encourage an alternate, process-based approach to organizational change. They identify nine steps for culture change: leaders must reach a consensus regarding the current state of the organization, agree on the preferred future of the organization, determine what the changes will be, identify stories illustrating the preferred culture, create a strategic action agenda, create immediate small wins, discover leadership implications, maintain accountability, and develop a communication strategy.⁸⁹ This model is very similar to that developed by Egan, who frames change in three stages: an analysis of the current scenario, an agreement about the preferred scenario, and a strategy to arrive at the preferred scenario.⁹⁰

Both of the previous models were built on the foundation laid by Harvard scholar John Kotter, who introduced a similar model of organizational change that has become a standard in the field. He suggests that change occurs as leaders create a sense of urgency, build a guiding team, get the vision right, communicate in such a way as to create buy-in, empower action by removing barriers to success, create short-term wins, create wave after wave of change and thus solidify the change, and make change stick by continuing to communicate the new culture of the organization to new members.⁹¹ As

Organizational Development on Organizational Commitment: The Mediating Role of Human Capital,” *Tehnicki vjesnik* 20, no. 6 (2013): 1021.

⁸⁹ Cameron and Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 102.

⁹⁰ Gerard Egan, *Change—Agents Skills B: Managing Innovation and Change* (San Diego: University Associates, 1988), 6.

⁹¹ These eight steps are explained fully in John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002).

members of the organization “see” and “feel” the need for change, adaptation in the organization will occur.⁹²

Following Kotter’s methodology closely, Herrington, Bonem, and Furr adapted his approach for use in congregational culture change. Their approach to congregational change is known as the “Congregational Transformation Model.” Their eight-step process requires making personal preparation, creating urgency, establishing the vision community, discerning the vision and determining the vision path, communicating the vision, and reinforcing momentum through alignment.⁹³

Acknowledging the influence of Kotter on their model, they deviate from him somewhat by including disciplines within change leaders such as “deep spiritual vitality in their relationship to God” and a commitment to accountability within a team.⁹⁴ This makes their model distinct in that it addresses concerns that a Christian leader faces that secular leaders do not.

Thom Rainer also borrows heavily from Kotter’s work in his work on culture change in the church. His process for culture change includes steps such as prayer, communicating a sense of urgency, building a coalition, becoming a voice and vision of hope, moving from an inward focus to an outward focus, and consolidating change. Like Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, Rainer adapts his model to a Christian context, but many of the principles upon which he relies are based on Kotter’s influence.⁹⁵

Pastors Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro outline several considerations for shifting organizational culture in a church context. Reflecting a similar approach as

⁹² Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, 179.

⁹³ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 12–13.

⁹⁴ Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 97–98.

⁹⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2016).

Cameron and Quinn, their process begins with assessing the present culture and the role of the leader in shaping the future. Leaders must then list the values needed in the preferred culture and enlist buy-in from other leaders. Leaders must write and display the vision for the future and communicate it by living it out and teaching it. As members of the church begin to follow the example of the leadership and live out the new cultural norms, leaders should celebrate the wins and honor those who buy-in. Finally, leaders must constantly check and recheck whether or not the church is accomplishing the vision. This regular assessment will hold leaders accountable to the values of the new culture.⁹⁶

Conclusion

The examples above provide a broad research-driven theory base for church leaders who want to shape the organizational culture of their church. Furthermore, there is literature available to describe church culture change at a practical level.⁹⁷ Yet there is a void in the research available to church leaders. No research has been conducted to explore the degree to which the biblical text may inform modern organizational culture creation. This dissertation will fill the void in the research by surveying Luke-Acts to discover if organizational culture was created in the New Testament church, and if so, in what ways and to what effect.

What is clear from the literature is that both the leaders and members of an organization play an important role in creating and perpetuating organizational culture. This is significant for the church because it means that both church pastors and members have a responsibility to create and sustain a church culture that is Christ-centered and faithful to biblical norms. What is also clear from the literature is that organizational

⁹⁶ Lewis and Cordeiro, *Culture Shift*, 59–64.

⁹⁷ For a helpful example, see Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). A seminal work on church growth and health, Rainer essentially applies the work of Jim Collins' *Good to Great* to the church. Rainer identifies factors such as leadership, vision, and culture as vital components in changing church culture.

culture will change through natural transitions in the life of the organization and through intentional enculturation from leadership. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the church is always in danger of “mission drift,” whereby the culture unintentionally shifts into unbiblical practices. Church leaders must be intentional about shaping and reshaping the church organizational culture to fulfill biblical norms for the church. Intentionally shaping organizational culture “is less like laying fresh sod for manicured lawns and more like cultivating the soil for maximum growth.”⁹⁸ Pastors and church leaders should care about shaping their church’s culture because they desire the church to achieve maximum growth.

The way church leaders shape culture may mirror the methods present in the literature base in some ways and may depart from those methods in other ways. As will be discovered, some of the principles in the literature base may be present in the biblical material itself in certain cases, though the text will be surveyed in such a way that no theory or model is imposed onto the text. The survey of Luke–Acts will explore what organizational culture creation may have looked like in the early church.

Methodology

There are two possible methodological approaches to this research project: deductive and inductive surveys. The *deductive* approach to the text would require the interpreter to take a contemporary model of organizational culture creation and survey the text of Scripture to see if and in what ways that model might be present in the text. Deduction begins with an idea and then seeks to identify the presence of that idea in the text.⁹⁹ One might take Kotter’s model of organizational change and seek to find specific

⁹⁸ D. Michael Lindsay, *View From The Top: An Inside Look at How People in Power See and Shape the World* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2014), 70. Lindsay adds that shaping an organization’s culture is “an investment in future prosperity.”

⁹⁹ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 126.

examples in Luke–Acts where Jesus or early church leaders followed Kotter’s process. This method doubtfully would lead to helpful information (other than perhaps to justify one of the contemporary approaches). It is further unlikely that modern approaches such as Kotter’s would in fact be present in the text intact, though certain elements of modern models might be identifiable.

There are two problems with a deductive methodology. First, it has the danger of being eisegetical. Imposing an “alien” framework or model onto the text can do harm to an appropriation of the authorial intent of the text. The primary goal in interpreting Scripture is “to achieve a credible and coherent understanding of the text on its own terms and in its own context.”¹⁰⁰ To the degree possible, the interpreter needs to limit the influence of his own presuppositions so that the text is not interpreted in a light for which it was not intended.¹⁰¹

The second problem with the deductive method is that it can be anachronistic. Jesus and early church leaders could not have employed Kotter’s model of change, for instance, because Kotter’s model was not developed until centuries after Luke–Acts was written. Therefore, to approach the text deductively would be reading a modern framework onto the ancient text.¹⁰² The current research question is not if Jesus used a contemporary model. The current research question aims to discover through what means Jesus did create culture.

¹⁰⁰ Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 10.

¹⁰¹ Rudolf Bultmann famously argued that exegesis without presuppositions is impossible. However, a sound exegetical method minimizes the negative effects of modern presuppositions. See Rudolf Bultmann, “Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?” in *Existence and Faith: Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. Schubert Ogden (New York: Meridian, 1960), 342–51.

¹⁰² This anachronistic approach has been noted in relation to word studies. *Semantic anachronism* is “the reading of a later use of a word back into earlier literature.” Andreas J. Kostenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 633. See also D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 56.

The *inductive* approach to the text requires the interpreter to survey the text to discover the unique ways that Jesus and early church leaders created culture among the nascent Christian church. Induction begins by examining the contents of the text to discover the ideas present in the text itself.¹⁰³ This methodology is more consistent with sound hermeneutical principles because it protects the interpreter from “reading into” the text so that the research will avoid a “confirmation bias.”¹⁰⁴ The basic difference between the two methodologies is that one (deduction) asks the question, “Did Jesus and the early church leaders employ *A*, *B*, or *C* model to create organizational culture?” and the other (induction) asks the question, “What means, if any, *did* Jesus and the early church leaders employ to create organizational culture?”

The methodology of this project is inductively to survey the text to see how Jesus and the early church may have embedded culture.¹⁰⁵ Even in approaching the text this way, care needs to be exercised so that the authorial intent of the text is recognized. Was the purpose of Luke–Acts to demonstrate organizational culture creation methods? It would be hard to prove that it was. If that was not the purpose of the text, then the text must be approached in such a way that legitimate observations might be made about the text while at the same time not harming the intent of the text. Contemporary organizational culture models may be referenced throughout this dissertation project in order to compare and contrast what is discovered in Luke–Acts with the existing literature, but to the degree that it is possible (recognizing that interpretation without presupposition is impossible), the text will be surveyed to discover how Jesus and early

¹⁰³ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 126.

¹⁰⁴ Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ This survey will analyze both the events “behind the text” as well as Luke’s particular manner of telling about the events. In the case of Luke’s Gospel, for instance, both what Jesus said and how Luke recounts what Jesus said matter. For a discussion on the difference between looking at the text and looking at the events behind the text, see Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013).

church leaders may have shaped culture in nascent Christianity.

So how will the inductive method be applied? This project will survey Luke–Acts to discover how and to what effect Jesus and early church leaders attempted to shape the behavior, values, and beliefs of the early church.¹⁰⁶ Several interpretive principles will be observed.¹⁰⁷ In the Gospel of Luke, there are five important principles to note. First, certain initial questions (Who? What? When? Where? Why?) will be applied to the text.¹⁰⁸ Second, “interpretive instructions from the author himself” will be identified if they are present.¹⁰⁹ Third, repetition in the narrative will be noted, as this usually identifies central themes or keys to the meaning of the text.¹¹⁰ Fourth, the shifts in the narrative from story to teaching discourse will be observed carefully.¹¹¹ Fifth, attention will be given to understanding series of stories, with a special view to

¹⁰⁶ Behavior, values, and beliefs compose the make-up of a church’s culture. Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 20.

¹⁰⁷ These interpretive principles will be used as guidelines for surveying these texts under consideration, rather than “inviolable rules.” Abraham Kuruvilla suggests that hermeneutical principles should be considered as “rules of thumb” rather than “unassailable rules of nature.” Hermeneutical rules are “guardians,” whose purpose is “chaperoning the interpretation of the foundational text of the believing community.” See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 65–67.

¹⁰⁸ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 241. The hermeneutical method of interpreting narrative texts suggested by Duvall and Hays will be followed in this dissertation. They recommend a fairly standard approach to narrative interpretation. For similar approaches, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 153–73; Mark Allan Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 239–55.

¹⁰⁹ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 242. Duvall and Hays write, “Often a Gospel writer will help readers see his point by offering clues in the story’s introduction.” For instance, the information Luke offers about Jesus’ interaction with the Pharisees in Luke 15:1–2 is instrumental for understanding the stories of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Son in Luke 15:3–32. Powell notes that the author will often include comments that shape the way the text should be interpreted, particularly in regard to characters in the story. See Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 245.

¹¹⁰ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 243. See also Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 169.

¹¹¹ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 244. Kuruvilla argues that beyond the *semantics* of a text lies its *pragmatics*, and that the interpreter must discover what the biblical author is “doing” with what he is “saying.” See Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 48.

understanding the point the author was making by arranging the stories the way he did.¹¹²

In the book of Acts, the following interpretive principles will be employed. First, the research will seek Luke's purpose for writing to his original readers.¹¹³ Second, special attention will be given to the positive and negative patterns of the characters in the story.¹¹⁴ The text portrays the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) and the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:54–60) in quite different lights. When considering culture, these differences are important to note. Third, individual passages will be read “in light of the overall story of Acts and the rest of the New Testament.”¹¹⁵ This will guard against taking a mere description in the text as prescriptive for the modern church. Fourth, repeated patterns and themes will be identified.¹¹⁶ For instance, the Holy Spirit plays a central role in directing the work and culture of the early church (e.g., Acts 1:8, 2:4, 13:2, 16:7). Due to the prominence of this theme, it will warrant its own chapter.

Relevant portions of Luke–Acts will be analyzed section by section, with a chapter devoted to Luke and two chapters devoted to Acts. As the text is surveyed, particular attention will be paid to the ways in which Jesus and early church leaders shaped the behaviors, values, or beliefs of the disciples, as well as the extent to which those methodologies were effective. The hermeneutical principles outlined above will be taken into consideration as observations are made about organizational culture in the

¹¹² Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 244–46. Powell says, “Readers are expected to consider each new episode in light of what has gone before.” Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 244.

¹¹³ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 264. Osborne states that narratives are both “history and theology...brought together via a ‘story’ format.” See Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 154.

¹¹⁴ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 264. See also, Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 159–60.

¹¹⁵ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 265. Osborne notes that the story must be read at a macro level (the entire narrative) and the micro level (by individual periscopes or stories). See Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 168.

¹¹⁶ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 267. See also Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 248.

church.

Background Issues for Luke–Acts

The significance of this dissertation is that it fills the void in the literature on organizational culture by exploring the biblical text to identify how and to what extent Jesus and early church leaders shaped the organizational culture of the early church.¹¹⁷ Before commencing with the research into Luke–Acts, several background issues need to be addressed. The authorship, provenance, date, genre, and structure of the books will be briefly identified.

Authorship, Provenance, and Date

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are connected by virtue of common authorship. In fact, Luke and Acts comprise a two–volume work.¹¹⁸ The common authorship of Luke–Acts is the scholarly consensus, based on common prologues (Luke 1:1–4, Acts 1:1–3), language, style, and theology.¹¹⁹ Although the author is not explicitly named in either book, both internal and external evidences point to Luke as the author of both Luke and Acts. Luke was a doctor and a “dearly loved” friend of the Apostle Paul’s

¹¹⁷ This dissertation does not seek to fill a void in the research on Luke–Acts, but rather a void in the research on church organizational culture. This project seeks to apply current research about Luke–Acts to the field of church organizational culture so that biblical patterns for culture change might inform contemporary praxis.

¹¹⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *The Book of Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 18–19. See also Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 76; Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke–Acts* (London: SPCK, 1968), 10–11.

¹¹⁹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 203. Witherington concurs, noting “the testimony about Luke–Acts from both the manuscript evidence and the church fathers is basically unanimous. There seems to have been no dispute in the early church about the authorship of these documents.” See Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio–Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 56. As an example of common theology, Darrell Bock identifies the sending of the Spirit as a crucial thematic link between the ending of Luke and beginning Acts. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 7.

(Col 4:14). Internally, both the use of medical language in Luke–Acts¹²⁰ and the description of the author as a companion of Paul¹²¹ are evidences that Luke was the author. Externally, several of the Early Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus, ascribe Luke as the author.¹²²

The provenance of Luke is disputed. Although “there is not sufficient evidence to link the gospel definitely with any particular area,” traditional views include Achaia and Rome as the place of composition.¹²³ The geographical origin of Acts is also disputed and ultimately unknown, although some have suggested Antioch, Rome, or Ephesus.¹²⁴ The intended recipient was Theophilus, whose identity and location is unknown, though it has been suggested that he had a background in Judaism and the synagogue.¹²⁵ Beyond Theophilus, “it is almost certain that Luke had a broader audience than one individual in

¹²⁰ For more on this, see Adolf von Harnack, *Luke the Physician* (New York: Putnam, 1907); W. K. Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1882). See also Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 54. Keener notes that this may be a weak argument for Lukan authorship since “most of the alleged medical terms in Luke–Acts are widely attested outside medicine, such as in other historians... Nothing in Luke–Acts therefore demonstrates that its author was a physician.” Yet, Keener continues, “its language at least proves *consistent* with authorship by a physician.” See Keener, *Acts*, 50–51 (italics original). Keener recommends a more nuanced approach to the physician question in A. Weissenrieder, *Images of Illness in the Gospel of Luke: Insights of Ancient Medical Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

¹²¹ Note the use of the first-person plural “we” in the latter half of the book of Acts, such as in Acts 16:11. For more on Luke as a companion of Paul, see Keener, *Acts*, 49.

¹²² Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 205. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 414. Additionally, Justin Martyr notes the apostolic authority of Luke. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, in Roberts and Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 250–51.

¹²³ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 207. Bock suggests Caesarea, Rome, Antioch, or Greece as possible places of origin. See Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 18. Fitzmyer says the origin is “anyone’s guess.” See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX)*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1981), 57.

¹²⁴ Marshall, *Acts*, 48–49. Other suggested places of origin include Corinth, Achaia, Caesarea, Palestine, and Syria. For discussions of the various viewpoints, see Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 27; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1998), 54–55.

¹²⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 27–28.

mind.”¹²⁶ Because Luke used a Greek rhetorical style and did not assume his audience was familiar with Jewish customs, it is likely that the audience was Hellenistic.¹²⁷

There are a range of views regarding the dating of Luke and Acts. The most widely accepted date for the composition of Luke is between AD 75–90.¹²⁸ Most scholars date Acts between AD 80–95.¹²⁹ Yet, internal evidence suggests an earlier date for both books, since there is no reference to the Neroan persecution in either book and it is assumed that Judaism is still legal, a reality that would not have been the case after the Jewish rebellion in AD 66.¹³⁰

Genre, Purpose, and Structure

Both Luke and Acts can be described formally as *narrative*, though Duvall and Hays more specifically categorize Luke as “theological biography” and Acts as “theological history.”¹³¹ Luke “tells the ‘story’ of his protagonist Jesus Christ.”¹³² Acts is

¹²⁶ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 301. Schnabel says, “It is most plausible to assume a wide audience: such a large work is unlikely to have been written for one particular group or one specific church—it was most likely written for all the churches.” See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 38.

¹²⁷ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 64–65.

¹²⁸ David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 33. See also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 16. Carson and Moo suggest that Luke could have been written as early as the mid–late 60s. See Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 210. Morris concludes that a dating in the early 60s is most likely. See Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 28.

¹²⁹ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 297. Carson and Moo disagree with the scholarly consensus and date Acts in the mid–60s. Bruce agrees, arguing that since there is no mention of the Neroan persecution, the book must have been authored before AD 64. See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 12–14. Martin Hengel dates Acts between AD 80–90. See Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 66. Similarly, Fitzmyer puts the writing of Acts between AD 80–85. See Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 54.

¹³⁰ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 12–14. See also Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 300.

¹³¹ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 257. Richard Burridge traces the similarities of the gospels to ancient biographies. See Richard Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Greco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Bock concurs with Duvall and Hays, calling

a sequel to Luke and intends to show how “what Jesus began to do during his ministry on earth he now continues to do through his Spirit–empowered followers.”¹³³

The purpose of Luke’s Gospel was “to give an historical account which would form the basis for a sound Christian faith on the part of those who had already been instructed, perhaps imperfectly and incompletely, in the story of Jesus.”¹³⁴ Luke wrote to Theophilus, “so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:4). The purpose of Acts was to tell “the compelling story of the establishment of the first churches throughout the [Roman] empire.”¹³⁵ Luke wrote his second volume to Theophilus to describe how what God had begun in Jesus would continue in the church. Acts also serves to connect the Gospels and the Epistles.¹³⁶ The purpose of Luke–Acts, as a two–volume work, was to tell the story of Jesus and the early church, both what Jesus “began to do” (Acts 1:1) and what the church continued to do as they carried the mission of Jesus forward.¹³⁷

Luke employs a geographical structure for both Luke and Acts.¹³⁸ There are

Luke a “theological biography.” Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 46.

¹³² Michael Travers, “Luke,” in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 400.

¹³³ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 257. Keener notes that even though Luke and Acts have differences in sources, texture, and emphases, the authorial design of both books indicated a unity in the story contained therein. For Keener, Luke’s Gospel seems to be a “biographic volume in a two–volume history.” See Keener, *Acts*, 76–77.

¹³⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 40.

¹³⁵ Gary M. Burge, Lynn H. Cohick, and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament Within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 230.

¹³⁶ Steve Walton, “Acts,” in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book–by–Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 80.

¹³⁷ Schnabel states, “Acts is a biographical history of important developments in earliest Christianity. Luke–Acts, the two–volume work, is a historical report about ‘Jesus and his followers.’” See Schnabel, *Acts*, 38.

¹³⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson notes, “In the Gospel, Luke moves the narrative toward Jerusalem.

three major sections in Luke: (1) An Introduction (1:1–4:13); (2) Jesus’ Galilean Ministry (4:14–9:50); and (3) Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem and His Passion (9:51–24:53).¹³⁹ There are four major sections in Acts: (1) Beginnings in Jerusalem (1:1–26); (2) Mission in Jerusalem (2:1–8:3); (3) Mission in Judea, Samaria, and the Surrounding Regions (8:4–12:25); and (4) Mission to the Ends of the Earth (13:1–28:31).¹⁴⁰

In the next three chapters, Luke–Acts will be surveyed to explore how and to what effect Jesus and early church leaders may have embedded cultural norms among the organized church. This survey will be informed by the existing literature on organizational culture, but will approach the text on its own terms to discover if a biblical pattern for shaping church culture may exist based on the example of Jesus and early church leaders. This will fill a void in the current literature on organizational culture by constructing a biblical basis for intentionally shaping organizational culture within the church.

In Acts, the geographical movement is, in the most obvious sense, away from Jerusalem.” Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 10. Keener, commenting on the various structural options for the book of Acts, concludes, “What all these outlines have in common is geographic movement.” See Keener, *Acts*, 86.

¹³⁹ Kostenberger and Patterson, *An Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 403–4. Following a similar structure, Bock sees five major sections in Luke: 1) Luke’s Preface and the Introduction of John and Jesus (Luke 1:1–2:52); 2) Preparation for ministry: anointed by God (Luke 3:1–4:13); 3) Galilean ministry: revelation of Jesus (Luke 4:14–9:50); 4) Jerusalem journey: Jewish rejection and the new way (Luke 9:51–19:44); 5) Jerusalem: the Innocent One slain and raised (Luke 19:45–24:53). See Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 43–48.

¹⁴⁰ Burge, Cohick, and Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity*, 233. Schnabel suggests a geographical orientation to the structure of Acts as well. See Schnabel, *Acts*, 46. Witherington has a similar approach, though he marks those divisions differently than above. He sees Acts as being divided in six sections: Section 1 (Acts 1:1–6:7) describes the primitive church in Jerusalem. Section 2 (Acts 6:8–9:31) describes Judea and Samaria. Section 3 (Acts 9:32–12:24) describes the gospel to the Gentiles. Section 4 (Acts 12:25–16:5) describes Asia and the shift to Gentile missions. Section 5 (Acts 16:6–19:20) describes Europe and a return to Ephesus. Section 6 (Acts 19:21–28:31) describes Paul’s journey to Rome. See Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 74. For a similar proposal that suggests Acts has a series of “panels,” see John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 72ff.

CHAPTER 3

SHAPING CHURCH CULTURE IN LUKE: TABLE FELLOWSHIP

One question every Christian leader should consider seriously is whether or not it is in keeping with a biblical worldview to shape the organizational culture of the church. Organizational culture creation has been described as manipulative.¹ As a manipulative endeavor, organizational culture creation could be detrimental to the purpose and nature of the church. If, however, a prescriptive pattern can be found in the New Testament for intentional culture creation, the modern Christian leader would be justified in such an approach. Although an assumption of this research is that Jesus intentionally shaped the culture of his followers (their behavior, values, and beliefs), what remains to be discovered is exactly what means Jesus may have used to do so.² This chapter will argue that Jesus used meals as a primary means of intentionally shaping the culture (behavior, values, and beliefs) of his disciples and others, such as the Pharisees.³

¹ Schein says, “Culture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated by leaders.” Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 3.

² An exception to this void in the literature is Andy Crouch’s acknowledgement that Jesus intentionally created culture. In fact, Crouch recognizes, as is acknowledged in the present research, that Jesus used teaching and meals to create culture. This is a startling insight that corroborates the conclusions of the current research. However, while Crouch mentions this in general, he does not thoroughly examine the teaching or meals of Jesus to see in detail how Jesus uses these means to shape culture. See Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 137–38. The current chapter will examine the Lukan meals in detail, thereby filling the void.

³ One might legitimately ask whether Jesus was trying to shape the culture of his disciples or that of the Pharisees. The answer seems to be, “yes.” Luke weaves both the disciples and the Pharisees seamlessly into Jesus’ instruction and activity in the Gospel. For instance, in Luke 17:20, Jesus was asked a question by the Pharisees. After giving a brief answer to the Pharisees, Jesus spoke to the disciples (who were already present) in vv. 22–37. When Jesus addressed the Pharisees, he was shaping the cultural norms of his followers. When he spoke to his followers, he was challenging the cultural norms of the Pharisees.

As described in the previous chapter, there are many methods of shaping an organization's culture. Many of these methodologies can be identified in the actions of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. For instance, Kotter identifies the first step in changing an organization's culture as increasing a sense of urgency in the organization.⁴ In the eschatological discourse in Luke 17:20–18:8, the Pharisees asked Jesus about the timing of the kingdom's arrival. In response, Jesus invoked the stories of Noah and Lot to describe the coming judgment and the people's need to be ready (Luke 17:26–36). He described the reality of God's imminent judgment to increase a sense of urgency among those who heard Him to repent and be ready for the Day of the Lord.

Another methodology of shaping an organization's culture is "deliberate teaching and coaching."⁵ Jesus' teaching discourses are prominent in Luke, as they are in each of the synoptic Gospels. In fact, no less than ten major teaching discourses are found in Luke.⁶ These range from teaching opportunities in the synagogue (such as Luke 4:15–30 and Luke 13:10–17) to teaching large gathered crowds (such as in Luke 6:17–49 and Luke 12:1–59). Sometimes Jesus taught the disciples in private (Luke 11:1–13). At other times, Jesus taught people in very public settings, such as in the temple complex (Luke 20:1–21:38). Jesus instructed (Luke 11:1–4), confronted (Luke 11:39–54), and set expectations (Luke 14:25–35). The methodology of teaching is an effective strategy for

Oskar Skarsaune argues that Jesus addressed the Pharisees from the perspective of an insider. For more on this line of research, see Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002).

⁴ John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 15.

⁵ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 236.

⁶ The ten major discourses are as follows: Luke 4:15–30 (teaching in the synagogue); Luke 5:17–26 (Jesus teaches, forgives and heals a paralytic, and confronts the Pharisees); Luke 6:17–49 (the "Sermon on the Plain"); Luke 8:4–18 (teaching the crowds with parables); Luke 11:1–36 (instructing the disciples privately and responding to challenges from the crowd after driving out a demon); Luke 12:1–59 (teaching disciples and a crowd of "many thousands"); Luke 13:10–17 (teaching and healing in the synagogue); Luke 14:25–35 (teaching a crowd traveling with Jesus); Luke 17:20–18:8 (teaching about the arrival of the kingdom of God); Luke 20:1–21:38 (teaching in the temple complex).

shaping organizational culture. Jesus seems to have employed this methodology with frequency.⁷

These examples notwithstanding, there is a more salient feature of Jesus' life and ministry portrayed in Luke's Gospel. After broadly surveying the text of Luke, the research showed that the theme of meals features prominently and uniquely in Luke's account of Jesus' life.⁸ Therefore, this chapter will focus on Jesus' participation in meals as the primary means of challenging and shaping the behavior, values, and beliefs of those around him.⁹

Meals as a Motif in Luke

A motif can be defined as "a theological idea or theme which permeates an author's presentation."¹⁰ To conduct a motif study, one must "read an entire Gospel for the purpose of obtaining all possible information from it relative to a given motif."¹¹

Notable scholars such as Joel Green and Alan Streett have identified the theme of meals,

⁷ For several helpful articles on how Scripture is utilized in teaching in Luke–Acts, see Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke–Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001).

⁸ This chapter and the next two chapters will not attempt to exhaust everything there is to describe about the texts under consideration, but merely to explore the degree to which these texts reflect dynamics of culture–shaping.

⁹ As stated above, other means of culture creation can be identified in Jesus' ministry in Luke. However, this chapter will narrow the scope of analysis to the meal motif. This approach allows the most salient feature of the Gospel to emerge naturally through the exegesis of the text. An alternative to this approach might be to examine the role Jesus' miracles played in shaping the beliefs, values, and behavior of his followers. For example, in Luke 5:17–26 Jesus moved the behavior of the crowd from curiosity to worship by healing a paralytic. Similar results occurred in the other miracle stories. Another approach might be to examine the role confrontation played in shaping the culture of Jesus' followers, such as when he rebuked his disciples for rejecting children in Luke 18:15. However, the relative weight that is given in the text to these methodologies pales in comparison to the weight given the meal scenes. The meal motif is the most distinctive feature of Luke's Gospel. The emphasis given to this motif is unique among the other Gospels and must be regarded as a more central focus in Luke than miracles, confrontation, or other minor culture creation methodologies. Therefore, primary attention will be given to the meal scenes.

¹⁰ Scot McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988), 109.

¹¹ McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*, 109.

or “table fellowship,” as a major motif in Luke’s Gospel.¹² Koenig argues that “eating and drinking” is, in fact, the central motif of the Gospel.¹³ Karris notes, “In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.”¹⁴ Streett notes the unique role meals play in Luke’s Gospel vis-à-vis the fact that “other Gospel writers position the same teachings in different social contexts.”¹⁵ This demonstrates the weight Luke placed on meals as an integral part of Jesus’ ministry. In fact, the meal scenes unveil many of the central theological themes in Luke’s Gospel.¹⁶ This chapter will analyze the theme of meals in Luke to discover how Jesus intentionally shaped the culture of his followers.

In Luke, “the meals themselves are integral to the unfolding gospel narrative. Indeed, the meals function as transformative encounters, embodying the challenge and opportunity of Jesus’ proclamation for those who are present.”¹⁷ Many of these transformative encounters occurred upon hearing Jesus teach after the meal was finished. Jesus’ meal patterns followed the common Roman *symposium*, which included a meal

¹² See Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86. See also R. Alan Streett, *Subversive Meals: An Analysis of the Lord’s Supper under Roman Domination during the First Century* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 131–70.

¹³ John Koenig, *The Feast of the World’s Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2000), 181. Karris concurs, noting, “The theme of food occurs in every chapter of Luke’s Gospel.” See Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 5–6. Blomberg holds an alternate view. He argues how “it would be difficult to argue that Jesus’ table fellowship with sinners formed the central theme in his Gospel . . . Nevertheless, it clearly plays a prominent role in his narrative.” Craig Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 160.

¹⁴ Robert J. Karris, *Eating Your Way through Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 14.

¹⁵ Streett, *Subversive Meals*, 132. One example of this is Luke’s account of Jesus’ encounter of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke includes details of a meal with these disciples (Luke 24:30) that is not included in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 16:12–13). See A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1950), 244.

¹⁶ Dennis E. Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 4 (1987): 638.

¹⁷ Kylie Crabbe, “A Sinner and a Pharisee: Challenge at Simon’s Table in Luke 7:36–50,” *Pacifica* 24, no. 3 (2011): 249.

and followed with a period of extended discussion.¹⁸ The context of eating was transformative for those surrounding Jesus. Notably, Jesus always shared meals with others—he never ate alone in the Gospel—and it was in the communal eating that he shaped how people behaved and believed.¹⁹ About the transformative nature of the Lukan meals, Streett observes,

In Luke, meals are occasion when Jesus breaks down ethnic and sectarian boundaries, and calls for a more inclusive table fellowship, one which reflects God’s social vision for his kingdom. Luke likely includes these discussions to address similar social and political struggles facing his Christian community as it comes together for table fellowship.²⁰

Jesus used table fellowship to disrupt the “socio–religious sensibilities” of those who observed the meals.²¹ Interestingly, Jesus is normally the guest of others and therefore the recipient of hospitality, rather than the host. However, Jesus “‘spins the table;’ he turns his hosts into guests so that they might receive his hospitality.”²² It was in the role of host that Jesus shaped the behavior, values, and beliefs of those around the table.

In itself, the variety of the guests around the table would have challenged cultural norms. The nature of Lukan meals is that they were inclusive. In fact, the Pharisees complained that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, those who would have occupied the margins of Jewish society (Luke 15:1–2). To eat with someone in the

¹⁸ E. Springs Steele, “Luke 11:37–54—A Modified Hellenistic Symposium?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 3 (September 1984): 380. See also Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, & Mission around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 38; Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 27–31.

¹⁹ Robert L. Kelley, Jr., “Meals with Jesus in Luke’s Gospel,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 17 no. 2 (1995): 124.

²⁰ Streett, *Subversive Meals*, 132–33.

²¹ Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 87.

²² Martin William Mittelstadt, “Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: A Theology of Hospitality in Luke–Acts,” *Word & World* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 136.

ancient world was “tantamount to extending to them intimacy, solidarity, acceptance; table companions were treated as though they were of one’s extended family.”²³ That Jesus would identify himself so closely with tax collectors such as Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10), for example, deeply troubled the Pharisees. It is in that context that Jesus re-oriented the cultural expectations of those who were upset with his table companions. N. T. Wright states,

He ate with “sinners,” and kept company with people normally on or beyond the borders of respectable society – which of course in his day and culture, meant not merely social respectability but religious uprightness, proper covenant behavior, loyalty to the traditions and hence to the aspirations of Israel.²⁴

It is important to be aware of the socio-cultural context of Luke’s original audience. It is possible that Luke’s audience would have first read the Gospel around a banquet table, with people of different genders (male/female), ethnic backgrounds (Jew/Gentile), economic levels (rich/poor), and cultural statuses (slave/free).²⁵ Jesus’ ministry to the social outcasts through hospitality and meals would have verified and reinforced the experience of the early church in which there was “no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female” but simply those who were “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The re-shaping of cultural expectations was likely to be experienced not only by people who participated in the meals described in Luke’s Gospel itself but also among those who read or heard the Gospel after it was composed.

In Luke, ten meal scenes are identified, commencing with Jesus’ meal with Levi (Luke 5:29–39), and concluding with Jesus’ meal with his disciples after the resurrection (Luke 24:13–49). One additional scene that likely included a meal is when

²³ Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 87.

²⁴ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 149.

²⁵ Amanda C. Miller, “Bridge Work and Seating Charts: A Study of Luke’s Ethics of Wealth, Poverty, and Reversal,” *Interpretation* 68, no. 4 (2014): 421.

Mary and Martha showed Jesus hospitality (Luke 10:38–42).²⁶ Each of these scenes will be surveyed to explore how Jesus used them to shape the culture of those around him.

Eating with Levi (Luke 5:29–39)

The first meal scene in Luke took place at the house of a tax collector named Levi, who, “leaving everything behind,” followed Jesus (Luke 5:27–28). Levi’s first act of discipleship was to host a “grand banquet” for Jesus (Luke 5:29). The guest list for the banquet included “a large crowd of tax collectors and others.” When the Pharisees and scribes saw the crowd that had gathered for the banquet in Jesus’ honor, they asked Jesus’ disciples why Jesus would “eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 5:30).

The Pharisees’ question revealed an existing cultural reality: they had an underlying belief that Jesus should not be eating with tax collectors and sinners. Participating in table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners indicated “friendship” and “full acceptance” of those at the meal.²⁷ Considering the Pharisees’ desire to remain ceremonially pure, the prospect of dining with the crowd in Levi’s house was contemptible.²⁸

Tannehill notes that tax collectors were despised because of burdensome taxes, combined with the common practice by tax collectors of gouging prices so as to obtain as much money as possible from the people.²⁹ Tax collectors were known for extorting the people in order to accumulate wealth (Luke 3:12–13; Luke 19:8). As those in league with Rome, they would have been despised by the Jews and would have held a low social and

²⁶ The meal in this story is implied, but is very likely. Smith notes that the term *diakonia* was used regularly to refer to table service, implying that among the tasks Martha performed was the serving of a meal. See Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,” 622.

²⁷ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 132.

²⁸ Morris, *Luke*, 132.

²⁹ Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, Abingdon New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 108

moral standing.³⁰ Thus, “tax collectors and sinners” are grouped together in Luke’s Gospel.³¹ By eating with them, Jesus was indicating “intimacy, kinship, and unity” with them, for in the ancient world “shared meals symbolized shared lives.”³²

Jesus responded to the Pharisees’ query about his dinner companions by stating that the “healthy don’t need a doctor, but the sick do,” explaining that the purpose of his ministry was not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31–32). Jesus’ response re-oriented their underlying belief by challenging them to consider who indeed should be at the table. While the Pharisees focused on the supposed violations of ceremonial purity in this meal, Jesus focused on those God wanted to redeem. He reshaped both their cultural assumptions and values by drawing attention to God’s desire to see sinners come to repentance. He valued sinners and the Pharisees should have as well.

The next scene in the narrative introduces another question from the Pharisees. They asked why John’s disciples fasted and prayed frequently and yet Jesus’ disciples “eat and drink” (Luke 5:33). This question indicated that the Pharisees’ might have been objecting to the fact that “these meals are celebrations, joyful parties that seem inappropriate for people who need to repent.”³³ The Pharisees assumed that the appropriate posture of repentance was fasting and prayer.

Jesus challenged this assumption by comparing the meal at Levi’s house to a wedding feast where fasting would be inappropriate (Luke 5:34–35). Jesus described

³⁰ Streett, *Subversive Meals*, 136.

³¹ Fitzmyer notes, “The juxtaposition of these two groups is noteworthy, depicting Jesus’ association with segments of Palestinian Jewry often regarded as outcasts.” Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX)*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1981), 591.

³² Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 246.

³³ Tannehill, *Luke*, 108.

himself as the bridegroom and the disciples as the wedding guests. The correct response to Jesus' presence is celebration. The behavioral artifacts of the celebration in this case are eating and drinking.³⁴ Jesus argued that eating and drinking was the right behavior because of his presence among them.

In this meal scene, then, Jesus reshaped not only the Pharisees' underlying assumptions and values, but also their view of the kind of behavior that should be associated with repentance. Repentance is not merely exhibited in mourning and fasting, but also in the celebration of the forgiveness that Jesus bestows. This conclusion is displayed also in the preceding story in Luke's narrative, where Jesus forgave and healed a paralytic who then "went home glorifying God" (Luke 5:25). The crowd who observed this "was astounded, and they were giving glory to God" (Luke 5:26). When God forgives someone's sins, it is right to be "filled with awe" and celebrate (Luke 5:26).

Celebration banquets should be normative for God's people. In fact, the consummation of the kingdom of God itself is depicted as a meal where God's people "recline at the table in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29).³⁵ Levi and his guests were merely anticipating the coming kingdom by rehearsing the celebration that will be experienced in the eschaton.

Eating with Disciples in a Field (Luke 6:1–5)

The second meal scene immediately follows the first in the progression of Luke's narrative. The timing of the scene in relation to the previous episode is uncertain, as the only indication given in the text is that it occurred "on a Sabbath" (Luke 6:1). The Sabbath becomes the theme of the scene as the Pharisees question the lawfulness of the disciples' behavior. As the disciples passed through a field, they picked up heads of

³⁴ Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 96.

³⁵ Tannehill, *Luke*, 109.

grain, rubbed them together in their hands, and ate them (Luke 6:1). This action in itself was not unusual and seemed innocent enough.³⁶ What was questionable about the disciples' behavior was that they were gathering grain on the Sabbath, something that was inappropriate in the eyes of some Pharisees because they viewed it as a violation of the commandment not to work on the Sabbath (Exod 20:8–11).³⁷

The question the Pharisees posed—"Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"—revealed a cultural norm: they believed it was unlawful to pick grain on the Sabbath (Luke 6:2). Jesus' two-part response is instructive. The form of his question ("haven't you read?") suggests rebuke.³⁸ In the first part of his response, he appealed to David's example of entering the house of God to eat the sacred bread, an action he acknowledged was unlawful to do (Luke 6:3–4).³⁹ This clever illustration put the Pharisees on the defensive because if they condemned the actions of Jesus and those who were with him, they would also have to condemn David and those who were with him.⁴⁰ Bock notes that Jesus' appeal to David was a defense of a hierarchical ethic: "ceremonial restrictions of law are to give way to human need."⁴¹ This point is made more clearly in

³⁶ It was customary for harvesters to leave grain behind for sojourners and the poor to gather for food. This is what occurred in Ruth 2:3, where Ruth "entered the field to gather grain behind the harvesters." This was an act of mercy and charity on the landowners' part. Picking grain from a neighbor's field was lawful. Deut 23:25 says, "When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck heads of grain with your hand, but you must not put a sickle to your neighbor's grain."

³⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 522–23.

³⁸ Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 524.

³⁹ This story is a reference to 1 Sam 21:1–9, when David entered God's house when he was fleeing from Saul and asked Ahimelech the priest to give him bread or "whatever can be found." Ahimelech gave him the bread of the Presence, but only after clarifying that it could be eaten only by men who had kept themselves from women.

⁴⁰ Marshall says, "The implication is that David had the authority to act as he did, and that Jesus has the same right, but in a higher degree, to reinterpret the law." I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 228.

⁴¹ Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 525. See also W. L. Liefeld, "Luke," in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 887.

Mark's Gospel when Jesus states, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). This was a new view of the law. Jesus valued the needs of man more than the obscure legal questions of the Pharisees.⁴² His answer was an intentional reshaping of their values.

In the second part of his response, he appealed to the Son of Man's lordship over the Sabbath (Luke 6:5). The Son of Man has eschatological and cosmic rulership (Dan 7:13–14).⁴³ Because the Son of Man has cosmic rule, it follows that he is also Lord (ruler, *kurios*) of the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of Man can pick grain on the Sabbath.

Jesus created a new cultural norm: as the supreme Son of Man, he can both eat in this manner and give to eat on the Sabbath. Jesus "has the authority to set aside the Sabbath laws for the benefit of his disciples."⁴⁴ Luke's inclusion of this story clearly posed a discontinuity with Jewish cultural norms. Amy–Jill Levine rightly notes that Luke created a dichotomy between traditional Judaism on one side of salvation history and Jesus and his followers on the other.⁴⁵ That is certainly the case in this scene. Jesus' disciples are eating in accordance with the lordship of Christ. The Pharisees stand in stark opposition at this point with the Son of Man's lordship. His corrective teaching intended to reshape their beliefs, values, and subsequent behavior.

⁴² Indeed, as Arthur Just observes, "When Jesus brought the kingdom, that to which the weekly Sabbath observation pointed *arrived*, and so the Sabbath was *fulfilled*" (italics original). Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 255.

⁴³ Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man featured prominently in his trial before the Sanhedrin. The Son of Man title entailed that he was more than mere man. This was demonstrated by the Sanhedrin's assumption that he was claiming to be the Son of God after he referred to himself as the Son of Man who "will be seated at the right hand of the Power of God" (Luke 22:66–71).

⁴⁴ David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 263.

⁴⁵ Amy–Jill Levine, "Luke and the Jewish Religion," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68, no. 4 (2014): 392.

Eating with Simon and Teaching Forgiveness (Luke 7:36–50)

Luke's third meal scene took place in the home of a Pharisee named Simon who had invited Jesus to be his guest (Luke 7:36). While Jesus was reclining at the table of his host, an uninvited woman entered the house and assumed the role of a servant by washing his feet.⁴⁶ The manner in which she washed his feet was unusual. The woman "brought an alabaster jar of fragrant oil and stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to wash his feet with her tears" (Luke 7:37–38). After she washed them, "she wiped his feet with the hair of her head, kissing them and anointing them with the fragrant oil" (Luke 7:38). Her actions denoted humility and love.⁴⁷

The identity of the woman is unknown. Luke described her merely as "a woman in the town who was a sinner" (Luke 7:37).⁴⁸ This description connects this scene to the previous section, where Jesus explained that he has been accused of being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34). This close linkage identified the woman as one of those who should be considered by the reader as a friend of Jesus.

Neale argues that the inclusion of this meal story is "a way to demonstrate and confirm, by means of a specific example, the ludicrousness of the complaints about Jesus' table-fellowship."⁴⁹ Indeed, Simon believed it was ludicrous that Jesus allowed

⁴⁶ Streett notes that it was the role of a slave, among other things, to wash the feet of the guests at a meal. See Streett, *Subversive Meals*, 16.

⁴⁷ Garland, *Luke*, 325.

⁴⁸ Though the text does not make it clear, some scholars have suggested the woman is a prostitute. For that view, see Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 210. Nolland notes, "The dramatic impact of the woman's actions appear most strikingly if 'sinner' is understood as a euphemism for 'prostitute' or 'courtesan.'" John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 353.

⁴⁹ David A. Neale, *None but the Sinners: Religious Categories in the Gospel of Luke*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 140.

the woman to touch him in the manner she did.⁵⁰ In fact, he thought to himself that Jesus must not be a legitimate prophet because otherwise he would know the kind of woman she was and reject her displays of affection (Luke 7:39).

Jesus used this occasion as an opportunity to teach Simon about forgiveness. Special attention is drawn to the teaching discourse by the inclusion of Jesus' statement to Simon that he wanted to say something to him, and Simon's recognition that Jesus is "Teacher" (Luke 7:40). Jesus began his lesson with an illustration about a creditor who "graciously forgave" a man who owed 500 denarii and another man who owed 50 denarii. He asked Simon which of the men would love the creditor more. Simon responded correctly that the one who was forgiven the higher amount (Luke 7:41–43). Jesus then asked Simon if he saw the woman present at the table (Luke 7:44). This rhetorical question was intended to draw Simon's attention to her. Garland remarks, "Of course, he sees her; but he does not see her as Jesus sees her."⁵¹

Jesus then made three contrasts between Simon and the woman.⁵² First, he said that while Simon did not give him water for his feet, the woman washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair (Luke 7:44). Second, he said that while Simon did not give him a kiss, the woman had not stopped kissing him since he arrived (Luke 7:45). Third, while Simon did not anoint Jesus' head with olive oil, the woman anointed his feet with fragrant oil (Luke 7:46).⁵³ These contrasts could be seen as a rebuke of Simon.

⁵⁰ Some scholars have suggested that the woman's actions were immodest and possibly even erotic. See Streett, *Subversive Meals*, 142. See also Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 696. Alternatively, her actions, including the unbinding of her hair, may have been an expression of religious devotion, contrition, or even grief. See Charles H. Cosgrove, "A Woman's Unbound Hair in the Greco-Roman World, With Special Reference to the Story of the 'Sinful Woman' in Luke 7:36–50," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 4 (2005): 691–92.

⁵¹ Garland, *Luke*, 328.

⁵² Chester cleverly frames the situation: "[Simon] is *the host who's not really a host . . . the woman is the host who's not even a guest.*" Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*, 42. Italics original.

⁵³ Anointing the head with oil would have been customary for giving a blessing, such as in the case of Samuel's blessing of David as the future king of Israel. See 1 Sam 16:2–13. Anointing with oil also

Compared to the woman, his hospitality looked “decidedly cool.”⁵⁴ Yet, Jesus was simply trying to get Simon to see the woman in a different light. He drew the connection between the woman and the debtors in his illustration and concluded, “her many sins have been forgiven; that’s why she loved much” (Luke 7:47). Then, turning to the woman, he told her that her sins were forgiven. This demonstrated that Jesus was not just teaching Simon a lesson but he was concerned genuinely with the woman herself.⁵⁵

While the text does not give us Simon’s response to Jesus’ teaching, the other guests wondered who it was that could forgive sins (Luke 7:49). Luke does not give an explicit answer, but the story concludes with Jesus telling the woman that her faith has saved her and sending her away with a blessing (Luke 7:50). This declaration of her salvation was an implicit answer to the guests’ question: Jesus is one who can forgive sins.⁵⁶

This story is significant because it teaches that even a sinful woman can be forgiven and welcomed to a meal if she has faith. It further teaches that Simon’s evaluation of the woman was incorrect. His inhospitable behavior both toward to Jesus and the woman demonstrated his faulty value system. The woman rightly valued Jesus, and her behavior stands in contrast to Simon’s. Jesus’ positive response to her inculcated the table guests with a new cultural norm: those who love Jesus must love those Jesus loves.

Jesus is a friend of sinners. He did not come for those who deserved forgiveness the most but for those who did not deserve it at all. As Bock states, “the

would be used in connection to healing and prayer. See Jas 5:14.

⁵⁴ Tannehill, *Luke*, 136.

⁵⁵ Tannehill, *Luke*, 137.

⁵⁶ Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 708.

actions of a silent, sinful woman speak a thousand words.”⁵⁷ She loved much because she had been forgiven much. Her encounter with Jesus likely would change her future behavior. Jesus’ lesson for Simon hopefully would change his future behavior. His teaching clearly was intended to reshape the values of the dinner guests and their underlying assumptions concerning the woman’s place at the table and in the *koinonia*. The inclusion of this story is confrontational: just as Simon and the other dinner guests are at a point of decision regarding Jesus’ teaching, Luke’s readers must decide for themselves if they will accept the new cultural norm where outsiders are invited inside.⁵⁸

The Feeding of 5,000 (Luke 9:10–17)

Even though the fourth meal scene in Luke is one of the most familiar stories in Scripture, the cultural implications of Jesus’ feeding five thousand people cannot be overstated. In fact, excluding the resurrection, it is the only miracle that is included in all four Gospels.⁵⁹ Luke’s placement of this episode within the narrative structure is unique and has significant implications for this dissertation.

Although the feeding does not follow the typical banquet pattern seen in the other meal scenes in Luke, it is nonetheless a significant meal. In this story, Jesus was not invited to someone’s home. Rather, he fulfilled the role of the host. After Jesus quietly withdrew with his disciples to Bethsaida, crowds discovered where he was and followed him. Jesus “welcomed them, spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and cured those who needed healing” (Luke 9:10–11). What followed was a fulfillment of the Isaianic eschatological banquet wherein the Lord promised to “prepare a feast for all the peoples on this mountain” (Isa 25:6–10).

⁵⁷ Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 708.

⁵⁸ Crabbe, “A Sinner and a Pharisee,” 264.

⁵⁹ Wilson C. K. Poon, “Superabundant Table Fellowship in the Kingdom: The Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Meal Motif in Luke,” *The Expository Times* 114, no. 7 (April 2003): 224.

The crowds in Bethsaida grew hungry. Jesus' disciples urged him to send the crowds away to find their own food. However, Jesus instructed his disciples to feed the crowd (Luke 9:12–14). The miracle took place when Jesus took five loaves and two fish and multiplied them to feed the crowd, which included five thousand men, and likely included women and children beside (Luke 9:15–16). Not only did Jesus provide enough food for those who were present, but there were twelve baskets left over (Luke 9:17).⁶⁰ In a sociological context in which the majority of people lived at subsistence level, this miracle was an act of compassion.⁶¹

As significant as the miracle of feeding five thousand is in itself, just as significant for Luke's purpose is the function of the story in the flow of the narrative. Luke interpolates the feeding story between two stories that center on the question of Jesus' identity, utilizing an A–B–A' pattern.⁶² In the preceding story, Herod heard that some people thought Jesus was actually a resurrected John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other prophets who had been raised from the dead. The story ends as Herod asked about who Jesus was (Luke 9:9). In the subsequent story, Jesus asked his disciples who the crowds said that he was. Paralleling the Herod story, they answered that some said he was John the Baptist, some said Elijah, and some said one of the prophets. He then asked who the disciples said he was. Peter, speaking for the group, correctly answered that Jesus was the Messiah (Luke 9:20).

By sandwiching the feeding miracle between the two other stories, Luke is

⁶⁰ Bovon rightly notes regarding v. 17, "Anyone who has never experienced hunger will have difficulty understanding . . . the joy of satiety. Eating in those times meant to experience continued life, joy in the meal, and fellowship." Francois Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 357.

⁶¹ Scholars estimate that between 75–97 percent lived at or below subsistence level. See Miller, "Bridge Work and Seating Charts," 419. See also Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 52–53.

⁶² Garland states that because the feeding miracle is sandwiched between the stories about Jesus' identity, "it becomes a key event for penetrating the nature of Jesus' identity." Garland, *Luke*, 373.

answering the question, “Who is this?”⁶³ Jesus is God’s Messiah, the Messianic figure who provided the meal promised in Isaiah 25.⁶⁴ Jesus is the Anointed One who feeds the people and provides for their needs.⁶⁵ In this meal scene, Jesus was not so much shaping the people’s behavior or values, as their basic underlying assumptions, those “unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values” that “determine behavior, perception, thought, and feeling.”⁶⁶ He was doing nothing less than revealing his true identity to his followers so that they would believe in him.⁶⁷ It was that belief that would guide the disciples’ subsequent behavior of denying themselves, taking up their crosses, and following Jesus (Luke 9:23–27). The feeding miracle, therefore, played a central role in shaping the organizational culture of the disciples, for it reinforced their belief about who Jesus was and laid the foundation for their subsequent behavior in denying themselves and following him.

The Hospitality of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42)

There is some question as to whether or not the scene in Mary and Martha’s home included a meal, since the text does not explicitly mention it. However, due to the common association of the word “serve” (*diakonia*, Luke 10:40) with table service, the

⁶³ Tannehill notes that the way Luke frames the feeding story depicts his understanding of the important role the meal played in Peter’s subsequent confession of Jesus as the Messiah. See Tannehill, *Luke*, 156.

⁶⁴ Luke’s clever juxtaposition of the feeding miracle in between the questions about Jesus’ identity is an example of his “narrative theology.” Luke commonly used narrative, as opposed to explicit theological propositions, to communicate theological truth. See Michael Travers, “Luke,” in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 400.

⁶⁵ This fact is affirmed in the subsequent section (Luke 9:28–36). During the Transfiguration, a voice spoke from a cloud saying, “This is My Son, the Chosen One; listen to Him” (Luke 9:35).

⁶⁶ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 24.

⁶⁷ Marshall observes that while Jesus’ concern for the crowds is obvious, “the miracle is one that is meant for the eyes of the disciples.” Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 357.

preparation of and participation in a meal is likely in view here.⁶⁸ The story is “built around a contrast.”⁶⁹ The actions of Martha and Mary are set in opposition to one another; Martha was “distracted by her many tasks” while Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet and was listening to what He said” (Luke 10:39–40). Godet notes,

The two sisters have often been regarded as representing two equally legitimate aspects of the Christian life, inward devotion and practical activity. But Martha does not in the least represent external activity, such as Jesus approves. Her very distraction proves that the motive of her work is not pure, and that her self-importance as hostess has a larger share in it than it ought.⁷⁰

Jesus concluded that Mary’s choice to concern herself with “one thing” was superior to Martha’s choice to be “worried and upset about many things,” calling it the “right choice” (Luke 10:41–42). Indeed, “it is Mary’s focused attention on the word of Jesus that becomes the pivot point around which the story revolves.”⁷¹ Her decision to listen to what Jesus said was in keeping with Jesus’ concern that those who call him “Lord,” should also do the things he said (Luke 6:46). Jesus reshaped Martha’s priorities so that she would heed the importance of sitting at his feet and “listening to what He said” (Luke 10:39).

The story about Martha and Mary follows the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke’s narrative. Luke included the story of Martha and Mary at this point in his narrative in order to teach the importance of listening to the words of Jesus given in the previous scene.⁷² In the previous scene, Jesus had instructed an “expert in the law” that if one would inherit eternal life, he must love God and love neighbor (Luke 10:25–28). The

⁶⁸ Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,” 622. Evans suggests Martha may have been preparing an “elaborate meal.” Evans, *Luke*, 210.

⁶⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1037.

⁷⁰ Frederick L. Godet, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981), 311.

⁷¹ Holly E. Hearon, “Luke 10:38–42,” *Interpretation* 58, no. 4 (2004): 394.

⁷² John J. Kilgallen, “Martha and Mary: Why at Luke 10:38–42?” *Biblica* 84, no. 4 (2003): 554. See also Garland, *Luke*, 451.

expert in the law, “wanting to justify himself,” asked Jesus who his neighbor was (Luke 10:29). Jesus responded with the story of the Good Samaritan, who reached across ethnic boundaries to show mercy to a man who had been robbed, beaten up, and left for dead (Luke 10:30–37). The Samaritan was the hero of the story. He showed compassion to a stranger. Jesus then instructed the expert in the law, “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:37).

Jesus’ instruction was clear: those who follow him must love their neighbors, regardless of who they are or the level of sacrifice it takes to demonstrate love. Luke juxtaposed the story of Martha and Mary with the Good Samaritan to draw a simple point: disciples should listen to (and obey) the words of Jesus (in this case, the word about loving one’s neighbor).⁷³ This is highly significant for understanding the way in which Jesus shaped the cultural expectations of his disciples. He shaped their behavior by teaching them to love their neighbor (Luke 10:25–37). He shaped their values by teaching them to value his words (Luke 10:38–42).⁷⁴ To be a disciple of Jesus is to value his words (like Mary) and behave in a way that is consistent with those words—in this case, loving one’s neighbor.⁷⁵

Eating with a Pharisee and Denouncing Hypocrisy (Luke 11:37–54)

The sixth meal scene occurred at the home of an unnamed Pharisee who invited Jesus to dine with him. As Jesus sat down to recline at the table, the Pharisee noticed that Jesus did not undergo the ritual washing that was ordinarily performed

⁷³ Noting the comparison of the two stories, Craddock writes, “Jesus has just met a man skilled in Scripture who has trouble hearing the word of God, and Jesus offers him an example, a Samaritan. Now Jesus visits with a woman so busy serving, she does not hear the word, and Jesus offers her an example, her sister.” Fred Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 151–52.

⁷⁴ Robert Stein notes that the centrality of the “word” theme is evident because the term is used of divine proclamation over forty times in Luke–Acts. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 322.

⁷⁵ As Green notes, hearing the words of Jesus and obeying them are integral components to repentance and discipleship. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 108.

before eating (Luke 11:38).⁷⁶ Responding to the Pharisee's astonishment, Jesus began to denounce the Pharisees and the scribes through a series of six "woes," three specifically addressed to the Pharisees and three specifically addressed to the scribes.

The first indictment of the Pharisees addressed the hypocrisy of ritual cleansing on the outside if the inside was not also clean. Jesus noted that although the Pharisees were diligent about cleaning the outside of their dishes, inside they were "full of greed and evil" (Luke 11:39). This was evidenced by the fact that they had neglected the poor, which Jesus called bypassing "justice and love for God" (Luke 11:42). The second indictment relates to the first. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for choosing the front seat in the synagogues and loving greetings in the marketplaces (Luke 11:43).⁷⁷ While neglecting others, they enjoyed the privileges associated with their position. Jesus' estimation of the Pharisees is detailed in the third indictment, wherein Jesus said the Pharisees are like "unmarked graves" that people walk over without even knowing it (Luke 11:44). This association with the dead would have entailed ceremonial uncleanness.⁷⁸ Jesus made clear that it was not he who was unclean, but the Pharisees.

At this point in Jesus' speech, an "expert in the law" interjected by noting that in Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees, "You insult us too" (Luke 11:45). Turning to the man, Jesus leveled his first indictment at the scribes. They loaded people with "burdens that are hard to carry," and yet would not carry the burdens themselves (Luke 11:46). This referred to the fact that the scribes, in their attempt to ensure the people's conformity to the law, "embellished its specifications," all while being unwilling to observe the

⁷⁶ Green observes that in that culture, to overlook handwashing before a meal "was to mark oneself as an outsider in this community. In light of the laws of hospitality, failure to wash in this scene also constituted an insult to the host." Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 470.

⁷⁷ Fitzmyer notes that the front seat in the synagogue was the place of honor and that the greetings in the marketplace were "greetings of respect." Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 949.

⁷⁸ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 666.

requirements they dictated to others.⁷⁹ This revealed that the scribes participated in the same kind of hypocrisy as the Pharisees.

The second indictment of the scribes contained irony. Jesus acknowledged that they had built monuments (or “tombs”) for the prophets (Luke 11:47). This may have seemed on the surface as a way of honoring the prophets, but Jesus clearly meant that the scribes were responsible for the deaths of the prophets.⁸⁰ He made this point explicitly by acknowledging that the prophets had been killed and persecuted (Luke 11:49). He concluded, “Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible” (Luke 11:51).

Jesus’ third and final indictment of the scribes condemned them not only for failing to enter the house of wisdom, but also for hindering others who sought to go in (Luke 11:52). In their hypocritical actions, the scribes chose the path of foolishness. For those who were supposed experts in the law, this last blow was withering. The Pharisees and scribes responded to Jesus’ words by opposing him and “lying in wait for Him to trap Him in something He said” (Luke 11:53–54).

Contextually, Luke placed this story immediately following Jesus’ teaching about the pervasive nature of darkness (Luke 11:33–36). Jesus said, “When your eye is good, your whole body is also full of light. But when it is bad, your body is also full of darkness” (Luke 11:34). He urged those who listened to make sure that the “whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness” (Luke 11:36). Jesus argued for true purity, not just purity on the outside. If someone is to be light, he must not have darkness inside. This was a condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes, who were not the light they should be because they had darkness remaining inside of them. The hypocrisy

⁷⁹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 474.

⁸⁰ Arthur Just writes, “The lawyers realize how damaging the voice of the prophets is to their interpretation of the Torah, and so they join their fathers in *keeping the prophets dead*” (*italics original*). Arthur A Just, Jr., *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 492.

of the Pharisees and scribes described in Luke 11:37–54 is an example of the “darkness” discouraged in Luke 11:33–36.⁸¹

Jesus used the opportunity of the meal to shape intentionally the behavior of the Pharisees and the scribes. Bock notes that this passage “details how the hostility to Jesus arose and why the division between the old leadership and the new way exists.”⁸² Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of the religious leaders’ actions. In doing so, not only did he influence the behavior of the Pharisees and scribes but also the future behavior of his disciples, and further, the behavior of those who read Luke’s Gospel. Hypocrisy is an unacceptable behavior for those who follow Jesus. Jesus set new cultural norms and expectations both for religious leaders and for those who would be his disciples.

Eating with a Pharisee on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1–24)

The seventh meal scene in Luke is the third and final meal that took place in the home of a Pharisee. Jesus was invited on a Sabbath to eat at the home of “one of the leading Pharisees,” along with several other scribes and Pharisees, who were “watching Him closely” (Luke 14:1). Following the “woes” Jesus leveled at them in the previous meal scene, the Pharisees and scribes looked for an opportunity to trap him either in his actions or words.⁸³ Two incidents at the table gave them the opportunity they sought: first, his healing of a man with dropsy (“a man whose body was swollen with fluid,” Luke 14:2–6), and second, his teaching about humility and status (Luke 14:7–24).

In the first incident, Jesus posed a difficult question for the Pharisees and scribes. He asked them if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, reintroducing the

⁸¹ Garland, *Luke*, 476. See also Nolland, who writes, “The Pharisees and the lawyers are blind to the light, precisely because their own lives are morally and religiously compromised.” Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 663.

⁸² Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1126.

⁸³ Plummer remarks that while it is most probable that the man with dropsy (“a man whose body was swollen with fluid,” v. 2) was uninvited and was merely hoping to be healed, the Pharisees may have placed him there as a trap. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, 354.

controversial question about Sabbath laws addressed in Luke 6:1–5. When they did not answer, he healed the man with dropsy. He then implied through a question that if any of those present had an animal or a son who fell into a well on the Sabbath, they would pull him out (Luke 14:3–5). By equating the healing of the man with the rescue of the son or animal, Jesus elevated the diseased man’s status and noted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes. They would be willing to break Sabbath regulations if it benefited them, but they were unwilling for Jesus to break Sabbath regulations to benefit someone who was a social outcast due to his disease. This revealed the inherent self-interest of the Pharisees.⁸⁴

In the second incident, Jesus noticed how those at the table chose the best seats for themselves and responded by teaching them about humility and status in God’s kingdom. Jesus told a parable about a man who was invited to a banquet, sat at the place of honor, and was embarrassed when he was asked to change seats because there was someone more important (Luke 14:8–10). He concluded the parable by instructing those around the table to “recline in the lowest place,” because “the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:10–11). This signified the importance of humility and low status.

In the next section, Jesus encouraged the host of the meal not just to invite wealthy relatives or neighbors, but also those who were “poor, maimed, lame, or blind” (Luke 14:12–14), such as the man with dropsy in Luke 14:2. He concluded by telling a parable about a man who hosted a banquet and invited many people. All of the elites on the guest list made excuses for their absence at the meal (Luke 14:16–20). The man then invited the “poor, maimed, blind, and lame” to the banquet and they all came (Luke 14:21–24). This reinforced his previous teaching about humility and low status. Meals in

⁸⁴ Garland states that the rhetorical point Jesus made is that in the same way they would care for their child in danger, “this man seized with dropsy is a child of God whose life is endangered, but they are indifferent to his plight.” Garland, *Luke*, 568.

the kingdom of God include guests who are characterized as “expendables with essentially no status and certainly lacking the means to reciprocate an invitation and increase the host’s status in any way.”⁸⁵

One might legitimately ask what connection is made between the healing of the man in vs. 1–6 and Jesus’ teachings on humility and status in vs. 7–24. However, these two sections are closely linked. In the ancient world, dropsy (the disease likely in view in this healing) was commonly compared to greed.⁸⁶ Philosophers compared “dropsy’s insatiable craving for more water and greed’s acquisitive desire for more honor and wealth.”⁸⁷ Therefore, in this scene Jesus “offers healing and transformation not only for an individual’s bodily ailment, but also for the community’s damaging preoccupation with the competitive pursuit of honor, status, and wealth.”⁸⁸

Jesus clearly desired to influence the behavior, values, and beliefs of those around the table. Indeed, “Jesus confronts common practice and offers a new way of thinking, changed attitudes and a new way of conduct, which embrace both present and future aspects of the kingdom of God.”⁸⁹ The kingdom of God has counter-cultural values. Those who are exalted will be humbled and those who are humbled will be exalted. Meals that reflect kingdom values include those who are poor, maimed, lame, and blind. Bock notes that while Jesus had taught these lessons previously, the religious leaders had not yet learned the way of the kingdom. Therefore, this healing and the

⁸⁵ Miller, “Bridge Work and Seating Charts,” 422.

⁸⁶ John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 296–97.

⁸⁷ Miller, “Bridge Work and Seating Charts,” 422.

⁸⁸ Miller, “Bridge Work and Seating Charts,” 422. Hartsock comments that “this scene is a significant scene in the larger anti-wealth ethic of Luke; perhaps that is why no other Gospel writer includes the dropsy scene, as their purposes are not the same as Luke’s purposes.” Chad Hartsock, “The Healing of the Man with Dropsy (Luke 14:1–6) and the Lukan Landscape,” *Biblical Interpretation* 21, no. 3 (2013): 353.

⁸⁹ Lyle Story, “One Banquet with Many Courses (Luke 14:1–24),” *Journal of Biblical & Pneumatological Research* 4 (Fall 2012): 92.

subsequent teaching discourse served as “a rebuke and a call to repentance.”⁹⁰

Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners (Luke 15:1–32)

The eighth meal scene involved two groups of people: “the tax collectors and sinners” and “the Pharisees and scribes” (Luke 15:1–2). Jesus had been teaching the crowds about the cost of following him (Luke 14:25–33). He called on everyone to “listen” to what he said (Luke 14:34–35). At the introduction of the next story, Luke notes that the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to “listen,” in obedience to the instruction Jesus had given in the previous story (Luke 15:1). The Pharisees complained about this, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). Jesus responded to their complaint by telling three stories: the story of the Lost Sheep, the story of the Lost Coin, and the story of the Lost Son.

All three stories have important parallels. First, something of value was lost. In the first story, a man had one hundred sheep and lost one (Luke 15:3). In the second story, a woman had ten coins and lost one (Luke 15:8). In the third story, a father had two sons and lost one (Luke 15:11–16). The value of what had been lost increases in each story (an animal, wealth, a child) while the increments of the items decrease (one hundred sheep, ten coins, two sons).⁹¹ Second, someone searched for what had been lost.⁹² The shepherd left his other sheep to find the lost one (Luke 15:4). The woman lit a lamp and searched carefully throughout the house to find the lost coin (Luke 15:8). The father saw his son from a long distance and ran to welcome him (Luke 15:20). Third, there was great

⁹⁰ Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1258.

⁹¹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 573.

⁹² Bailey calls this “the burden of restoration.” He says, “In this parable Jesus is defending his welcome of sinners. This welcome involves restoration to a community.” Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary–Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 153–54.

rejoicing when what had been lost was found.⁹³ Both the shepherd and the woman called their friends and neighbors and said, “Rejoice with me” (Luke 15:6, 9), and the father hosted a feast to celebrate the return of his son (Luke 15:22–24). Jesus’ conclusion was that there is “joy in heaven” over those who repent (Luke 15:7, 10).

While there are important parallels between these three stories, the third story includes an additional element that is not in the first two stories. During the banquet the father threw for his repentant younger son, his older son returned from working in the field and complained that his father was celebrating the return of the prodigal son. While the father celebrated and rejoiced over his son, the older brother stood outside the house and refused to rejoice that his brother who was lost had been found (Luke 15:25–32).⁹⁴

The point of these stories was that the Pharisees and scribes should rejoice in the same way that God rejoices when sinners come to repentance. In the context, the Pharisees and scribes, who refused to rejoice that tax collectors and sinners were listening to Jesus’ words (like Mary in Luke 10:39), were like the prodigal’s older brother who refused to rejoice when his sinful brother repented and returned home. The story was ultimately an indictment of their behavior.

The cultural impact of Jesus’ stories should not be missed.⁹⁵ Rindge states, “The parable is not only a defense of Jesus’ meal-sharing with the marginalized, but also an invitation to the Pharisees to join the meal.”⁹⁶ He intended to reshape how people

⁹³ Giblin writes, “The dynamic theme is the invitation to share in joy over the conversion of sinners.” Charles H. Giblin, “Structural and Theological Considerations on Luke 15,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (January 1962): 22.

⁹⁴ Bock notes the irony of this passage: “The son who was lost and outside is now inside, while the ‘inside’ elder brother complains from outside.” Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1317.

⁹⁵ Green observes that Luke accomplishes his theological aims through narrative. The use of stories would have had a powerful effect, inviting the Pharisees and scribes “not only to drop their concerns about Jesus but, indeed, to replicate his behavior in their own practices.” Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 569.

⁹⁶ Matthew S. Rindge, “Luke’s Artistic Parables: Narratives of Subversion, Imagination, and Transformation,” *Interpretation* 68, no. 4 (2014): 409.

valued the outcasts, those who lived on the margins of society such as tax collectors and sinners in this meal scene and the poor and lame in the previous meal scene (Luke 14:1–24).⁹⁷ This, in turn, was intended to shape the behavior of the Pharisees and scribes from complaining to rejoicing. Those who followed Jesus learned what he valued and where they should find their joy.

Eating with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10)

The ninth meal scene in Luke represents the last meal involving controversy.⁹⁸ The location of the meal is in Jericho at the home of a chief tax collector named Zacchaeus. Jericho was introduced in the previous episode where Jesus healed a blind man outside the city gates (Luke 18:35–43). A crowd gathered in Jericho as Jesus passed through (Luke 19:1). Zacchaeus could not see him, so he climbed a tree to get a better view (Luke 19:2–4). Looking up, Jesus asked Zacchaeus to display hospitality by opening his home to him (Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus “welcomed Him joyfully” (Luke 19:6). Green states, “This signifies from Jesus’ point of view that he hopes, in the context of a shared meal, to forge a relationship with Zacchaeus.”⁹⁹ Zacchaeus sought Jesus, but in reality Jesus was seeking him.¹⁰⁰

The crowd who saw Jesus eat with Zacchaeus complained that he had “gone to lodge with a sinful man” (Luke 19:7). Culturally, there was good reason for complaint. Tax collectors were in league with the Roman government and commonly extorted the

⁹⁷ Fitzmyer argued that the parables in Luke 15 actually are a continuation of the teaching in Luke 14:1–24, part of the “Lucan travel account.” Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV)*, 1072.

⁹⁸ Fitzmyer identifies this story as one of the concluding teachings in Luke’s travel account. He says, “[Luke] sees in this outcast of Palestinian society yet another of the ‘lost’ whom Jesus has come to save. This episode thus brings to an end that part of the Lucan travel account which has been called the ‘Gospel of the Outcast.’” Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV)*, 1218.

⁹⁹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 670.

¹⁰⁰ O’Toole says, “The quest really belongs to the Son of Man.” Robert F. O’Toole, “The Literary Form of Luke 19:1–10,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 116.

Jewish people in order to accrue personal wealth. That Luke notes that Zacchaeus is a “chief” tax collector (Luke 19:2) “implicates him more deeply in the corrupt tax system of the Roman government.”¹⁰¹ Zacchaeus would have been an outcast in the pattern of the woman at Simon’s house (Luke 7:36–50), the man with dropsy (Luke 14:1–6), and the blind man outside Jericho (Luke 18:35–43). Ladd states, “It almost seems that Luke attributes to God a sort of ‘inverted partiality,’ in that the gospel is particularly for the poor, the despised, and the disadvantaged.”¹⁰²

There are some important parallels between the story of the blind man and the story of Zacchaeus. Both stories involve men who cannot see—one because he is blind (Luke 18:35), and one because he is short (Luke 19:3). Both stories involve crowds, particularly, crowds that stand in opposition to the men in the stories (Luke 18:39; 19:7). Both stories involve men who try to get Jesus’ attention—one by calling out (Luke 18:38), and one by climbing a tree (Luke 19:4). Both stories involve Jesus’s transformative interaction—Jesus heals one man (Luke 18:42), and has a meal with the other (Luke 19:5).¹⁰³ Luke connects these stories because they make a similar point: God loves the outcast.

The importance of this story is evident in the contrast between Jesus’ acceptance of Zacchaeus and the crowd’s rejection of him. After Zacchaeus promised to repay and compensate those he had extorted, Jesus declared that salvation had come to his house and that he was a true son of Abraham.¹⁰⁴ Then, recapitulating his earlier

¹⁰¹ Craddock, *Luke*, 218. Craddock continues by stating, “In a corrupt system the loftier one’s position, the greater one’s complicity in that system,” 218.

¹⁰² George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 242.

¹⁰³ Though he approaches these parallels in a slightly different manner, Garland does a highly commendable job of tracing the connections between these stories. See Garland, *Luke*, 744–45.

¹⁰⁴ It should be noted that Zacchaeus was willing to depart with his riches, something the wealthy ruler in Luke 18:18–23 would not do. See Tannehill, *Luke*, 277. Additionally, Zacchaeus humbly repented of his sin, something the tax collector in Luke 18:13–14 did.

teaching that he had not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31–32), Jesus communicated the point of the story: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Zacchaeus was a lost sheep that Jesus came to find, like those in the parables of Luke 15.¹⁰⁵ Jesus did not come for those who deserved salvation the most, but for those who did not deserve it at all, like Zacchaeus. The cultural lesson for those who would follow Jesus was clear: disciples of Jesus must value the lost because Jesus values the lost. Further, the behavior of the disciples must reflect their value for the lost. This meant that the complaining of the Pharisees (Luke 15:2) and the crowd (Luke 19:7) must give way to the rejoicing of the Host (Luke 15:22–24).

The Last Supper (Luke 22:14–34)

The tenth meal scene is a climactic moment in Luke’s Gospel. It is one of the most well represented scenes in church life, Christian art, theological debate, etc. Various interpretive options regarding the Lord’s Supper are well documented.¹⁰⁶ However, the focus on this text for the present research will be on the impact of Jesus’ teaching about greatness on the culture of his disciples.

In the middle of the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples before his crucifixion, Jesus announced that one of his disciples was going to betray him (Luke 22:21–22). The

¹⁰⁵ There is a definite connection between the shepherd theme in Luke 15 and Luke 19. The promise of an eschatological shepherd in Ezek 34 may serve as the backdrop for these passages. See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV)*, 1218; Francois Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 594; David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 341–54.

¹⁰⁶ Much work has been done on the Last Supper. For example, see William Barclay, *The Lord’s Suppers* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967); Markus Barth, *Rediscovering the Lord’s Supper* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988); A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1972); Albert Schweitzer, *The Problem of the Lord’s Supper* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982); and R. Alan Streett, *Subversive Meals An Analysis of the Lord’s Supper under Roman Domination during the First Century*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013. For a work tracing the meals in Luke in relation to Eucharist, see Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the Eucharist According to Luke* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994).

disciples began to argue about which one of them was going to do so (Luke 22:23). This argument about who among them would be the worst evolved into an argument about who among them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). Jesus responded by urging the disciples not to rule over one another like pagan kings (Luke 22:25–26). Rather, they should serve one another. Jesus contrasted the way the existing culture viewed greatness with how he viewed greatness. He said, “For who is greater, the one at the table or the one serving? Isn’t it the one at the table? But I am among you as the One who serves” (Luke 22:27).

This was an astonishing role reversal. Jesus was associating himself not with one who eats at the table, but with one who serves others at the table.¹⁰⁷ Jesus then indicated that he would eat with his disciples at an eschatological table, implying that he would continue to demonstrate selfless service in the kingdom (Luke 22:29–30). Smith states, “Jesus’ presentation of himself as host/servant at the Last Supper is thus seen as prefiguring his role as host/servant at the messianic banquet.”¹⁰⁸

Jesus reoriented his disciples’ view of who was important. In John’s account of this meal, Jesus illustrated his teaching on humility by modeling humility through foot washing (John 13:4–16). Bovon conveys the sense of role reversal: “By subverting the human system of authority and the exercise of power, the Jesus of Luke . . . requires that the person at the top lower himself.”¹⁰⁹ Jesus’ teaching about humility and service followed his declaration that he would give himself for his disciples (Luke 22:19–20), “calling to mind here that the extent of Jesus’ self-giving service reached to the point of giving up his life for his own.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Smith argues that messianic banquets tend to be “connected with the theme of reversal, when the wealthy, the privileged, and especially the people of Israel (or Pharisees), will be judged.” Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,” 629.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,” 632.

¹⁰⁹ Francois Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 174.

¹¹⁰ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993),

Jesus' cultural expectations of his disciples were clear, shaping their beliefs, values, and behavior. This teaching discourse taught them that they should value humility and service. Arthur Just notes that service (*diakonia*) would be a "mark of the ministry of the apostles."¹¹¹ Indeed, as Plummer states, "true greatness involves service to others: *noblesse oblige*."¹¹² This theme would carry into the life of the early church, as the Apostles selected men who would serve tables (*diakonos*) and meet the needs of neglected widows (Acts 6:1–7). Jesus set forth a model of leadership that was counter-cultural, reorienting and correcting the disciples' underlying assumptions about greatness. Streett concludes, "For Luke's audience the lesson is clear—they should imitate Jesus and his meal practices and abandon the practices of the status-conscious Gentiles."¹¹³

Eating with Disciples After the Resurrection (Luke 24:13–43)

The eleventh and final meal scene in Luke is the first meal Jesus ate after the resurrection. Blomberg states that the coupling of Jesus' teaching and table fellowship in this episode forms the "climax of Luke's Gospel."¹¹⁴ The scene finds two disciples making their way to Emmaus, discussing the preceding events, presumably the reports of Jesus' resurrection in the previous section (Luke 24:1–14). Jesus encountered them on the road as they were arguing and asked about the source of their dispute (Luke 24:15–17). Not recognizing him, they proceeded to explain that they did not understand how Jesus could have been the Messiah if he was crucified (Luke 24:18–24). This reflected the common belief that the Messiah would "save" or deliver Israel by overthrowing Rome

1068.

¹¹¹ Just, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 844.

¹¹² Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, 501.

¹¹³ Streett, *Subversive Meals*, 194.

¹¹⁴ Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 160.

and inaugurating the kingdom.¹¹⁵

Jesus responded to their discussion by rebuking them for failing to believe what the prophets had said about the Messiah's suffering. Then, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:26–27). They were intrigued enough by what he said that they urged him to stay with them overnight, still unaware of his true identity (Luke 24:28–29).

Something significant took place in the next scene. Jesus reclined at the table with them, "took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30). At that point, "their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him" (Luke 24:31). Jesus left them, and they returned to Jerusalem and reported to the disciples what had happened (Luke 24:32–35). As they spoke to the disciples, Jesus appeared to them again. To prove to them he was really there, he invited them to touch him. Then, he ate fish in their presence (Luke 24:36–43). This scene "probably parallels the Emmaus narrative by reporting a process of coming to faith and insight that includes both instruction in the scripture and a shared meal."¹¹⁶

Fitzmyer states, "Though he is the guest, he assumes the role of the host or *paterfamilias*."¹¹⁷ As host, Jesus revealed to these disciples who he was. The significance of this passage is Jesus did not reveal himself to the disciples on the road, or even during the exposition of the prophets, "but in the blessing before the meal."¹¹⁸ Arthur Just states, "The primary thrust of the Emmaus narrative is *table fellowship* . . . the *teaching of Jesus*

¹¹⁵ This is why Jesus' disciples seem pre-occupied with the timing of the kingdom's arrival. See Luke 17:20; Acts 1:6. For a helpful survey of first century Messianic expectations, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

¹¹⁶ Tannehill, *Luke*, 360.

¹¹⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV)*, 1568. See also Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1206.

¹¹⁸ Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 60.

and *the meal of Jesus* must be considered together.”¹¹⁹ It was in the context of the meal, even more so than the study of the biblical text on the road, that the disciples’ eyes were opened to who Jesus was. G.B. Caird astutely observes,

The disciples recognized Jesus by the way in which he broke bread. Luke and his friends would no doubt find in the solemn scene at the supper table an anticipation of their own Eucharistic observances. Yet these two disciples had not been present at the last supper. The memories which Jesus’ action evoked must have been of other meals which he had held with his friends, perhaps, like the last supper, as anticipations of the messianic banquet of the kingdom.¹²⁰

Green notes that “the series of actions—took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them—is most reminiscent of his similar actions in 9:16 in the account of the miraculous feeding.”¹²¹ In the same way the feeding miracle in Luke 9 revealed Jesus’ identity, this meal on the way to Emmaus revealed who he was. Tannehill calls the Emmaus narrative a “revelatory process.”¹²² Breitenberg says, “In the breaking of bread—an ordinary and mundane act but one that was carried out in a specific context and in which the risen Jesus participated—they knew him again.”¹²³ Most of the meal scenes in Luke provided the context in which Jesus taught his disciples how to treat one another. In this scene, Jesus taught his disciples what they should believe about him. Jesus shaped their beliefs around the table.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how Jesus shaped the culture (behavior, values, and beliefs) of those around him. While Jesus used many mechanisms for culture creation, such as creating a sense of urgency and teaching, his primary method for influencing the

¹¹⁹ Just, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1006. Italics original.

¹²⁰ G. B. Caird, *Saint Luke* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1963), 259.

¹²¹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 849.

¹²² Tannehill, *Luke*, 358.

¹²³ E. Harold Breitenberg, Jr., “Luke 24:13–35,” *Interpretation* 64, no. 1 (2010): 76.

behavior, values, and beliefs of his disciples and others seems to be meals, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Meal scenes in Luke

<i>Text</i>	<i>Meal</i>	<i>Cultural Components Shaped</i>
Luke 5:29–39	Eating with Levi	Beliefs, values, and behavior toward tax collectors and sinners.
Luke 6:1–5	Eating with Disciples in a Field	Beliefs, values, and behavior regarding Sabbath laws.
Luke 7:36–50	Eating with Simon and Teaching Forgiveness	Beliefs and behavior regarding the place of the sinful woman at the table.
Luke 9:10–17	The Feeding of 5,000	Beliefs about Jesus’ identity and subsequent obedient behavior.
Luke 10:38–42	The Hospitality of Mary and Martha	Values regarding the importance of listening to Jesus’ words.
Luke 11:37–54	Eating with a Pharisee and Denouncing Hypocrisy	Behavior regarding hypocrisy.
Luke 14:1–24	Eating with a Pharisee on the Sabbath	Beliefs and behavior regarding status and humility.
Luke 15:1–32	Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners	Behavior toward tax collectors and sinners.
Luke 19:1–10	Eating with Zacchaeus	Values and behavior regarding the lost.
Luke 22:14–34	The Last Supper	Values and behavior regarding humility and service.
Luke 24:13–43	Eating with Disciples After the Resurrection	Beliefs about Jesus’ identity.

The meal motif holds unique prominence in Luke when compared to the other Gospels. Smith observes, “Meals were a central way in which Jesus portrayed the values and vision of the covenant and the meaning of the rule of God.”¹²⁴ In Luke’s Gospel, the primary means Jesus used to shape the culture of his followers was table fellowship. McMahan states this well when he says,

¹²⁴ Gordon T. Smith, *A Holy Meal: The Lord’s Supper in the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 13.

Of all the means by which Jesus could have chosen to be remembered, he chose to be remembered by a meal. What he considered memorable and characteristic of his ministry was his table–fellowship. The meal, one of humankind’s most basic and common practices, was transformed by Jesus into an occasion of divine encounter. It was in the sharing of food and drink that he invited his companions to share in the grace of God. The quintessence of Jesus’ redemptive mission was revealed in his eating with sinners, repentant and unrepentant alike.¹²⁵

People’s reactions to these meal encounters were mixed. Some of the Pharisees, for instance, became angry with Jesus and opposed him after these table experiences (Luke 11:53–54). Others, such as the disciples Jesus encountered on the road to Emmaus, had their eyes opened to see who he was and felt their “hearts ablaze” (Luke 24:31–32). Still others, like Zacchaeus, experienced complete life transformation over the course of the meal (Luke 19:8).

Yet despite the various reactions to Jesus at the dinner table, new cultural norms were established. These norms often involved new behaviors and values related to who would be considered “acceptable company” at the table, and thus who could be included in the kingdom. These norms also involved new beliefs related to who Jesus was and what he came to do. Some of the most life–transforming moments in Luke’s Gospel occurred at a dinner table. Jesus set a cultural agenda for his followers through the practice of table fellowship.

¹²⁵ C. T. McMahan, “Meals as Type–Scenes in the Gospel of Luke” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 1.

CHAPTER 4

SHAPING CHURCH CULTURE IN ACTS: TEACHING

There is no more exhaustive description of early church life and culture than that which is found in the book of Acts. Any study of early church leadership practices must include an analysis of Acts. It seems evident from the previous chapter that Jesus shaped the culture of his followers primarily through the medium of table fellowship. What remains to be explored is how and to what effect early church leaders also intentionally shaped the organizational culture of the early church. Two key themes emerge in the book of Acts in relation to how early church culture was shaped: the theme of teaching and the theme of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's role in influencing church culture will be traced in the next chapter. It will be argued in this chapter that early church leaders used the means of teaching as a primary embedding mechanism for shaping church culture.¹

In addition to the deductive methodologies mentioned in previous chapters, several inductive methodological approaches could be utilized in addressing the subject of church culture creation in Acts. For instance, the meal motif explored in the previous chapter also features prominently in Acts.² Meals were at the center of the new culture

¹ For a helpful survey of the theological message of the book of Acts, see Steve Walton, "Acts," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 74–83.

² Research has been conducted on the importance of meals in Acts, although not with a view toward how they shaped church organizational culture in particular. See, for instance, Reta Halteman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). See also Nathan MacDonald, Luzia Sutter Rehmann, and Kathy Ehrensperger, eds., *Decisive Meals: Table Politics in Biblical Literature* (London: T&T Clark, 2012). Interestingly, Smith argues that meals in the first century provided a context in which teaching could take place. See Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 256–258.

that was created in the early church. The early church was devoted to “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42). The believers met daily in the temple complex and “broke bread from house to house” (Acts 2:46). Meals played an important role in the establishment of deacons (Acts 6:1–7). Food was a central part of the vision Peter had that led him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:9–43), which signaled a paradigm shift in the apostolic ministry throughout the rest of Acts. Table fellowship was likely a part of the hospitality Paul provided under house arrest in the closing days of his ministry (Acts 28:30–31). Clearly, table fellowship was as important to the early church after Jesus’ ascension as it was during the course of his ministry. Early church leaders likely understood the power of hospitality in creating and reinforcing cultural norms in the nascent Christian church.³

Another approach to understanding culture creation in Acts would be to examine the role the community itself played in shaping cultural norms in the early church. There may be an inherent congregationalism in Acts.⁴ For instance, Matthias was

³ One might wonder why this dissertation would not trace the theme of meals in Acts given the weight they have received up to this point. However, while meals have an important role in Acts, they do not bear the prominence that they do in Luke. As has been demonstrated, the dominant motif in Luke is clearly meals. However, in Acts there is a more prominent theme; as this chapter will bear out, the role of the speeches in Acts is central. The primary culture embedding mechanism of the apostles was teaching. Therefore, this chapter will not trace the role of meals in shaping culture. The methodological commitment of this dissertation is not to force an alien structure upon the text but rather to allow the most salient features of the text to receive the attention they deserve. Speeches are most prominent in Acts. Schnabel notes that Luke reveals the very purpose of his text as a whole through the apostolic speeches. For his thoughts, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 35–36. The speeches and their settings provide unique information regarding the culture of the early church. Indeed, as Bruce notes, the speeches are “valuable and independent sources for the life and thought of the primitive Church.” F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 21. In addition to the cultural data that can be gleaned from the speeches, some have even suggested that the frequent summary statements about the teaching of God’s Word (Acts 6:7, Acts 9:31, Acts 12:24, Acts 13:49, Acts 16:5, Acts 19:20, and Acts 28:31) may serve as structural markers in Acts. Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 217. This marks the teaching theme as prominent in Acts.

⁴ Some Protestants would argue for a different polity inherent in Acts. For an argument for congregationalism, see Paige Patterson, “Single–Elder Congregationalism,” in *Who Runs the Church?: Four Views on Church Government*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 144. See also Mark E. Dever, “The Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 795.

selected as Judas' replacement by the action of the community (Acts 1:23–26). Perhaps most obviously, the important role of the community is seen in the actions taken at the Jerusalem council, where “the apostles and elders, with the whole church” used their collective voice to influence the church at Antioch (Acts 15:22). When the church at Antioch received a letter from Jerusalem with instructions, “they rejoiced because of its encouragement” (Acts 15:31). One of the reasons the Jerusalem letter was so effective was because it carried the weight of the entire community.⁵ A church's culture only changes when it develops broadly throughout the entire body. Only when the entire community adapts has there been an actual change in the culture of the church.

An important area of research in Luke–Acts has been the role of the Spirit in the life and development of the early church, though not with a focus on the Spirit's role in shaping church culture.⁶ The immense cultural changes the early church experienced cannot be explained apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. This line of research will be pursued in the next chapter and will make an important contribution to the study of church culture.

As worthy as these other avenues of research are, the focus of this chapter will be on the role the speeches in Acts may have played in shaping early church culture, specifically the speeches addressed to the church. Taking into consideration the observations above, it could be argued that the speeches, given in the context of

⁵ Lewis' theory about the role “key stakeholders” play in shaping culture is analogous to what occurred at the Jerusalem Council. Peer influence is powerful in shaping culture. This is why church discipline is so weighty, as an example. For information on Lewis' “strategic communication” process see Laurie K. Lewis, *Organizational Change: Creating Change Through Strategic Communication* (Chichester, UK: Wiley–Blackwell, 2011).

⁶ For instance, see William H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke–Acts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); Aaron Kuecker, *The Spirit and the “Other”: Social Identity, Ethnicity, and InterGroup Reconciliation in Luke–Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Gonzalo Haya–Prats, *Empowered Believers: The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); Youngmo Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom in the Writings of Luke and Paul: An Attempt to Reconcile These Concepts* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005); J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005); Arie W. Zwiep, *Christ, the Spirit and the Community of God: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

community, are a primary means by which the Spirit shapes church culture. Put another way, while speeches are not the only way early church culture was shaped, many of the other means (such as the Spirit's involvement) involved speeches.⁷ For instance, although the Spirit was the main character on the Day of Pentecost, the immediate result of the Spirit's involvement was that the believers began to speak, doing so "as the Spirit gave them ability for speech" (Acts 2:4). Meyer states, "Acts does not simply attribute the spread of the gospel to the power of the Spirit. It is vitally important to note that Acts follows the rest of the Scriptures in linking both the Spirit of God and *the word of God*."⁸ The next chapter will explore the unique role the Spirit played in shaping the culture of the early church in various ways. However, the speeches in Acts merit attention on their own in order to understand how they were used in shaping early church culture.⁹

The Speeches in Acts

Teaching is an integral constituent in the narrative of Acts. Richard Wells observes that the first and last "acts" of the apostles in the book of Acts were sermons.¹⁰ Luke used the repetition of summary phrases such as "the word of God continued to

⁷ Streett traces the importance of prophecy (often in the form of exhortation or teaching) as a central activity in Christian meals in the first century. This reinforces the argument that teaching was an important part of many of the other culture creation methodologies in Acts. R. Alan Streett, *Subversive Meals: An Analysis of the Lord's Supper under Roman Domination during the First Century* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 236–85.

⁸ Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 216–17. Italics original.

⁹ It should be noted that there has been a scholarly debate on the authenticity of the speeches in Acts. Some believe that Luke was recounting speeches that may not have actually occurred. For that argument, see M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 139. For an alternate view, see especially I. Howard Marshall, *The Book of Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 40–42; see also John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 43–47.

¹⁰ C. Richards Wells and A. Boyd Luter, *Inspired Preaching: A Survey of Preaching Found in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 75.

increase” to mark the significance of the Word.¹¹ In fact, as Marshall observes, the “chief medium” through which Luke develops his theology in Acts is through the inclusion of the apostolic speeches.¹² Indeed, “Preaching is the tie that binds Acts together.”¹³ Soards poignantly states the importance of the speeches in Acts,

Through the regular introduction of formally repetitive speeches, Luke unified his narrative; and, more important, he unified the image of an otherwise personally, ethically, and geographically diverse early Christianity. This is no mean feat: Luke crafted from events and words a history that was coherent and, moreover, ideologically pointed—a history that could, in turn, move through the future selectively preserving the tradition it repeated and thereby deliberately advancing its causes.¹⁴

Scholars have identified the speeches in Acts in various ways. Dibelius categorized the speeches according to the speaker (i.e. Christian speakers such as Peter, Paul, James, Stephen, etc., and non-Christian speakers such as Gamaliel, Tertullus, and Festus) and identified twenty-four speeches.¹⁵ Schneider followed Dibelius in his identification of twenty-four speeches, but categorized them not according to speaker, but according to kind, such as missionary speeches, defense speeches, partial speeches, and dialogues.¹⁶ Soards, while acknowledging that the scholarly consensus is twenty-four speeches in Acts, argues more comprehensively that when the partial speeches and dialogues are taken into consideration there are actually thirty-six speeches in Acts, delivered by both Christian and non-Christian speakers.¹⁷ Helpfully, Soards defines a

¹¹ E.g., Acts 6:7, Acts 9:31, Acts 12:24, Acts 13:49, Acts 16:5, Acts 19:20, and Acts 28:31. Meyer notes that these repeated phrases might serve as explicit structural features in Acts. Meyer, *Preaching*, 217.

¹² Marshall, *Acts*, 39.

¹³ Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 76.

¹⁴ Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 12.

¹⁵ Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 138–85.

¹⁶ G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 95–103.

¹⁷ Soards, *The Speeches in Acts*, 1. A list of these speeches can be found in Appendix 1.

speech as “a deliberately formulated address made to a group of listeners,” which for him includes non-sermonic material such as prayers and even speeches from non-Christians.¹⁸

C. H. Dodd differentiated between preaching the gospel to the lost (*kerygma*) and teaching that instructed the church (*didache*).¹⁹ Much research has been conducted on the missionary speeches in Acts.²⁰ Dodd, for instance, traced the common elements of the apostolic *kerygma*, creating a seminal work for the field.²¹ However, for the purpose of the present research, the concern must be focused on the speeches delivered to the church so that the impact they made on early church culture can be traced.

Since the purpose of this project is to identify the means through which the culture of the early church was shaped, the relevant speeches that deserve analysis are those that are directed to the church specifically, necessarily excluding the non-Christian speeches, non-sermonic speeches, dialogues, and prayers. Of the sermonic speeches, Wells and Luter identify three distinct categories among twenty sermons: paraenetic sermons, missionary sermons, and apologetic sermons.²² They note that five of the

¹⁸ Soards, *The Speeches in Acts*, 20.

¹⁹ C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), 50–51.

²⁰ See, for instance, C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980); Atef M. Gendy, “Style, Content and Culture: Distinctive Characteristics in the Missionary Speeches in Acts,” *Swedish Missiological Themes* 99, no. 3 (2011): 247–65; Thor Strandenaes, “The Missionary Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles and their Missiological Implications,” *Swedish Missiological Themes* 99, no. 3 (2011): 341–54.

²¹ Dodd lists six features of the apostolic *kerygma*: “the age of fulfillment has dawned . . . this has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus . . . by virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God, as Messianic head of the new Israel . . . the Holy Spirit in the Church is the sign of Christ’s present power and glory . . . the Messianic Age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ . . . the *kerygma* always closes with an appeal for repentance, the offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of ‘salvation,’ that is, of ‘the life of the Age to Come,’ to those who enter the elect community.” Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 21–23.

²² Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 78–79. The *paraenetic sermons* are found in Acts 1:15–26, Acts 11:1–18, Acts 15:6–11, Acts 15:13–21, and Acts 20:17–38. The *missionary sermons* are found in Acts 2:14b–39, Acts 3:12b–26, Acts 10:34b–43, Acts 13:16b–41, Acts 14:15–17, Acts 17:22b–31,

twenty sermons are paraenetic in nature, “preached *to believers* for purposes of encouragement, edification, and/or instruction.”²³ This chapter will focus on the five paraenetic sermons addressed to the church, as these are the sermons that most directly shaped the culture of the early church.²⁴ Each of the sermons will be examined to explore how they shaped the culture of the early church.

Peter’s Sermon in the Upper Room (Acts 1:15–26)

The first paraenetic sermon in Acts occurred soon after the ascension of Jesus and the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:9–11). The disciples had gathered in an upper room to pray and wait for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12–14).²⁵ After listing the names of the eleven apostles, Luke recounted Peter’s sermon to 120 disciples who had gathered in the upper room and the reaction of the disciples to his message (Acts 1:15–26).

The topic of Peter’s sermon was the need to replace Judas.²⁶ There are two major parts of his address, each centered in the citation of Scripture. In the first part of the sermon, he described the fate of Judas (Acts 1:16–20a). Peter grounded his statements about Judas in David’s prophecy that a betrayer would be destroyed and replaced (Ps 69:25, Ps 109:8). Peter then recounted to the disciples how Judas “acquired a field with

and Acts 28:24–28. The *apologetic sermons* are found in Acts 4:8–12, Acts 5:29–32, Acts 7:2b–53, Acts 22:1–21, Acts 23:1b–6, Acts 24:10b–21, Acts 26:2–23, and Acts 28:17b–20.

²³ Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 78. Italics original.

²⁴ Certainly, the missionary and apologetic sermons would have been formative in the life and culture of the early church, but only the paraenetic sermons addressed the church directly. The purpose of the paraenetic sermons was the encouragement, edification, and instruction of the church. Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 78.

²⁵ Barrett notes that upper rooms were often used as meeting places, studies, and places of prayer. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 87.

²⁶ Conzelmann rightly notes that this action of choosing someone to replace Judas was a one-time need in order to fill out the Twelve. In other words, not every apostle would need to be replaced. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 12.

his unrighteous wages” which Judas gained by being a “guide to those who arrested Jesus” (Acts 1:16–18). Peter described Judas’ fate in vivid terms, saying that he died in his field by falling headfirst and having his insides spill out (Acts 1:18–19).²⁷ The death was so gruesome and notable in the community that people named the place where he died the “Field of Blood” (Acts 1:19). Peter was doubtless stressing the justice of Judas’ death, considering the fact that he had betrayed Jesus.²⁸

In the second part of the sermon, Peter addressed the need to replace Judas in more detail. He appropriated Psalm 109:8 to state that someone needed to take Judas’ place as part of the Twelve. He then instructed those gathered about the requirements for selecting Judas’ replacement. First, it was necessary that one was selected who had accompanied Jesus during his ministry (Acts 1:21–22a). Second, it was necessary that one was selected who would “become a witness” of Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 1:22b). Peter thereby set the parameters of expectation for apostolic leadership. An apostle must have observed Jesus and serve as a witness to the resurrection. Bock states, “The continuity of exposure to Jesus is central to the special role of the witness and underscores the credibility of the eyewitness tradition the apostles produced.”²⁹ He continues by observing, “No one of succeeding generations would have these qualifications.”³⁰ Peter clearly established a new cultural norm: those who serve as apostles must be qualified in such a manner in order to lead. Stott says that Judas’

²⁷ This differs slightly from Matthew’s account of Judas’ death, in which he dies by hanging. There are several works that seek to harmonize the two accounts, including the possibility that the rope Judas used to hang himself broke and caused him to fall headfirst. See C. W. Carter and R. Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 20–21; A. B. Gordon, “The Fate of Judas According to Acts 1:18,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1971): 97–100.

²⁸ Polhill poignantly states, “For Peter the recollection of Judas’s gruesome end must have been a grim reminder of his own denial of his Lord as he now sought to lead the assembly to fill the abandoned post.” Polhill, *Acts*, 92–93.

²⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 88.

³⁰ Bock, *Acts*, 88.

replacement had a responsibility “to safeguard the true tradition about Jesus.”³¹

The disciples responded to Peter’s sermon by considering two possible candidates: Joseph and Matthias (Acts 1:23). They prayed and asked God to show them which man should be selected, then cast lots to see who would be selected (Acts 1:24–26). Casting lots was a traditional means of determining God’s will and was rooted in a confidence in God’s sovereignty over the selection (Prov 16:33 states that every decision of the lot that is cast is “from the Lord”).³²

There are several important cultural observations in this story. First, it is necessary to note that the believers followed the instruction of Peter in terms of the manner of Matthias’ selection. That is, his teaching shaped their subsequent behavior. Notably absent from this passage is any verbal debate or opposition to Peter’s words. The fact that they selected a man with the qualifications Peter defined signified the effectiveness of the message he preached. In the first congregational action the early church took after Jesus’ departure, they responded to teaching with obedient behavior, something the early church did throughout the rest of the book of Acts with few exceptions.³³

The second cultural element Peter shaped in his sermon was the values of the early church. First, by grounding his instructions in the authority of Scripture, he taught the early church to rely on Scripture to guide them. Chrysostom noted about this text that Peter “acted as expositor, not as preceptor.”³⁴ Peter did not merely decree who should be

³¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 58.

³² David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 128.

³³ A notable exception to this obedient behavior was the disobedience of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–11.

³⁴ Chrysostom, *A Commentary of the Acts of the Apostles*, in vol. 11 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 19.

selected. Wells notes, “In short, Peter employs Scripture, first to comfort, then to guide, the nascent church.”³⁵ Second, by relying on prayer, he taught the church to depend on God’s sovereignty in directing their actions. That is, he taught them to value God’s wisdom above their own. Third, he shaped their values as demonstrated in their decision to select a man who would bear witness to the resurrection. By selecting such a man, the early church affirmed this qualification and demonstrated their value of Peter’s words. Their choice reflected that they also valued Jesus’ instructions related to the witness of the believers (Acts 1:8). Matthias would model what Jesus expected for the entire church, a faithful witness to the nations of the resurrected Christ.

In this first paraenetic sermon, Peter clearly shaped several new cultural norms for the early church. His sermon was effective as is demonstrated by their obedient behavior in response. His instruction about leadership clearly governed the expectations the early church had for apostolic leadership.

Peter’s Sermon to the Circumcision Party in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1–18)

The second paraenetic sermon in Acts was delivered to a group of believers in the early church “who stressed circumcision” (Acts 11:1). Tracing the narrative flow, this section begins in Acts 9:32 where Luke shifted his focus from the conversion of Paul to the acts of Peter. This section of the narrative includes three conversion stories, all stressing the inclusive nature of the gospel.³⁶ The last conversion story, that of the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48), features prominently in Peter’s subsequent sermon in Acts 11. In fact, the content of his preaching is a recollection to the Jerusalem church of

³⁵ Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 91.

³⁶ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 136. The three conversions include the healing of a paralyzed man, the healing of a woman, and the salvation of a Gentile soldier.

the events surrounding the conversion of Cornelius.³⁷

The context of Peter's sermon must be considered in order to understand the reason he taught the Jerusalem church in the manner he did.³⁸ In Acts 10, God's sovereignty is vividly on display. God gave a dream to Cornelius in which he instructed him to send men to Joppa and ask Peter to meet with him (Acts 10:1–8). Meanwhile, as the men neared Peter's house, God gave a vision to Peter in which he was instructed to eat unclean animals (Acts 10:9–13). Peter refused at first, alluding to the Jewish regulations regarding ritual purity,³⁹ but a voice spoke to him and said, "What God has made clean, you must not call common" (Acts 10:15).⁴⁰ This vision happened three times. As Peter was "deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean," the men Cornelius had sent arrived at his house (Acts 10:17–18). The Spirit spoke to Peter and told him that he had sent the men and that Peter should accompany them, which he did (Acts 10:19–23).

When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, he found that many people had gathered together (Acts 10:24–27). He acknowledged to Cornelius that it was "forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner" but God had shown him not to call any person unclean (Acts 10:28–29). After hearing Cornelius talk about the dream God

³⁷ Kistemaker observes the following about this text: "We receive the impression that because of the vast history of the Christian church, Luke is forced to be selective and concise. However, when he records Peter's visit to Cornelius, Luke is purposely elaborate . . . As a Gentile Christian, he attaches considerable importance to the entrance of the Gentiles into the church." Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 407.

³⁸ This narrative will be treated in the next chapter as well. This chapter will focus on the role of Peter's sermon as it relates to the Cornelius story. In the next chapter, the narrative will be examined with a focus on the Spirit's role in the story.

³⁹ These regulations can be found in Lev 11.

⁴⁰ Witherington states, "Peter assumed that because of the considerable presence of unclean animals and the possible problem of contamination, there was nothing fit to eat in the sheet." Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 250.

had given him, Peter spoke to those in Cornelius' household and said, "Now I really understand that God doesn't show favoritism, but in every nation the person who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34–35). Peter then declared, "through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

The response to Peter's sermon was extraordinary. The Holy Spirit came upon those who heard the message and they began "speaking in other languages and declaring the greatness of God" (Acts 10:46). The Jews who were present were astounded at the fact that "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also" (Acts 10:45).⁴¹ The way Luke tells the story emphasizes the fact that the Jews were caught by surprise that the Holy Spirit would move among the Gentiles in this manner.⁴²

This event—the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles—caused a significant debate in Jerusalem. In fact, the immediate context of Peter's sermon indicates that those who stressed circumcision were arguing with him and accusing him of associating with the Gentiles, which was something that he himself had indicated to Cornelius was unlawful to do (Acts 11:1–3). The complaint about table fellowship with those who were ritually impure was not new to Peter, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter. One of the most consistent themes in the Lukan meal scenes is Jesus' insistence that everyone should be welcome at the table, regardless of ethnic or religious background. Here, the discussion appears again about fellowship with those on the cultural margins. It was to this circumcision party that Peter addressed his sermon.⁴³

⁴¹ Kistemaker observes that the Jews were astounded that God had poured out the Spirit on the Gentiles, even though "Jesus had commanded the apostles to preach the gospel to all the nations." Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, 400. It should have followed that the pouring out of the Spirit would follow the proclamation of the gospel.

⁴² Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, 360.

⁴³ Bock refers to these people as the "circumcision group," suggesting they were not an organized party, but rather a group of concerned Jewish Christians. Bock, *Acts*, 406. Scholars such as Conzelmann and Parsons suggest that those "of the circumcision" referred to the entire Jewish Christian

The point of God's revelation to Peter and Peter's subsequent sermon recounting the events surrounding Cornelius' conversion was "that God now grants salvation to all people irrespective of ethnic or religious background."⁴⁴ In "an orderly sequence," he told those present in Jerusalem the story of Cornelius' conversion (Acts 11:4ff) and concluded his sermon by stating, "Therefore, if God gave them [the Gentiles] the same gift that He also gave to us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?" (Acts 11:17). For Peter, the lesson of the vision was clear: God desired the salvation of all people, including those considered ritually impure by the Jews. This represented a significant operational paradigm shift in the early Christian church.

The response to Peter's sermon about Jew/Gentile relations was as immediate and powerful as the response to the sermon that led to Matthias' selection as part of the Twelve. When the people heard his message, their first response was silence, followed closely by praise (Acts 11:18a).⁴⁵ The Jewish believers "glorified God, saying, 'So God has granted repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles!'" (Acts 11:18b). While the Jew/Gentile question was by no means settled at this point in the narrative, as is demonstrated by the fact that the issue reappears later at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35), the people's reaction to Peter's sermon indicated an important new cultural norm regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles in the mission of the church.

Peter's teaching in this passage shaped the beliefs, values, and behavior of the Jerusalem believers related to previous cultural norms regarding Jew/Gentile relations. While the divide between Jews and Gentiles was normative, even in the context of the

congregation. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 86; Parsons, *Acts*, 156.

⁴⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, 474.

⁴⁵ "Growing quiet" likely indicated that the circumcision group decided after hearing Peter's sermon to "desist from criticism." Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 199.

Christian community, Peter clearly led a shift in behavioral methodology for the early church. From now on, they would make the gospel known among the Gentiles. He also shaped their beliefs about who could receive salvation and the gift of the Spirit, which in turn created a new value whereby Gentiles were included in the mission. Later, in Acts 13, Gentiles would be called “Christians.” In terms of this new designation, Martin Hengel accurately observes,

The fact that the members of the new messianic community in Antioch were given the peculiar Latin-type designation *Christianoi/Christiani* . . . indicates that they had become an independent organization over against the Jewish synagogue community. To the outsider, the successful messianic sect could now appear as a group on its own, which had detached itself from Judaism. It was given its own name, the independent character of which made it fundamentally different from earlier designations like ‘Galilean’ or ‘Nazorean’ (Acts 24:5), which had referred to Jewish groups.⁴⁶

If a group’s culture truly is perceived as “how things are done around here,”⁴⁷ then this new designation as a distinctive group from Judaism certainly marked a new cultural norm. Gentile Christians now formed a new group apart from the previously distinctive Jewish Christian church. This new group had its own cultural norms that marked important changes from the past. Peter’s teaching was at the heart of this change.

Peter’s sermon had its desired effect, as can be seen in the fact that the next episode in the narrative is the spread of the gospel to Antioch, where the good news was proclaimed to the Hellenists (Acts 11:19–26). Longenecker states, “The conversion of Cornelius was a landmark in the history of the gospel’s advance from its strictly Jewish beginnings to its penetration of the Roman Empire.”⁴⁸ Munck notes the connection between the beginning of the primitive Antioch church to the previous events regarding Cornelius and Peter, stating about Antioch,

⁴⁶ Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 103.

⁴⁷ Cameron and Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*, 19.

⁴⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in Vol. 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 884.

There something new and hitherto unknown came into existence, namely the preaching of the Gospel to non-Jews. Luke went on immediately with his account of the great effect of this venture, with effects just as revolutionary as those which followed the preaching of the Gospel to the Jews.⁴⁹

Peter's teaching, in this case, clearly shaped the culture of the early church.

The Jew/Gentile relationship would continue to be a central part of the dialogue occurring in the early church (e.g., Gal 3:27–28; Eph 2:11–22, etc.), but at the minimum, the mission of the early church now included the Gentiles. Culture change is long-term, as it was in this case, but the genesis of change began with the events surrounding this sermon.⁵⁰

Peter's Sermon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6–11)

As mentioned above, the circumstances surrounding the conversion of Cornelius and Peter's subsequent sermon by no means settled all questions on the Jew/Gentile issue. This is evidenced by the appearance of a dispute in Antioch regarding whether or not the newly converted Gentiles were required to be circumcised (Acts 15:1–6).⁵¹ The question centered on whether the Gentiles could be part of God's people as Jewish proselytes or if they could be part of God's people as Gentiles.⁵²

The response of early church leaders was to form an assembly in Jerusalem to consider the question (Acts 15:6). After much debate, Peter was the first to speak. His

⁴⁹ Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 108.

⁵⁰ Goldsworthy notes how "the inclusion of the gentiles forced a re-evaluation of the way the law would function in the church." Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 241. This is a startling change in cultural norms.

⁵¹ Bruce notes that it was the normative practice of Gentile converts to Judaism to "observe the Jewish law in its entirety." Initiation into the Jewish community often involved circumcision, which is why "full proselytization was more common among women than among men." F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 266. If Wright is correct that "all early Christianity was Jewish Christianity," this expectation for early Christian converts to fully observe Jewish regulations such as circumcision makes sense. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 453.

⁵² Schnabel, *Acts*, 621.

address contained three main points, each of which firmly grounded his argument in God's sovereignty: First, God chose Peter to announce the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7); second, God validated the inclusion of the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8); and third, God chose to cleanse all who believe, without discrimination between Jew and Gentile (Acts 15:9).⁵³ Peter pointed his audience to the authority of God's activity and choice. This trust in God's sovereignty is on display in his later epistolary declaration that those who are chosen by God are chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God and Father" (1 Pet 1:1–2).

Peter followed the grounding statements in his sermon with a rhetorical question: "Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). Barrett restates the gist of Peter's question, "It is absurd to expect Gentiles to put up with what we Jews cannot endure."⁵⁴ That is, the burden of Jewish regulations was something from which the gospel freed both Jew and Gentile. Therefore, to require Gentile converts to become Jewish proselytes represented "a challenge directed against God, for they refuse to believe the revelation God had given to Peter in Caesarea and the fact that the Holy Spirit had truly been given to Cornelius and his friends."⁵⁵

Peter concluded his sermon with a statement of belief. He said, "On the contrary, we believe we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are" (Acts 15:12). What Peter accomplished in this statement is significant. He argued that God indeed made no distinction in how Jews and Gentiles come to faith – both must be saved through the grace of God rather than the observation of obscure Jewish regulations. Polhill remarks, "Peter's ultimate point was that God is free to save

⁵³ Soards, *The Speeches in Acts*, 90.

⁵⁴ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 717.

⁵⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, 634.

whomever and however he pleases.”⁵⁶ Indeed, “There is only *one* way of salvation—
‘through the grace of our Lord Jesus.’”⁵⁷

The Council responded immediately to this sermon with a quiet contemplation (Acts 15:12). They heard from Barnabas, Paul, and James (whose sermon will be analyzed in this chapter), before deciding to write a letter clarifying the Jerusalem church’s position on the Judaizing question (Acts 15:12–29). Their conclusion after hearing the sermons of Peter and the others was that the Gentiles do not need to undergo circumcision. They attributed this decision directly to the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28a). Aside from a few instructions relating to sexual immorality and some food regulations, the Jerusalem church wrote to the church at Antioch that they desired “to put no greater burden on you” (Acts 15:28b).

Peter’s sermon achieved its desired effect. The new cultural expectation for the church was that Gentiles would not be required to become Jewish proselytes. Bock states well the importance of this sermon,

In sum, the scene is important because it completely legitimates the Gentile mission. It also establishes faith alone rooted in the grace of God through Christ alone as the principle of inclusion, and it does so by showing continuity with the promises of old. The new faith and practice are actually rooted in old promises, making the faith an old one in its roots. The idea that circumcision is necessary is emphatically refuted in the chapter . . . God’s initiative must be appreciated for what it is: a full inclusion of Gentiles without making them Jews.⁵⁸

Bock’s use of the terms “faith and practice” indicates that Peter shaped the cultural elements of belief, behavior, and by extension values, since values are beliefs that the church actually acts upon.⁵⁹ The Jerusalem Council became a model for

⁵⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, 328.

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 327. Italics original.

⁵⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 493.

⁵⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 41.

decision-making in the church through church history.⁶⁰ The subsequent actions of the church would be modeled on the communal collaboration of the Jerusalem gathering. The centrality of teaching, dependence on the Holy Spirit's direction, and communal discussion and debate would guide future decisions in the life of the early church. Peter's sermon shaped the beliefs, values, and behavior not merely related to the church's relationship with new Gentile converts but also in how the church would govern itself in the future.

James' Sermon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13–21)

The fourth paraenetic sermon in Acts is also delivered at the Jerusalem Council, but through the proclamation of James. The Jerusalem Council, including the sermons of Peter and James, has been described as “the centre of Acts.”⁶¹ Although delivered in the same context as Peter's sermon above, there was a significant difference in the content of James' sermon: whereas Peter preached primarily an exhortatory message to the church, James added specific instructions regarding the church's course of action. James took a leadership role in proposing a solution that the Jerusalem Council affirmed by their actions.⁶² The solution he proposed in his sermon had a direct impact not only on giving an answer to the immediate problem, “but the further expansion of the church.”⁶³

Like Peter, James rooted his argument in the work of God among the Gentiles.

⁶⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 175. For a more detailed analysis of biblical decision-making models for the church, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *Decision-Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁶¹ Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 2, 709.

⁶² Bock suggests that James might have sought harmony “with a point of view his instincts may have originally sought to oppose.” This ability to navigate two opposing parties is evidence of his leadership ability. Bock, *Acts*, 508.

⁶³ Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 2, 709–10.

He restated Peter's report that God was at work "to take from the Gentiles a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). He then recalled the words of Amos 9:11–12 and Isaiah 45:21, stating that God rebuilt David's tent "so the rest of humanity may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles who are called by My name" (Acts 15:17).⁶⁴ Whereas "Peter had offered a theological argument for Gentile inclusion in part on the basis of his personal experience, James offers a theological argument based on another source of authority: scripture."⁶⁵ James' teaching was grounded in Scripture, thus giving his teaching the weight of divine authority.

James finished his sermon with specific application to the situation in Antioch. He suggested that the Council write a letter to the church at Antioch encouraging them to "abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood," but not to "cause difficulties" for the Gentiles in regard to circumcision (Acts 15:19–20). He grounded the instructions about sexual immorality and food regulations in the authority of Scripture, specifically in the primacy of Moses' teaching (Acts 15:21). James' instructions were in harmony with Peter's thesis that the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised, but he took a mediating view by suggesting the believers in Antioch should still observe certain Jewish regulations.⁶⁶

Schnabel lists several important theological implications for the early church to be drawn from James' (and Peter's) teaching. First, the teaching at the Jerusalem Council reaffirmed that salvation was by grace through faith, and thus not a result of observing

⁶⁴ Marshall says about the reference to David's tent being rebuilt, "In the present context in Acts it seems that God is to restore the fallen dynasty of David and all that appertains to it, with the aim that the remainder of humankind will seek the Lord – that is, the nations over which God's name is called." I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 591.

⁶⁵ Parsons, *Acts*, 212–13.

⁶⁶ Parsons suggests this was a "compromise" move with the Pharisees. *Ibid.*, 214.

strict Jewish regulations.⁶⁷ Second, Gentiles could be saved without having to follow the teaching of the Judaizers. That is, they were not required to become Jewish proselytes.⁶⁸ Third, “God’s decision about who is ‘in’ is bound up solely with people’s faith in Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile,” resulting in the unity of God’s people and the affirmation that believing Gentiles are “*bona fide members of God’s people*.”⁶⁹ Fourth, while Gentiles were not required to be circumcised or to become Jewish proselytes, there were still important parts of the Old Testament law that they should observe, especially those related to idolatry and immorality.⁷⁰

James’ sermon was successful in that the Jerusalem Council followed his teaching exactly. They sent the suggested letter to Antioch, along with several “leading men among the brothers” who could clarify the intent and meaning of the letter (Acts 15:22–29). Peterson writes about the conclusion of the Council after hearing the apostles’ teaching,

The Jerusalem Council acknowledged that Gentile Christians were not obligated to live under the yoke of the law. At the same time, it challenged them to exercise their liberty with wisdom, restraint, and love, recognizing the concerns of some Jewish Christians about contamination through any association with idolatrous practices. The requirements commended to Gentile believers by letter and urged upon them by prophets and teachers in the local church context (15:30–32, 16:4) were designed to keep the lines of fellowship open with Jewish believers by giving warning to Gentiles about any compromise with the idolatry and immorality that was so much a part of their world.⁷¹

James’ sermon shaped the culture of the early church by influencing the beliefs of those gathered in Jerusalem regarding God’s work among the Gentiles. It also directly influenced the behavior of the Council in terms of their actions toward the church at

⁶⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, 653.

⁶⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, 653–654.

⁶⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 654. Italics original.

⁷⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, 654–55.

⁷¹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 440.

Antioch. One can only imagine the effect it would have had on church history had the Jerusalem church stifled what God was doing in Antioch and beyond. Longenecker writes about the significance of their actions in terms of subsequent history,

When one considers the situation of the Jerusalem church in AD 49, the decision reached by the Jerusalem Christians must be considered one of the boldest and most magnanimous in the annals of church history. While still attempting to minister exclusively to the nation, the council refused to impede the progress of that other branch of the Christian mission whose every success meant further difficulty for them from within their own nation . . . Thus both Paul's mission to the Gentiles and the Jewish-Christian mission to Jews were enabled to progress side by side without conflict.⁷²

Notably, James' sermon also had an effect on the behavior of the church at Antioch, because they enthusiastically received the letter containing his proposals. When they received and read the letter, "they rejoiced because of its encouragement" (Acts 15:31). It is assumed in the text, though not stated explicitly, that their rejoicing reflected tacit agreement about the solution proposed by the Jerusalem church. James' teaching affected, then, not just the behavioral norms of those in Jerusalem but also those in Antioch.⁷³ It is clear that the teaching of James served a vital role in shaping the culture of the early church.

Paul's Sermon to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17–38)

The fifth and final paraenetic sermon in Acts was delivered by the Apostle Paul. It is considered to be Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders. Paul was staying in Miletus and called for the elders to join him from Ephesus (Acts 20:17). When they arrived, he delivered his final sermon to them.⁷⁴

⁷² Longenecker, "Acts," 953.

⁷³ Malina and Pilch state that due to the exhortatory nature of the letter sent to Antioch, their response reflected obedience as a result of loyalty and solidarity with those in Jerusalem, rather than a sense of obligation to the power or authority of the other church. This is a powerful statement about the personal influence wielded by the Jerusalem leaders. Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 111.

⁷⁴ Wells calls this sermon "the first known systematic pastoral theology." Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 182.

Pervo states that this sermon is unique in Acts because it is an address to leaders. The sermon suggests “a paradigm for leadership, reinforcement of leaders’ authority, and guidance for believers.”⁷⁵ There are three major sections in the sermon: a defense of Paul’s ministry among them (Acts 20:18–27), instructions for the elders and the church (Acts 20:28–31), and a benediction wherein he commits them to the Lord and to the “message of His grace” (Acts 20:32–35). Paul concluded his sermon by kneeling and praying with the elders (Acts 20:36).⁷⁶

The first section of the sermon was a defense of Paul’s ministry among them. He reminded them that he “did not shrink back from proclaiming . . . anything that was profitable or from teaching it . . . in public and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). He indicated that God had called him to go to Jerusalem and stated that he was willing to face whatever he might find there, even though the Spirit had told him that he would be imprisoned and afflicted once he arrived (Acts 20:22–24). He then declared that he was guiltless of their blood because he had declared faithfully to them “the whole plan of God” (Acts 20:25–27). This reminiscence of Paul’s ministry and his indication that his current movement was ordered by the Holy Spirit would have reminded the elders of the authenticity of his leadership among them. Paul frequently defended his authority as an apostle by reminding the churches of his labor and exemplary conduct among them (e.g., 2 Cor 10:1–18; 1 Thess 2:1–12). Conzelmann stated that this section “sketches the picture of Paul as he should always be remembered.”⁷⁷

The second section of the sermon contained several instructions for the

⁷⁵ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 516–17.

⁷⁶ Peterson divides the sermon in an alternate manner that is helpful and memorable. The first section of the sermon is Acts 20:18–21, titled “Recalling the Past.” The second section of the sermon is Acts 20:22–35, titled “Facing the Future.” Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 563–65.

⁷⁷ Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 173.

elders.⁷⁸ First, they should remain on guard “for yourselves and for all the flock that the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the flock of God, which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).⁷⁹ Paul stated the reason for his exhortation: “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And men will rise up from your own number with deviant doctrines” (Acts 20:29–30). Paul understood that evil men could bring “bloody persecution” to the church and that false teachers could emerge to lead the flock astray.⁸⁰ Second (and embedded within the first imperative), they should “shepherd” the flock of God that was among them.⁸¹ This shepherding mandate is consistent with the biblical motif found elsewhere in Scripture related to leadership of God’s people (e.g., Ps 23, Ezek 34, 1 Pet 5:2). Third, they should be on the alert, remembering Paul’s previous warnings about the possibility of false doctrine (Acts 20:31).

The third section of the sermon was a benediction in which Paul committed the elders “to God and to the message of His grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:32). Paul also reminded them once again of his labor on their behalf during his ministry among them (Acts 20:33–35). This was meant to encourage and build them up,

⁷⁸ Although Paul does not mention it in this sermon, an interesting feature of his instructions to elders in Ephesus elsewhere is the requirement that they must be “hospitable.” This is especially relevant in light of the material in the previous chapter on table fellowship and hospitality. It is clear that Paul understood the importance both of teaching and table fellowship. See 1 Tim 3:2, where hospitality and the ability to teach are coupled together as qualifications for elders in Ephesus.

⁷⁹ Barrett calls Acts 20:28 both “the practical and the theological centre of the speech; the practical centre, because Paul’s primary intention is to urge the Ephesian elders to do their duty effectively . . . and the theological centre, because only here in Acts is there an attempt to bring out the ground of the church’s ministry in the work of the Holy Spirit.” Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 2, 974.

⁸⁰ Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 204.

⁸¹ Parsons and Culy state that the construction of the verb “to shepherd” (*poimainein*, a present active infinitive) indicates that this was the purpose for which they had been appointed by the Holy Spirit. Mikeal C. Parsons and Martin M. Culy, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 396. Thus, “shepherding” becomes the governing motif of the verse. For an excellent work that develops a biblical theology of the shepherding theme, see Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

which it in fact did, as is evidenced by their reaction of affection and intimate friendship when he departed (Acts 20:36–38). Paul also reminded the elders that God would give them an inheritance (Acts 20:32), which was echoed in Peter’s later teaching that those who shepherd the flock well will receive “the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4). Polhill notes about this benedictory section, “Paul passed on the banner to the Ephesian elders to continue to lead the church after his departure, urging them above all to be faithful to his gospel in the light of the coming threats.”⁸²

Because of his imminent departure and doubtful return, the elders’ response to Paul’s sermon was sorrow. While the text does not explicitly indicate whether or not the elders took to heart his instructions, it is nonetheless clear that he intended to shape their future behavior. This is indicated by the imperatives to be on guard, shepherd the flock, and be on the alert (Acts 20:28–31). Even in the form of his address, which paralleled other common farewell addresses, Paul intended for his example and instructions to influence the behavior of the elders. Polhill notes, that among other things, a common feature of the ancient farewell address was “exhortations to desired behavior on the part of the hearers.”⁸³

Additionally, by committing the elders to “the message of His grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:32), Paul intended to shape their belief and confidence in the message that he had entrusted to them through his teaching ministry. Paul desired those who led the church to be committed faithfully to continue in the tradition of his teaching ministry. In his letter to Timothy, who was serving in Ephesus, Paul urged him, “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to

⁸² Polhill, *Acts*, 429.

⁸³ Polhill, *Acts*, 423. Polhill discusses other common features which include assembling close associates, notifying the hearers of the speaker’s impending death or departure, asking the hearers to emulate the speaker’s behavior, delivering exhortations about future behavior, and casting predictions of coming trouble.

faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). Paul had modeled this by declaring to them “the whole plan of God” (Acts 20:27) and now expected the elders to emulate his example.⁸⁴ Paul wanted to shape a culture among the church leaders in Ephesus of assured belief in the message and subsequent behavior that included intentional and faithful teaching of the message.

Conclusion

Soards observes, “Luke weaves speeches into the narrative of Acts and creates *emphasis* so that the speeches articulate a distinct worldview.”⁸⁵ The paraenetic speeches in Acts function prominently in Luke’s account of the life and growth of the early church. As described above, the apostles’ teaching shaped the organizational culture of the early church because it directly impacted the behavior, values, and beliefs of early Christians. As Richard Wells so appropriately remarks about the sermons in Acts, “when the preachers preach, things happen.”⁸⁶

Each of the paraenetic sermons was effective, shaping the early church’s culture in discernable ways, as seen in table 2. Whether it was in selecting a replacement for Judas, developing an understanding of how Jewish and Gentile believers should relate to one another, or understanding the sacred task of shepherding the flock, the sermons achieved their desired goals. Peter, James, and Paul understood that the church must be obedient to the Word of God. It was through the instruction that took place by the means of these paraenetic sermons that the church’s culture was shaped.

⁸⁴ Pelikan notes that the semantic construction in v. 27 suggests Paul was indicating that “‘accuracy’ (*akribeia*) in the presentation of the Christian message was the obligation not only not to pervert it, but also not to omit some part of it, for heresy has often been a concentration on one aspect, in itself correct, of ‘the whole counsel,’ at the expense of the message ‘as a whole.’” Pelikan, *Acts*, 219.

⁸⁵ Soards, *The Speeches in Acts*, 183.

⁸⁶ Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 177.

Table 2. Paraenetic sermons in Acts

<i>Text</i>	<i>Sermon</i>	<i>Cultural Components Shaped</i>
Acts 1:15–26	Peter’s Sermon in the Upper Room	Values and behavior relating to the selection of Matthias as one of the Twelve.
Acts 11:1–18	Peter’s Sermon to the Circumcision Party in Jerusalem	Beliefs, values, and behavior regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church’s mission.
Acts 15:6–11	Peter’s Sermon at the Jerusalem Council	Beliefs, values, and behavior regarding the circumcision of Gentile converts.
Acts 15:13–21	James’ Sermon at the Jerusalem Council	Beliefs, values, and behavior regarding the circumcision of Gentile converts.
Acts 20:17–38	Paul’s Sermon to the Ephesian Elders	Beliefs and behavior regarding faithfulness to the “message of grace” and the flock of God.

The apostles grounded their teaching ministry in the authority of Scripture, understanding that if the behavior, values, and beliefs of the early church would change, it would be driven by the teaching of God’s Word. Commenting on the central role played by these sermons, Wells and Luter note that preaching creates, establishes, and strengthens the church.⁸⁷ In the book of Acts, the Spirit used the teaching of the Word to shape the culture of the early church in significant and definable ways.

⁸⁷ Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 81.

CHAPTER 5

SHAPING CHURCH CULTURE IN ACTS: THE SPIRIT

The research up to this point has suggested that table fellowship and teaching were key mechanisms Jesus and early church leaders used for shaping the behaviors, values, and beliefs of the early church. These themes—table fellowship and teaching—are activities in which any modern church leader can participate in the context of local church ministry. Yet, the employment of these two strategies does not necessarily guarantee culture change within the church. While table fellowship and teaching were definite activities of Jesus and early church leaders, they do not comprehensively account for the ways in which early church culture was shaped. Behind these activities lay the work of the Holy Spirit.

If the culture of a church could be shaped through table fellowship and teaching alone, it is possible that the cultural change could be manipulated or artificially produced by a skilled leader. If this occurred, it is unlikely that the culture change would be lasting or healthy. For church culture to be shaped in healthier and more lasting ways, something else is necessary: the work of the Holy Spirit. Table fellowship and teaching are helpful means for shaping church culture. Both strategies are present in Luke–Acts. Yet, these methods alone are not sufficient for shaping healthy church culture. There is a limit to what church leaders can do in their own power.

In Acts, the Holy Spirit would be needed and responsible for the “intrinsic . . . transformation of human identity.”¹ Jesus’ disciples were “not to go off on

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 14.

their own steam,” as it were, but rather to wait upon the Holy Spirit, for “the success of their witness [would] be due not to their own strength but to the power of God, because it is God’s mission, not theirs.”² Once the Spirit descended at Pentecost, the life of the church would change forever. Now, the church would enjoy the presence and power of the Spirit in the achievement of the mission.

This chapter will trace the role the Holy Spirit played in shaping the early culture of the church in Acts.³ It will argue that healthy culture change is empowered by the activity of the Holy Spirit. Leaders in secular organizations may use various strategies to try to change their organizational culture. Yet for the church, true change must be empowered not merely by human means (such as table fellowship and teaching) but divine means. Lasting culture change is impossible without heart change. Heart change is impossible without the work of the Holy Spirit. The leaders of the early church needed nothing less than God himself to shape the culture of the church in the right ways. They received what they needed in the person and presence of the Holy Spirit. David Garland states that the disciples had to “wait for the power of the Holy Spirit before they [could] do anything that [would] be effective.”⁴

² David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 15.

³ The Spirit plays a central role in Luke as well. For instance, the Spirit indwelt John the Baptist while still in the womb (Luke 1:15). Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). John promised that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). The Spirit anointed Jesus for ministry (Luke 3:22). Luke describes Jesus as being “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1). Jesus acted in “the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14). The first sermon Luke records Jesus preaching is in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–30). In that sermon, Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1–2 (“The Spirit of the Lord is on me”) and stated that Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in himself. Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10:21). Jesus warned against those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit (Luke 12:10). He promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say when they are persecuted (Luke 12:11–12). For a helpful overview of the Spirit in the Old Testament, in the ministry of Jesus, and in the life of the church, see David Turner’s brief summary of these and other passages. David L. Turner, *Interpreting the Gospels and Acts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2019), 115–122. Though these references to the Spirit in Luke are important, this chapter will focus on the Spirit’s role in Acts because the connection between the Spirit and the early church’s culture is clearer in Acts than in Luke.

⁴ Garland, *Acts*, 17.

After Jesus' resurrection, he instructed the disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit who would empower them in their mission (Acts 1:8). When the Spirit came upon the church in Acts 2, the culture of the early church experienced transformative change. In his first sermon on Acts, Chrysostom noted,

The mighty change which is taking place in the disciples now that the Spirit has come upon them...Here again you will see the Apostles themselves, speeding their way as on wings over land and sea; and those same men, once so timorous and void of understanding, on the sudden *become quite other than they were*; men despising wealth, and raised above glory and passion and concupiscence, and in short all such affections: moreover, what unanimity there is among them now; nowhere envying as there was before, nor any of the old hankering after pre-eminence, but all virtue brought in them to its last finish...⁵

This chapter will trace the “mighty change” that took place in the church as a result of the Spirit's work. First, this chapter will include a brief overview of the Spirit's activity in Acts, noting in general terms how those activities influenced early church culture. Second, this chapter will focus on two “case studies” in which the Spirit's role is explicitly connected to cultural changes within the early church: Acts 2:1–47 (the Day of Pentecost) and Acts 10:1–11:18 (the conversion of Cornelius and other Gentiles).

An Overview of the Spirit's Activity in Acts

The work of the Spirit is necessary if a church's culture is going to change. The cultural changes that occurred in the early church cannot be explained apart from the work of the Spirit. In fact, it has been argued that the Spirit is the main “character” in the story of the early church in Acts.⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson notes that because of the

⁵ Chrysostom, *A Commentary of the Acts of the Apostles*, in vol. 11 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 1. Emphasis added.

⁶ Some scholars see Luke's repeated references to the Spirit as providing a structural outline for the book of Acts itself. For one such proposal, see John Christopher Thomas, “The Charismatic Structure of Acts,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13/1 (2004): 19–30. Thomas proposes viewing the structure of Acts as consisting of eight “panels,” each punctuated with an account of the Spirit's activity (not including the prologue). The structure for Thomas is as follows: Acts 1:1–5 (The Prologue); Acts 1:6–2:47 (The Anointing of the Charismatic Community in Jerusalem); Acts 3:1–6:7 (The Acts of the Charismatic Leader Peter and Those of the Charismatic Community in Jerusalem); Acts 6:8–9:31 (The Acts of Certain Charismatic Leaders...in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria: Stephen, Philip, and Paul); Acts 9:32–11:21 (The Acts of a Certain Charismatic Leader in Lydda, Caesarea, and Jerusalem: Peter); Acts 11:22–12:24 (The

central role played by the Holy Spirit, “Acts can appropriately be called the ‘Book of the Holy Spirit.’”⁷ Justo González refers to Acts as “The Gospel of the Spirit.”⁸ The phrase “filled with the Holy Spirit” is used frequently in Acts and denotes the animating role the Spirit played in the actions of the apostles.⁹ The Spirit directed the behavior of the apostles at crucial times in Acts, such as on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples spoke in other languages (Acts 2:1–21) and in the direction of the Apostle Paul’s ministry toward Europe (Acts 16:6–10). The Spirit functions vitally in the shaping of church organizational culture. Changing the culture of the church is an enormous task, one that is impossible without the Holy Spirit.

The word *pneuma* or one of its cognates appears seventy times in the book of Acts.¹⁰ Most occurrences of *pneuma* refer clearly to the person or work of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ When the occurrences of *pneuma* that explicitly refer to the Holy Spirit are

Acts of Certain Charismatic Leaders in Antioch and Jerusalem: Barnabas, Agabus, and Peter); Acts 12:25–16:5 (The Acts of a Certain Charismatic Leader: Paul from Antioch to Derbe and Back Again, from Antioch to Jerusalem and Back Again); Acts 16:6–19:20 (The Acts of a Certain Charismatic Leader: Paul, the Call and Journey to Macedonia); Acts 19:21–28:31 (The Acts of a Certain Charismatic Leader: Paul to Macedonia, Jerusalem, and Rome). The eight accounts of the Spirit’s activity that punctuate these panels are as follows: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4); The Jerusalem Believers are Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:30–31); the Samaritan Believers Receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–17); Cornelius and his Household are Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–48); Barnabas, Full of the Holy Spirit and Faith (Acts 11:24–28); Saul/Paul, Full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:9); The Disciples at Ephesus are Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–7); Spirit/Prophetic Activity in Paul and Agabus (Acts 20:22–21:11). See Thomas, “The Charismatic Structure of Acts,” 28.

⁷ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 14. Johnson says, “The essential drama of Luke’s narrative is found in the breathtaking sweep of the Spirit’s work.” Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 16.

⁸ Justo L. González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

⁹ E.g., Acts 2:4, Acts 4:8, Acts 4:31, Acts 7:55, and Acts 9:17. For more on this theme, see James H. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006).

¹⁰ Bock notes, “There are almost four times as many references to the Spirit in Acts as in Luke’s gospel...the increase shows how the Spirit is now active in the community Jesus formed and how the coming of the promise enables the community to carry out its mission.” See Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 219–20. For a helpful overview on the Holy Spirit, see Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020).

¹¹ Craig Keener says that the total number of possible references to the Holy Spirit in Acts is

examined, a broad range of the Spirit's activities can be seen.¹² The Spirit is associated with conversion (Acts 10:44), proclamation (Acts 4:8, 25, 31; 11:28; 19:6), empowerment (Acts 1:8), cross-cultural inclusion and mission (Acts 2:4; 8:29; 10:19–20; 11:12; 13:2, 4), and generosity (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35), among other things. The Spirit speaks and informs (Acts 1:16; 4:25; 8:29; 11:12; 13:2; 20:23; 21:4, 11; 28:25); guides and directs (Acts 8:29, 39; 16:6–7; 18:5); fills (Acts 4:8, 31; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 52); corrects and disciplines (Acts 5:1–11); decides (Acts 15:28); comes down, is poured out, and received as a gift (Acts 1:8; Acts 2:38; 8:15–19; 10:44, 47; 15:8; 19:2, 6); empowers and gives witness (Acts 1:8; 5:32; 6:10); encourages (Acts 9:31); sends (Acts 13:2, 4); and appoints (Acts 20:28). The Spirit works both explicitly and implicitly.

The Spirit's work provides the framework for which *everything* else takes place in the book of Acts, including any elements of culture-shaping. The Spirit's

59. This accounts for nearly a quarter of all references to the Spirit in the New Testament. See Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 70–71. Several of these appearances refer to unclean or demonic spirits (such as in Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:16, 18; and 19:12, 13, 15, 16), some refer to the human spirit (such as in Acts 7:59; 17:16), and some are unclear whether they refer to the Holy Spirit or the human spirit due to textual ambiguity (such as in Acts 18:25; 19:21; 20:22; 23:8, 9). There is also one textual variant that includes reference to the Spirit but is omitted in most major translations (see Acts 18:5). For helpful analysis of textual variants, see Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1975). C. K. Barrett sees “no difficulty” in the translation of this textual variant as “constrained by the Spirit,” referencing the urging of the Spirit in directing Paul’s ministry. See C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 866.

¹² For a helpful albeit brief overview of the Spirit’s activity in Acts, see Keener, *Acts*, 70–74. See also F. F. Bruce, “Luke’s Presentation of the Spirit in Acts,” *Criswell Theological Review* 5/1 (1990): 15–29; F. F. Bruce, “The Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 27, no. 2 (1973): 166–83. Bruce’s work in “The Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles” was helpful in the initial research for this chapter. Bruce traces the Holy Spirit’s place in Acts. He briefly surveys the Holy Spirit in Luke as a background for his survey of Acts. He shows that while Luke focuses on the time of Christ, the book of Acts is concerned with the age of the Spirit, thus marking the Holy Spirit’s prominence in Acts. Bruce notes how the Spirit assimilates believers into the community of faith at Pentecost, and in the experiences of Paul, Cornelius, the Samaritan believers, and the twelve Ephesian disciples. The Spirit is sometimes received in different ways by people in the early church, such as before/after baptism, with laying on of hands, etc. He notes the role of the Holy Spirit in directing the decisions of the early church such as at the Jerusalem council. He also notes how the Holy Spirit gives a sense of identity and solidarity among the community such as in the case of the early church’s confrontation with Ananias and Saphira. The Spirit directs the Christian advance on earth. The Spirit speaks to prophets like Agabus and directs people like Paul. Bruce concludes that because the gospel’s work in the world is “under the constant direction of the Holy Spirit,” the church should take heart.

presence is the underlying assumption and foundation of all the church's activities in Acts. If the empowerment of the Spirit in Acts 1:8 is programmatic for the rest of the narrative, then the church could not accomplish anything without the Spirit's power and presence, even when the Spirit's activity is more implicit than explicit.¹³ Dean Pinter notes "how often the Spirit's manifestation appears quietly in the narrative."¹⁴ Yet the quiet manifestation of the Spirit does not indicate the absence of the Spirit nor does it lessen the importance of the Spirit as it relates to shaping early church culture through any of the activities listed above.¹⁵ Though the connection is often implicit, the Spirit's presence and work is critical for early church culture in Acts.

The importance of the Spirit's presence and work can be observed by tracing the various activities of the Spirit in the book of Acts. Of the episodes in Acts that make mention of *pneuma* in reference to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's activities can be classified in ten broad categories.¹⁶ While some of these references do not have any bearing on shaping church culture, many of them do, though in a general and often implicit manner. Nevertheless, an overview of the Spirit's activities will prove helpful in gaining an overall sense of the Spirit's role in the life of the early church and the culture that developed therein.

¹³ Keener suggests Acts 1:8 provides both an outline for the book of Acts as well as an introduction of the book's major themes. See Keener, *Acts*, 107.

¹⁴ Dean Pinter, *Acts*, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 453.

¹⁵ Along these lines, Drumwright engages the criticism that the Spirit is "dismissed" from the book of Acts because of the infrequent references to the Spirit throughout some sections of the narrative. Drumwright traces the presence of the Spirit throughout the narrative flow and concludes, "Not the frequency of the references to the Holy Spirit but the foundational importance of the Spirit to the narrative, his presence and continuing leadership underlying the entire account, is the final measure of the significance of the Holy Spirit for the structure of the book. The Holy Spirit can scarcely be said to have been dismissed from the book of Acts at any point." See Huber L. Drumwright, Jr., "The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 17 (Fall 1974): 4.

¹⁶ Allison and Köstenberger classify the Spirit's work in three categories: 1) speaking; 2) creating, recreating, and perfecting; and 3) filling with the presence of the Triune God. Allison and Köstenberger, 284.

The Spirit Speaks and Informs

One of the most common ways the Spirit works in Acts is by speaking to and informing the church. For example, in the first instance in which *pneuma* occurs in the book of Acts, it is in the context of giving instruction to the disciples. Luke says that “through the Holy Spirit,” Jesus gave instructions to the apostles he had chosen (Acts 1:2). The Spirit was the instrument through which the disciples were instructed by Jesus. Schnabel remarks, “[Luke] envisages here the disciples as having experienced the Holy Spirit as divine presence addressing them...”¹⁷ This first reference to the Spirit sets the tone for the Spirit’s activity in the rest of the book: the church would be a *listening* church, dependent on the guidance of the Spirit.

Several references throughout the book situate the words of the Old Testament as having come through the Spirit or having been spoken by the Spirit, such as when Peter addressed the one hundred and twenty disciples in the Upper Room and said that Judas’ betrayal of Jesus was so that “the Scripture [would] be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David foretold” (Acts 1:16).¹⁸ When the disciples prayed for boldness after the release of Peter and John, they referenced the fact that God spoke “through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant” (Acts 4:25). Similarly, when Paul was under house arrest in Rome he quoted Isaiah, prefacing the quotation by stating, “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah...” (Acts 28:25). Clearly, the Spirit was viewed as an agent of God’s revelation.

Several other episodes throughout Acts make the Spirit’s address to the

¹⁷ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 71.

¹⁸ This is a robust statement of affirmation for the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. The apostles recognized the Old Testament as spoken “through the Holy Spirit.” For an evangelical defense of this doctrine, see David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1995); B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948).

disciples even more clear. In Acts 8:29, for instance, when the evangelist Philip met the Ethiopian disciple on the road to Gaza, Luke says, “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go and join that chariot’” (Acts 8:29).¹⁹ When Cornelius sent men to meet Peter, the Spirit addressed Peter personally. Luke says, “The Spirit told him, ‘Three men are here looking for you’” (Acts 10:19; see also Peter’s recounting of this experience in Acts 11:12). The Spirit spoke to the church at Antioch telling them to set Barnabas and Saul aside for the work to which he had called them (Acts 13:2). At other times, the Spirit spoke to the disciples through prophets, such as Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:11) and the disciples in Tyre who warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4). Later, the Spirit spoke directly to Paul, warning him of the danger that awaited him in his travels (Acts 20:23).

The Spirit spoke to and informed the early church, either by direct address or through the revelation of Scripture. An inference from this aspect of the Spirit’s activity is that the early church listened to the instructions of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ This gave divine authority to their mission, because it was rooted in divine instruction.

The Spirit Guides and Directs

Like the activity of speaking and informing, the Spirit also guides and directs the church. Whereas the Spirit speaks and informs through direct address or Scripture, the Spirit often guides and directs in more indirect ways. For example, after Philip shared the gospel with the Ethiopian official, led him to faith in Christ, and baptized him, “the Spirit

¹⁹ Pinter sees an interesting parallel between Philip and the prophet Elijah: “Much like the prophet Elijah, Philip is addressed by the angel of the Lord (8:29; cf. 2 Kgs 1:15), directed by the Spirit on his journey (Acts 8:26–29, 39; cf. 1 Kgs 18:12), and finds himself running along a road with an important person (Acts 8:30; 1 Kgs 18:46).” See Pinter, *Acts*, 211. See also David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 292.

²⁰ Luke does not always indicate *how* the church heard the Spirit. Pinter suggests the church heard the Spirit in community: “In community, in the fellowship of other believers, we learn to know the fellowship and leading of the Spirit. Occasionally the Spirit may direct us individually through dramatic vision or prophetic word. More often, however, we are led through a growing and deepening conviction that is discerned as we walk and talk, as we pray and play, along the road of life together with others.” See Pinter, *Acts*, 375.

of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer...Philip appeared in Azotus..." (Acts 8:39). While this is not a case of direct address where the Spirit spoke to Philip, it is an example of the guidance and direction of the Spirit to move Philip to another place of service.

Later in Luke's narrative, the Spirit similarly guided Paul and his associates. Paul intended to preach the gospel in Asia, but "they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). When Paul then tried to go into Bithynia, "the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (Acts 16:7). In both occasions, the Spirit directed Paul by preventing him from going where he initially intended to go. Keener, commenting on this text, says, "As much as they might like to evangelize everywhere, the Spirit that empowers mission guides Paul's team to the most appropriate place."²¹ As they continued their missionary journey, Paul received a vision in which a man from Macedonia asked him for help. Paul's group of missionaries determined to travel to Macedonia, "concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:10). Apart from the vision Paul received, the method of the Spirit's direction in this case is unknown. Yet it is clear the Spirit prevented them from traveling where they intended to travel so that they would be directed to Macedonia.²²

These are not the only examples of the Spirit's guidance and direction. In Acts 18:5, Acts 19:21, and Acts 20:22–23, Luke says the Spirit is the agent of God's direction in Paul's life. In Acts 18:5, Paul was "urged by the Spirit" to testify about Jesus. In Acts 19:21, Paul "resolved by the Spirit" to go to Jerusalem. In Acts 20:22–23, Paul told the Ephesian elders he was on his way to Jerusalem, "compelled by the Spirit, not knowing

²¹ Keener, *Acts*, 379.

²² Pinter suggests that the Spirit perhaps used a word of prophecy or worked through a growing consensus discerned by the group as they traveled. Ultimately, though, he concludes that the specific manner the Spirit used to communicate his will is unknown. See Pinter, *Acts*, 373. Along the same lines, Keener says, "Charismatic guidance inevitably involves some ambiguities (cf. 21:4), though everyone in antiquity was accustomed to sometimes ambiguous divine guidance." See Keener, *Acts*, 380.

what I will encounter there, except that in every town the Holy Spirit warns me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me.”²³ The Spirit’s direction was a vital part of guiding Paul in his mission.

Though not always by means of direct address, the Spirit guided the early church, warning, compelling, and urging early believers to go in the directions he desired. An inference from this aspect of the Spirit’s activity is that the early church was obedient and yielded to the direction of the Spirit. The church would be a community of people committed to depending on the guidance of the Spirit in all they did.

The Spirit Fills

Repeatedly throughout the narrative of Acts, Luke refers to people being either “filled with the Spirit,” such as on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), or being “full of the Spirit,” such as the deacons chosen to serve the church (Acts 6:3, 5) or Stephen as he was being murdered (Acts 7:55). Polhill differentiates between the “filling” that occurs with new converts who receive the Spirit as a permanent gift (such as in Acts 2:4) and other moments of “filling,” where “the Spirit comes upon one who is already a believer in a time of special inspiration and testimony to the faith” (such as in Acts 4:8, 31; 7:55; and 13:9).²⁴ A third category may be seen in Acts 6 as believers are referenced as having a

²³ In each of these texts, there are alternate textual readings. In Acts 18:5, some manuscripts render *suneicheto tōi logōi* as “Paul devoted himself.” In Acts 19:21, an alternate reading of the text is “Paul resolved in *his* spirit” (emphasis added). Similarly, in Acts 20:22, an alternate reading is “And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, compelled in *my* spirit” (emphasis added). For an explanation of each of these textual variants and their manuscript base, see Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1975). In reference to Acts 19:21 and Acts 20:22, Richard Longenecker sees clear reference to the Holy Spirit. He suggests Acts 19:21 could be rendered, “Paul decided...by the direction of the Spirit”. See Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in Vol. 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 1014. In reference to Acts 20:22, Longenecker states, “Both compulsion and warning were evidently involved in the Spirit’s direction, with both being impressed on Paul by the Spirit at various times as he journeyed.” See Longenecker, “Acts,” 1028. Keener concurs with this appraisal. See Keener, *Acts*, 478–479.

²⁴ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 98.

lifestyle of being filled with the Spirit.

Barrett notes the tension between these uses of “filling,” commenting about Acts 2:4,

There can be no doubt that Luke saw the event described here as the fulfillment of the promise of [1:5]...it therefore appears that filling with the Holy Spirit and baptism with the Holy Spirit are synonymous. Luke’s account of the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit is vivid, and central in his thought, but lacks consistency, thereby raising many questions. It is not easy to answer the question whether, for him, the Spirit, once given, is a permanent possession, or spasmodic. He says nothing that actually suggests that the Spirit was at any point taken away from those who had received it, yet at [4:8] Peter is *filled* with the Holy Spirit...and at [4:31] this is said of the whole group...It would be wrong to attempt to deduce from Acts a clear-cut and consistent doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Luke believes that the gift of the Spirit is constitutive of the Christian life.²⁵

Though Barrett prefers not to draw any wide-sweeping doctrinal conclusions about the Spirit at this point, he notes that the “filling” of the Spirit, both in reference to the gift of the Spirit given to new believers (i.e., baptism in the Spirit) and then subsequent moments of filling, entails at least “the notion of empowerment by the Spirit of God at a specific time and for a specific purpose.”²⁶ Bruce comments similarly,

However we understand the sensible phenomena, there is no doubt about the disciples’ inward experience: “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” The spiritual baptism foretold by John and promised afresh by the Lord was now an accomplished fact. The filling with the Spirit was an experience to be repeated on several occasions...but the Spirit-baptism took place once for all, so far as the believing community was concerned.²⁷

In Acts, sometimes these moments of filling come upon the entire community (as in Acts 2:4; 4:31; 13:52). Other times, these moments come upon an individual (as in

²⁵ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 115. Emphasis original.

²⁶ Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 1, 115. Schnabel argues that these moments of “filling” refer not to the long-term endowment of the Spirit but rather more short-term experiences of spiritual power, which, in his view, “explains why a person might be ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ on many occasions while at the same time remaining ‘full’ of the Spirit.” See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 115.

²⁷ F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 56.

Acts 4:8; 9:17; 13:9). In nearly every case, these moments of filling are followed by significant ministry (such as when the disciples at Pentecost begin to proclaim the “magnificent acts of God,” Acts 2:11).

An inference of this activity of the Spirit is that the Spirit animated believers in moments of great spiritual import and ministry. Members of the early church did not rely on their own strength, ability, or wisdom to do what God called them to do. Their activity in ministry relied upon the activity of the Holy Spirit in and among them.

The Spirit Corrects and Disciplines

In addition to speaking, informing, guiding, directing, and filling, the Spirit also corrects and disciplines. In the narrative about Ananias and Sapphira’s dishonesty with the apostles (Acts 5:1–11), reference is twice made to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3, 9). Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property, took some of the proceeds to the apostles to give away, but held some back for themselves. This action contrasted strongly with the generosity evident in the Christian community in Jerusalem in general (Acts 2:45; 4:32–35) and the immediately preceding act of generosity on the part of Barnabas, who sold a piece of property and donated the entire proceeds of the sale (Acts 4:36–37). The repetition of “laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:35, 37; 5:2) indicates that the Ananias and Sapphira story is to be read in light of the community’s generosity.²⁸ This was an act of duplicity that mocked the unity of the community and the authority of the apostles.²⁹

Peter assessed this duplicitous act on the part of Ananias and Sapphira in reference to their posture toward the Holy Spirit. In Acts 5:3, Peter asked Ananias why he lied to the Holy Spirit. In Acts 5:9, Peter asked Sapphira why she agreed to “test the

²⁸ Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 135.

²⁹ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 75.

Spirit of the Lord.” Peter concluded that this act of dishonesty was not an act of deception toward people but to God (Acts 5:4).

Because of their dishonesty toward God, both Ananias and Sapphira died.³⁰

While this result may seem extreme to modern sensibilities, Garland concludes that this passage teaches, “One cannot trifle with God with impunity.”³¹ The consequence had an understandable result: “Then great fear came on the whole church and on all who heard these things” (Acts 5:11). While the penalty for their deception is not attributed directly to the action of the Holy Spirit, the connection between lying to the Holy Spirit and judgment is implied. As Stephen’s indictment of the Sanhedrin makes clear, it is possible to resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). When this occurs, there are consequences. There is a corrective and disciplinary aspect of the Spirit’s activity in the church. The early church learned through this episode that lying to the Spirit had significant implications. The fear that came upon them would be a reminder in the future not to violate the Spirit or the standards of God’s community.

This passage demonstrates that there is a corrective nature to the Spirit’s engagement with the church. When the church is unrighteous, there are negative effects within the community. An implication from this aspect of the Spirit’s activity is that the church, while ruled by Jesus Christ, is at the same time subject to God’s discipline through the Spirit when that rule is ignored. The church was to be a community submitted to the authority of Jesus Christ and subjected to the discipline of the Spirit. This episode serves as “evidence that God is with his church...and is keen to protect it from that which

³⁰ Many scholars have wrestled with the extreme nature of the punishment in this text. The death penalty seems to many to be a steep price to pay for dishonesty and a lack of generosity. Scholars have provided a variety of explanations to try to solve the seeming moral injustice of the situation. For a helpful overview of some of these explanations, see J. Albert Harrill, “Divine Judgment against Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11): A Stock Scene of Perjury and Death,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 2 (2011): 351–69.

³¹ Garland, *Acts*, 53.

would seek to corrupt and pervert it from within.”³²

The Spirit Decides

In one instance in Acts, the Spirit is given credit for making a formative decision in the life of the church. In the narrative of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 (discussed in detail in chapter 4 above), the apostles communicated with the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia about the question of whether Gentile converts should be required to be circumcised or not. After determining that Gentile converts would not be required to be circumcised, they wrote a letter to send to the church at Antioch to explain their decision (Acts 15:22). What is unique in their letter is that they attributed the decision to the Holy Spirit, not merely to their internal deliberations.

The leaders of the church had gathered in Jerusalem for the express purpose of deliberating on the circumcision question. Throughout the narrative, the assumed authority on the question of circumcision is the decision of the apostles themselves and their agreement on the matter (Acts 5:19). Yet, when the apostles sent the letter to the Gentile churches, they said, “it was the Holy Spirit’s decision—and ours—not to place further burdens on you beyond these requirements: that you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:28–29). Barrett states,

The apostles and elders are now joined in their decision by the Holy Spirit. In view of the importance of the decision this must be regarded as the outstanding example of Luke’s insistence *that all developments in the church’s life were directed by the Spirit*...It is not suggested that a decision made by the church must be a decision of the Holy Spirit; the unanimity of the church bore witness to a decision already reached by the Holy Spirit.³³

Far from presuming that every decision they made was a direct decision of the

³² Pinter, *Acts*, 134–35. Pinter says this story teaches that “the people of God who are filled with the Holy Spirit are to live holy lives that represent Jesus’s visible presence on earth.”

³³ Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 2, 744. Emphasis added.

Spirit, the apostles nonetheless discerned that this decision was one the Spirit had made. Indeed, their unity on the matter was an indication that the Spirit had guided their decision.³⁴

Though this language of decision is only attributed to the Spirit in this one instance, the apostles' recognition of the Spirit's decision reflects the importance of the Spirit's activity. This passage reveals an important aspect of the early church's culture: regardless of whatever personal opinions the apostles might have held in relation to the circumcision question specifically or Jew/Gentile relations more generally, they would act in submission to the decision of the Spirit. What the Spirit said, the church would do. When the Spirit decided, the church would obey.

The Spirit Comes Down and is Poured Out

There are references throughout Acts to the Spirit coming down, coming upon, baptizing, and being poured out upon people (Acts 1:5, 8; 2:17–18, 33; 10:44–45; 11:15; 19:6). The Spirit is also spoken of as being given and received (Acts 2:38; 8:15–19; 10:47; 15:8; 19:2, 6). Polhill argues that these terms are essentially synonymous with one another. Referring to the aforementioned “filling” text in Acts 2:4, he states,

From this point on in Acts, the gift of the Spirit became a normal concomitant of becoming a Christian believer (2:38). The expression of this differs; in 9:17 Saul is said to have been “filled” with the Spirit, as here. Sometimes this experience is described as a “baptism” in the Spirit (1:5; 11:16). In other instances the word “poured out” is used (2:17f.; 10:45) or “came upon” (8:16; 10:44; 11:15) or simply “receive” (2:38; 10:47). All these instances refer to new converts and point to the Spirit's coming in various ways, not always signified by tongues, as a permanent gift to every believer.³⁵

The reason for the variety in terminology is that the different terms “point to

³⁴ Marshall says, “The decision reached by the church was regarded as being inspired by the Spirit, who is throughout Acts the guide of the church in its decisions and actions.” See I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 255.

³⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 98.

the Spirit's coming in various ways...as a gift to every believer." The Spirit is a gift that is received by every believer at conversion. The disciples could not be or do what God expected without the Spirit's power.³⁶ This reception of the Spirit could not be manipulated or purchased (as Simon Magus attempted to do in Acts 8:9–25), but must be given by God and received at conversion. The Spirit's work was reserved for believers and was a gift for the church alone.

Terms such as "baptism" and "pour out" provide vivid imagery to signify the immersive experience believers have with the Spirit.³⁷ Keener describes how these terms work together to portray an important reality in the Christian experience:

Luke speaks of the Spirit falling on people (Acts 10:44; 11:15), the Spirit coming on people (19:6), God pouring the Spirit out on them (2:17–18, 33; 10:45), people receiving the Spirit (2:38; 8:15–19; 10:47; 19:2; cf. 1:8), and people being filled with the Spirit (2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52)...However we describe these experiences in Acts, nearly all Christians agree that we receive the Spirit and full access to his work at conversion; yet nearly all Christians also agree that we can have other experiences with the Spirit that deeply affect us and help us...one could say that we all do receive full access to the Spirit at conversion, but at special times we may recognize our need for the Spirit's special help.³⁸

The coming and pouring out of the Spirit signifies the access to the believer and help to the church that is available through the presence of God made known in the Spirit. Perhaps the reason Luke "layers" the various terms he does in reference to the Spirit's coming is that one word or phrase simply is insufficient to express adequately the

³⁶ Gert Steyn notes that while Joel 3:1 clearly references the Spirit being poured out, the Septuagint used *apo* + the genitive to translate the verse, which suggests an emphasis on that which comes from the Spirit, namely the Spirit's power. This is consistent, of course, with Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8. For more on the implications of this translation, see Gert J. Steyn, "ekcheō apo tou pneumatos...(ac 2:17, 18): What is being poured out?" *Neotestamentica* 33/2 (1999): 365–71.

³⁷ The reference to the Spirit being "poured out" may also signal an eschatological return from exile. Richard Sklba capably demonstrates that Israel's exilic community came to associate the pouring out of the Spirit with a return from exile and an inauguration of a new age for God's people. See Richard J. Sklba, "'Until the Spirit from on High Is Poured out on Us' (Isa 32:15): Reflections on the Role of the Spirit in the Exile," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (January 1984): 1–17.

³⁸ Craig S. Keener, "The Spirit and the Mission of the Church in Acts 1–2," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62.1 (2019): 30.

resources available to the church in the Spirit.³⁹ The fully immersive nature of the church's experience with the Spirit can only be reflected through the use of a variety of vivid terms.

What is important to note here is that these terms indicate a fulfillment of the eschatological promises of the Old Testament. For instance, Peter attributes the experience of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as a fulfillment of the end-times promise of the Spirit in Joel 2 (discussed in more detail in the case study of Acts 2 below). The coming of the Spirit, therefore, is not an unanticipated phenomenon. It was the fulfillment of God's promises and thus it was anticipated by God's people. Daniel Block argues that the pouring out of the Spirit was associated with God's covenantal ownership of his people, over against his enemies—the Spirit was an identity marker for God's people; the pouring out of the Spirit was “the definitive act whereby he claimed and sealed the newly gathered nation of Israel as his own.”⁴⁰ Not only did the church have the “Father's promise” contained in the Old Testament (Acts 1:4), they also had the promise of Jesus to wait for the Spirit who would empower them (Acts 1:5–8).

It is also important to recognize the diversity of those upon whom the Spirit was poured out.⁴¹ In Acts 2, the Spirit is poured out on men and women, young and old, and Jew and Gentile. In Acts 10, the Spirit comes upon Cornelius and the other Gentiles of his household. In both texts, there is a surprising diversity among those who receive the Spirit. The coming of the Spirit was something that would affect *everyone* in the church. The Spirit was not reserved for a select few, but was a gift available cross—

³⁹ Fred Craddock notes how often hyperbolic language is used in Scripture to try to account for God's activity. He says that because finite language is used to try to describe a transcendent God, the limits of language are often stretched and found to be inadequate. Language used to describe God often “bursts” because language is being used to express something larger than language. See Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011), 107–108.

⁴⁰ Daniel I. Block, “Gog and the Pouring Out of the Spirit: Reflections on Ezekiel xxxix 21–9” *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 269.

⁴¹ This concept will be treated more thoroughly in the case study of Acts 2 and Acts 10 below.

generationally and cross-culturally.

The coming down and pouring out of the Spirit signified the permanent presence of the Spirit in the church. There would be a new stasis based on the permanent indwelling of God's Spirit. The church would now rely upon the gift of the Spirit in a new way as it was poured out upon them. This reliance on the Spirit that had come upon them would be transformative for every aspect of their life together. The pouring out of the Spirit would influence the culture of the church to a greater degree than any other factor in its history.

The Spirits Empowers and Gives Witness

One of the key activities of the Spirit in Acts is empowering the witness of the church and giving witness to the gospel.⁴² It is likely that Acts 1:8 is programmatic for the rest of the book of Acts.⁴³ It introduces the key themes of the book (such as the promise of an empowered witness which sets the tone for the Spirit's activity in the rest of the book) and provides an outline for the structure of the book itself (setting up a geographical expansion motif where the gospel goes from the epicenter of Jerusalem outward to Judea/Samaria and beyond). In Acts 1:8, Jesus promised the disciples that they would receive "power" when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they would be his "witnesses" in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth. This gave a *promise* to the disciples: they would be empowered by the Spirit that came upon them. This also gave a *priority* to the disciples: they would be Jesus' witnesses locally (in

⁴² Keener says "the activity of the Spirit emphasized most in Acts is empowering witnesses for their mission (e.g., Acts 1:8; 2:17–18; 4:8, 31; 7:51; 8:29, 39–40; 10:38; 11:12; 13:2, 4, 9; 16:6–7)." Keener, *Acts*, 105–106. J.M. Penney argues that for Luke, the Holy Spirit is best defined as the Spirit of mission. J.M. Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). See also I. Howard Marshall, "The Significance of Pentecost," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30/4 (1977): 347–69; J.B. Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991).

⁴³ See Keener, *Acts*, 107. See also Polhill, who notes that because the geographical scope of Acts 1:8 sets up the outline for the rest of the book, "it can well be considered the 'theme' verse of Acts." See Polhill, *Acts*, 85–86.

Jerusalem), regionally (in Judea and Samaria), and globally (to the end of the earth). This verse both set the agenda for the church (“you will be my witnesses”) and enabled the accomplishment of that agenda (“you will receive power”). Keener notes,

Acts 1:1 describes Luke’s Gospel as an account of all that Jesus *began* to do and teach; in Acts, we see how Jesus and his name continue to work through his church...Their mission...becomes a model for the entire church, since in 1:8, the mission continues to the “ends of the earth”...The Lord empowers all believers to continue the same mission of witness, although this empowerment takes on different forms for different agents.⁴⁴

Pinter concurs by stating,

While the Father has “the authority” to set history and shape important events, the followers of Jesus receive “power” to announce his rule. The power is the personal presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives...they are promised that the same Spirit who empowered their Lord Jesus in his own life and work of proclaiming the kingdom would also empower them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. For Luke, the church is empowered for its mission with the same Spirit who empowered the mission of Jesus.⁴⁵

In many subsequent episodes, that power is on display in the witness of the disciples. For instance, when Peter and John (who experienced the “filling of the Spirit,” Acts 4:8) gave witness to what they had “seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), those who questioned them observed their “boldness,” recognizing in amazement that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). Later, when Stephen gave witness and began to argue with some opponents of the gospel, Luke says “they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and *the Spirit by whom he was speaking*” (Acts 6:10, emphasis added). The Spirit empowered the witness of the early disciples.

Beyond this empowering work, the Spirit himself also bears witness to the gospel in the book of Acts. When Peter and the apostles were arrested for a second time

⁴⁴ Keener, “The Spirit and the Mission of the Church in Acts 1–2,” 32–33. Emphasis original. Keener acknowledges that most scholars observe a similar connection between Luke and Acts. For this same view on the connection between what Jesus “began to do” in Luke and what the church continued to do in Acts, see also F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 66; E.M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 49; Bo Reicke, “The Risen Lord and His Church: The Theology of Acts,” *Interpretation* 13 (1959): 156–69.

⁴⁵ Pinter, *Acts*, 39.

(Acts 5:18ff), Peter stood and gave witness before the Sanhedrin. He preached about the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus (Acts 5:30–31), and concluded by stating, “We are witnesses of these things and *so is the Holy Spirit* whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32, emphasis added). Thus, the Spirit is at work both in empowering the witnesses of the gospel and in bearing witness to the gospel himself.

The implications of this aspect of the Spirit’s work for early church culture is significant. The Spirit himself would direct and empower the witness of the early church. Not only was the church expected to bear witness to the gospel, but that witness would be enabled by God himself. Furthermore, not only would the Spirit empower the witness of the disciples, but the Spirit himself would join them in the work of bearing witness to the truth of the gospel of Christ.

The Spirit Encourages

Though only mentioned once in Luke’s narrative, one of the activities of the Spirit in Acts is to encourage the church. In Acts 9:31, Luke includes a summary statement of the progress of the church up to this point in the narrative. He states that the church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria “had peace and was strengthened.” He says the church was “living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged (*paraklēsei*) by the Holy Spirit,” which caused the church to increase in numbers.⁴⁶

The connection between the encouragement of the Holy Spirit and the growth of the church warrants special note. This reference to numerical growth in the aftermath of the persecution that occurred in the church beginning in Acts 8:1 is stunning. Even though the church was persecuted, it grew in numbers. The instrumental nature of the phrase “encouraged by the Holy Spirit” explains the *cause* of the church’s growth. Luke

⁴⁶ “Encouraged by the Spirit” is literally rendered “through/in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit.” It is an instrumental dative that describes the *cause* of the church’s growth. See Schnabel, *Acts*, 467.

attributed the continued growth of the church to the Spirit's encouragement of the church. The Spirit, therefore, "besides directing the church's mission, nurtures its growth."⁴⁷ Thus, the church's mission, health, and growth were all connected to the Spirit's ministry of encouraging the church.

The Spirit produced joy in the early church, despite the hardships they endured. As the gospel was propelled beyond Jerusalem and the church experienced greater degrees of persecution in the narrative (culminating with Paul's imprisonment in Rome in Acts 28), the Holy Spirit was actively encouraging members of the church. This was a crucial factor in their continued witness and their endurance in faith. The culture of the early church in its mission, health, and growth can be attributed to the encouragement of the Spirit.

The Spirit Sends

A key turning point in the book of Acts is when the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to plant churches across Asia Minor (Acts 13:1–3). The significance of this event is that the church at Antioch was itself a church plant (Acts 11:19–26).⁴⁸ What's more, this marked the first ever church-sponsored mission trip. Marshall explains the significance of this episode:

The importance of the present narrative is that it describes the first piece of planned 'overseas mission' carried out by representatives of a particular church, rather than by solitary individuals, and begun by a deliberate church decision, inspired by the Spirit, rather than somewhat more casually as a result of persecution. Luke thus describes in solemn detail how the missionaries were appointed at a church meeting under the guidance of the Spirit. He is well aware that he is describing a crucial event in the history of the church.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Holladay, *Acts*, 202.

⁴⁸ Polhill notes the significance of the fact that the term "Christian" was first used of the believers in Antioch. He suggests that it indicates 1) the success of the Gentile mission in Antioch, and 2) the recognition of Christianity as having its own identity, apart from Judaism. See Polhill, *Acts*, 273.

⁴⁹ Marshall, *Acts*, 214. For more on the significance of this, see Ernest Best, "Acts 13:1–3," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 11 (1960): 344–348.

The church at Antioch would be the first church plant to send missionaries to plant churches elsewhere. Yet it would be a mistake to attribute this act of sending to the church at Antioch alone. As Peter Back clarifies, “To suggest that the home church *sends out* the workers, is to confuse the role of the church with the work of the Holy Spirit. The church separates the workers, but it is the Holy Spirit who sends their members into mission.”⁵⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, referring to the Spirit, says, “It is he who is, properly speaking, the missionary.”⁵¹

In fact, it *was* the Spirit that sent out Barnabas and Paul on their missionary journey. As the church at Antioch was fasting and gathered in worship (perhaps two necessary conditions for the Spirit to inaugurate a great missionary movement), the Spirit spoke and said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2).⁵² Pinter observes the importance of this moment in the overall narrative of Acts: “Nowhere else does the Spirit direct a church to a specific task like this. The Spirit elsewhere speaks to individuals (e.g., Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 21:11), but not to a community in this manner.”⁵³ The church responded by fasting, praying, laying their hands on them, and sending them off (Acts 13:3).⁵⁴ Luke concludes, “So being *sent*

⁵⁰ Peter Back, “Exegesis on some Key Passages relating to Mission” *Evangel* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 18. Emphasis original. Along similar lines, Munck states, “The Holy Spirit sent Barnabas and Paul as its agents. The emissaries started their journey from Antioch, their missionary base, but the spiritual authority and the conduct of the mission rested with those who had received the call, not the Antioch church.” See Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 118.

⁵¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 40.

⁵² Garland suggests that communal prayer and fasting is how the church “becomes receptive to the Holy Spirit’s leadership.” See Garland, *Acts*, 133.

⁵³ Pinter, *Acts*, 299. Pinter notes here that even though there is an emphasis on the ministry of the word in this section of Acts, nevertheless Luke makes clear from these verses that the mission is a work of the Holy Spirit. See Pinter, *Acts*, 298.

⁵⁴ González argues that the act of praying and laying hands on Barnabas and Paul did not imbue them with more authority than the rest of the disciples but rather served as an act whereby “the entire community authorizes, blesses, and sends the two whom the Spirit has called.” See González, *Acts*, 153.

out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 13:4, emphasis added).

The Spirit’s activity in this text has important implications for an understanding of the early church’s culture. The church understood itself primarily as a people *sent out* by the Holy Spirit. If the church was to rely upon and be yielded to the Spirit, it would necessarily involve assuming a missionary posture.⁵⁵ The early church recognized that “God is the driving force in the church’s venture, and the Holy Spirit is the sending agent.”⁵⁶

The Spirit Appoints

A final activity of the Spirit can be observed in Acts. In Acts 20:17–38, Paul bid farewell to the Ephesian elders. Since this text is treated in detail in chapter four, only a few comments will be made here.

As part of Paul’s farewell, he delivered a final message of encouragement and exhortation to the Ephesian elders. He exhorted them to “be on guard” for themselves and the flock they shepherded as overseers (Acts 20:28) and to “be on the alert” against those who would come into the flock and distort the truth (Acts 20:29–31). He encouraged them with the reminder that God would build them up and give them an inheritance (Acts 20:32). What is relevant for the current line of research is what Peter said about the Holy

Garland concurs: “Laying hands on those who are chosen to be set apart marks the conferral of a blessing for their future mission enterprise. It does not confer power...” See Garland, *Acts*, 133. Pelikan argues that the laying on of hands means simply “to designate someone for a special task,” as in the setting apart of the deacons in Acts 6:6. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 153.

⁵⁵ Adam Dodds argues that the Spirit’s sending activity is one primarily of preparation. He notes, for instance, that the Spirit did not proclaim the gospel to Cornelius; that was Peter’s responsibility. In other words, the Spirit’s part in sending is to commission the church to proclaim the gospel and to prepare the hearts of those who will hear it. The church’s part in sending is being obedient to go and preach the gospel. Adam Dodds, “The Mission of the Spirit and the Mission of the Church: Towards a Trinitarian Missiology,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35/2 (2011): 216.

⁵⁶ Garland, *Acts*, 133.

Spirit in this text. In Acts 20:28, he indicated that the Ephesian elders were to watch over “the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers.” Thus, the text identifies one of the Spirit’s activities as appointing leaders over the church.⁵⁷ Barrett notes,

It was the Holy Spirit who appointed...the elders...Paul may appoint elders, but only those whom the Holy Spirit has already singled out and has thus himself appointed. The ministry is not appointed from below, nor from above if this means by those already ministers; the Holy Spirit is at work in the church choosing and preparing by his gifts those who are to be ministers.⁵⁸

This reality bears out several implications for an understanding of early church culture. First, the element of the Spirit’s activity would require the church to be sensitive to the calling of the Holy Spirit and the placement of leaders within the church. Leaders were not self-appointed; they were appointed by the Spirit. The church recognized the authority of the church’s leaders not based on their own selection of leaders or the leaders’ self-appointment, but by the sovereign selection of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent affirmation of the church. Second, Peter’s exhortation brought a grave sense of responsibility to those appointed as leaders, because they recognized “the congregation...belongs to God...not to the overseers. While shepherds may own the flock for which they care, it is God who ‘owns’ the church.”⁵⁹ Third, the Spirit’s work in appointing leaders also meant that the church could trust the Lord to provide leaders in his own time and in his own way. Barrett again is helpful at this point: “There is no

⁵⁷ Wayne Oates makes four observations about the ways the Holy Spirit functions in the life of an overseer of the flock as he cares for the flock, and how those functions come to bear on social relations. First, the overseer is the instrument of the Holy Spirit as he “resonates” (a kind of mediation) between the Spirit and the congregation. Second, the pastor looks to the Holy Spirit for guidance about which changes ought to be brought to the church. Third, the pastor relies on the power of the Holy Spirit to be a peacemaker and resolve social conflict within the church rather than using manipulative human techniques. Fourth, the pastor helps people to be sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit within them, particularly regarding the conviction of sin. See Wayne E. Oates, “The Holy Spirit and the Overseer of the Flock,” *Review and Expositor* 63, no. 2 (1966): 187–97.

⁵⁸ Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 2, 974–75.

⁵⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 846.

suggestion of any succession in episcopal office; there is no need for succession (in the commonly understood sense); the Holy Spirit will provide ministers as they are required.”⁶⁰

As can be seen above, though there is often an implicit connection between the activity of the Spirit and the shaping of early church culture, the connection between the Spirit and church culture is clear. If church culture refers to the behaviors, values, and beliefs of the church, then it is impossible to understand the culture of the early church without seeing the Spirit at the very heart of every aspect of its life. The Spirit’s activities—speaking/informing, guiding/directing, filling, correcting/disciplining, coming upon and being poured out, deciding, empowering and giving witness, encouraging, sending, and appointing—demonstrate the central role the Spirit played in the development of early church culture.

While it is true that the Spirit’s presence and activity is often implicitly connected to the work of shaping the culture of the early church, there are occasions where the Spirit’s role in culture-shaping is explicit. The two passages in Acts where the Spirit’s role in shaping the culture of the church is unambiguously clear are Acts 2:1–47 and Acts 10:1–11:18. Each of these passages will be analyzed in detail as “case studies” to demonstrate the central role of the Spirit in shaping early church culture.

Case Study: The Spirit’s Role in Acts 2

The role of the Spirit in shaping the cultural norms of the early church is seen clearly in Acts 2:1–47. In this passage, the Spirit worked specifically through the activity of preaching to develop new cultural norms in the church. If there is one explicit text in Acts that weaves together the threads of the Spirit, church culture, and preaching, it is the

⁶⁰ Barrett, *Acts*, vol. 2, 976.

Pentecost narrative.⁶¹ The Spirit's activity in this chapter shaped the behavior, values, and beliefs of the early church. The startling events of Acts 2 inaugurated "a new era" in the life of the church.⁶²

The narrative sequence of Acts 2 can be structured in three broad movements: the coming or manifestation of the Spirit (Acts 2:1–13), Peter's sermon giving explanation of the Spirit's activity and an exhortation to believe the gospel (Acts 2:14–40), and the response to the sermon and resulting effects in the life of the church (Acts 2:41–47).⁶³ Ben Witherington artfully summarizes these three movements under the following headings: Power at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–13), Preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–42), and People of Pentecost (Acts 2:42–47).⁶⁴ This case study will analyze these

⁶¹ There is an important connection between the theme of the Spirit and the theme of preaching that is relevant for how early church culture was shaped. Many of the Spirit's activities in Acts have bearing on preaching (such as the Spirit's speaking, filling, and empowering). Yet, when these references to the Spirit are compared to the list of speeches and sermons in Acts, a surprising insight is discovered: the connection between the Spirit and the speeches and sermons in Acts is often implicit, rather than explicit. There are a few references to the Spirit filling those who preach before a sermon is given or a message is proclaimed (Acts 4:8, 25; 11:28; 19:6) but when compared to the vast number of references in the Old Testament to the Spirit's empowerment of preaching (such as Num 11:25–26; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; Isa 59:21; Zech 7:12), the references in Acts are surprisingly few. In fact, in only one case (Acts 4:8) is explicit reference given to the Holy Spirit filling a preacher that is then followed by the actual content of the sermon. To complicate matters, in the one passage in which an explicit connection is made between the filling of the Spirit and the preaching of a sermon (Acts 4:8), the sermon that follows does not have direct bearing on the culture of the early church as it is an apologetic (defense) sermon given in front of Jewish leaders in Jerusalem rather than a paraenetic sermon intended for the church. It seems that rather than drawing the lines of connection between the Spirit and the sermon explicitly, Luke instead makes these connections implicitly. Though implicit, there *is* a connection between the Spirit and preaching in the book of Acts, and this Spirit-empowered preaching is connected to culture change in the early church in significant ways, as can be seen in the Pentecost narrative.

⁶² Holladay, *Acts*, 89.

⁶³ Parsons, *Acts*, 37–49. Though it is common to see three basic movements in the text, scholars do vary slightly in how they mark the divisions of the text. See, for instance, David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 25–36; Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 93–156. Parsons sees the divisions of the text as follows: Acts 2:1–13, 2:14–40, and 2:41–47. Bock, on the other hand, divides the text as follows: Acts 2:1–13, 2:14–36, 2:37–41, 2:42–47 (separating the crowd's response to Peter's sermon in Acts 2:37–41 from the summary statement about the church in Acts 2:42–47). Garland divides the text into two parts: Acts 2:1–13 and Acts 2:14–47. But in the actual commentary, all these commentators observe the distinctions between the manifestation of the Spirit, the sermon Peter delivers, and the results of the sermon in the response of the people.

⁶⁴ Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand

three movements, showing how the Spirit and the sermon work together in the narrative, and then demonstrating the bearing of this episode on shaping new cultural norms in the early church.

The Coming of the Spirit (Acts 2:1–13)

Luke introduces this episode by stating that the disciples were together in one place, gathered for the observation of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Pentecost was one of three major festivals celebrated in the life of Israel, taking place fifty days after Passover.⁶⁵ Pentecost was the annual harvest festival when the Jews would thank God for the harvest by bringing the first fruits as an offering to the Lord (Lev 23:15–22). This likely accounts for the presence of the number of Jews present in Jerusalem described in Acts 2:5, and possibly even for the presence of the Gentiles mentioned in Acts 2:9–11.⁶⁶ It may also explain the immediate reason the disciples were gathered in Jerusalem on this occasion.⁶⁷ On the other hand, it may be that the gathering of the disciples in Acts 2:1 was simply a continuation of their gathering for prayer in Acts 1:12–14 in obedience to Jesus' command to wait in Jerusalem in anticipation of the promised coming of the Holy

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 129–63. Note how Witherington divides the text as Acts 2:1–13, 2:14–42, 2:42–47, as opposed to Parsons' division. I follow Parsons' division here, though I acknowledge Witherington's rationale for seeing Acts 2:42–47 as a summary statement distinct from the response of the people in the previous section.

⁶⁵ The three major annual festivals included the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Festival of Weeks (also known as Pentecost or the Festival of Harvest), and the Festival of Shelters (also known as the Festival of Booths). See Exodus 23:14–17.

⁶⁶ Barrett suggests that Acts 2:5 refers to a gathering of Diaspora Jews who came to Jerusalem to observe the harvest festival. However, this may not fully account for the presence of the Gentiles described in Acts 2:9–11. For Barrett, the reason for the presence of the Gentiles remains unclear. See C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 118.

⁶⁷ Referencing back to Acts 1:13–15 and the gathering of 120 disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, Schnabel infers the number of the disciples present on the day of Pentecost to be around 120. See Schnabel, *Acts*, 113.

Spirit (Acts 1:4, 8).⁶⁸ This would mean then that the gathering of the disciples in Acts 2:1 is a continuation of the narrative flow that began with Jesus' command to wait for the Spirit (Acts 1:4) and his promise that the Spirit would indeed come upon them (Acts 1:8). If Acts 1 is seen as *promise*, Acts 2 can be seen as *fulfillment*.

As the disciples gathered, Acts 2:2–4 describes the manifestation of the coming of the promised Spirit. The Spirit's activity is described as both audible ("a sound like that of a violent rushing wind," Acts 2:2) and visible ("they saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them," Acts 2:3). Pinter concludes that the combination of the audible sound of wind and the visible sight of fire "alert us to the reality of the divine presence of God."⁶⁹ Significantly, this manifestation of wind and fire is described as coming "from heaven" (Acts 2:2). Reflecting on these verses, Holladay observes, "Like earlier moments in Israel's history when God is dramatically revealed, cosmic turbulence occurs. Sometimes God's appearances are punctuated with thunder, lightning, clouds, and fire."⁷⁰ This has echoes of the Exodus event and the manifestation of God's presence through the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exod 13:22). Holladay also suggests that this recalls John the Baptist's promise that Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3:11, Luke 3:16).⁷¹ In the appearance of tongues of fire and the sound of rushing wind, God was manifesting his presence in power among the disciples. The church would now possess and rely upon God's very presence for its life and practice.

Luke describes the result of this manifestation of God's presence in two ways in Acts 2:4. The disciples "were all filled with the Holy Spirit" and then "began to speak

⁶⁸ Bock notes that while there is no indication that the disciples are in the same place in Acts 2:1 that they are in the events of Acts 1, it is plausible that they are. See Bock, *Acts*, 94.

⁶⁹ Pinter, *Acts*, 64.

⁷⁰ Holladay, *Acts*, 89.

⁷¹ Holladay, *Acts*, 92.

in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.” The filling of the Spirit resulted in the speaking of the disciples in various tongues. Though the nature of tongues (*glossolalia*) in general is disputed, in this context it is apparent that those who heard were able to understand the content of what was said in their own languages (Acts 2:6–11). What is of interest here is the content of the disciples’ speech.⁷² Those who heard the disciples speaking in tongues said, “we hear them declaring the magnificent acts of God in our own tongues” (Acts 2:11). The content of their speech was a declaration or proclamation of God’s magnificent acts. This is a direct connection between the filling of the Spirit and the ministry of proclamation. The disciples’ “speaking in different tongues” (Acts 2:4) and “declaring the magnificent acts of God” (Acts 2:11) was a direct result of being “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). Luke notes that the disciples’ speaking occurred “as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4).

The crowd, made up of Jews staying in Jerusalem and Gentiles from around the world, reacted to this event with confusion (Acts 2:5–6) and amazement (Acts 2:7). They did not understand how they could hear the content of the disciples’ proclamation in their languages (Acts 2:8–11). Many in the crowd were left questioning the meaning of the event while others simply concluded that the disciples must be drunk (Acts 2:12–13). The crowd’s reaction to this manifestation of the Spirit provided an opportunity for Peter to preach a sermon that both explained the Spirit’s activity and exhorted the crowd to believe the gospel.

⁷² The “gift of tongues” is usually viewed as either a foreign language or some form of ecstatic speech or prayer language. For a helpful exploration of the gift of tongues and other charismatic gifts, as well as their relevance for the contemporary church, see Wayne A. Grudem and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Importantly, some scholars differentiate the seemingly charismatic tongues gift mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 from the foreign languages spoken in Acts 2. See, as an example, Holladay, *Acts*, 92.

Peter's Sermon (Acts 2:14–40)

Peter's sermon was occasioned by the confusion and the conclusions of the crowd in Acts 2:12–13. The sermon was Peter's interpretation for the crowd of what was happening before their eyes. It was also an opportunity for Peter's invitation for the crowd to respond to the good news about Jesus Christ.

Peter's sermon can be divided into two parts with a conclusion and invitation at the end. The first part of Peter's sermon is an explanation of the manifestation of the Spirit (Acts 2:14–21). The second part of the sermon is an exhortation to believe the gospel (Acts 2:22–36). The crowd responded to Peter's sermon with a question about what they should do, which then gave occasion for Peter to extend a conclusion to his message and an invitation for the crowd to respond in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37–40).

The first part of Peter's sermon is an *explanation* of the manifestation of the Spirit. In Acts 2:14–21, Peter responded to the confusion and conclusions of the crowd with an explanation of the manifestation of the Spirit they had just seen. He explained first what the tongues event was not and then what the tongues event was. First, the tongues event was not what the crowd thought it was, an example of public drunkenness resulting in confused speech (Acts 2:15). Peter made clear that the disciples were not drunk since it was too early in the morning. Second, Peter explained what the tongues event was. Peter explained that the tongues event was the fulfillment of the promised coming of the Holy Spirit in Joel 2:28–32. The manifestation of the Spirit described in Acts 2:1–4 was nothing less than the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit promised and expected for generations throughout Israel's history.

There are a couple of significant elements of Peter's quotation of Joel 2:28–32 that deserve special attention. First, the descent of the Spirit is for "all people" (Acts 2:17). This is important because of the presence of the Gentiles in Jerusalem (listed in Acts 2:9–11 as including Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Cretans, Arabs, and those who lived

in Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, and Rome). Peter made clear that the gift of the Spirit was not merely for the Jews but also for Gentiles such as those in this list of nationalities.⁷³ Yet the inclusion of Gentiles is not the extent of the meaning of “all people.” Not only are both Jews and Gentiles included in the outpouring of the Spirit, but so are men and women, as Joel prophesied that both sons *and* daughters would prophesy (Acts 2:17–18). Further, the outpouring of the Spirit would not discriminate based on age, as both young men would see visions and old men would dream dreams (Acts 2:17). Additionally, the Spirit would not be reserved for elites or those in high socio-economic classes, but even “servants” would receive the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:18). Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, indeed, “*everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21, emphasis added). Paul described this dynamic of God’s Spirit-filled community in similar terms: “There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, since you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Indeed, “the gift of the Spirit transcends all human barriers.”⁷⁴ Racial, gender, age, and class barriers were all overcome in this eschatological outpouring of the Spirit. The mission was truly for Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and *the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

A second significant element of Peter’s quotation of Joel 2 is the connection he made between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of preaching. By

⁷³ Parsons says the listing of nationalities in Acts 2 recalls the table of nations in Genesis 10. See Parsons, *Acts*, 38. This is significant because Genesis 11 records the multiplication of languages among the nations because of the building of the tower of Babel. Yet, God promises to bless the nations through Abraham in Genesis 12. In Acts 2, God indeed brings blessing to the nations as they hear about his magnificent acts through the work of Jesus in languages they can understand. I. Howard Marshall notes the possible parallels with the Babel narrative as well. See I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 68. For a more thorough exploration of the intertextual connections between Acts 2 and Genesis 11, see Jimmy A. Atkins, “Led by the Spirit: An Inter-textual Analysis of Acts, Chapter 2,” *American Journal of Biblical Theology* vol. 2/3 (Jul–Sep 2019): 30.

⁷⁴ Keener, *Acts*, 146.

invoking Joel 2, Peter described the disciples' speaking the magnificent acts of God in other languages as *prophecy*. Keener remarks,

The prophetic activity here encompasses visions and dreams (2:17d) and prophesying more generally (2:17c, 2:18b, the latter being an addition to reinforce the point). Prophetic speech includes prophecy proper (e.g., 11:27; 13:1; 21:9, 11), yet in the most general sense is proclaiming the "word of the Lord," which in Acts includes the inspired gospel (e.g., 8:25; 12:24; 13:49).⁷⁵

What is clearly in view here is preaching. That is, the proclamation of the disciples was *empowered* by the outpouring of the Spirit, just as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8. Beyond this, Peter's sermon explaining this outpouring was *itself* empowered by the Spirit.

Bock observes that what is new or unexpected here is that in the new era of the Spirit, "no class is excluded."⁷⁶ That is, the Spirit will not only be poured out on people regardless of gender or class, but the Spirit will also empower the prophesying of people regardless of gender or class. This is a new cultural norm for the church, and clearly demonstrates a connection between the Spirit's activity, preaching, and early church culture.

The second part of Peter's sermon is an *exhortation*. In Acts 2:22–36, Peter shifted his message from an explanation of the Spirit's activity to an exhortation to the gathered crowd. Peter used this opportunity to pivot to the gospel and call people to respond to Christ. At the heart of his message was the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and reception and pouring out of the promised Holy Spirit. The centrality of the resurrection and the Spirit can be observed by Peter's use of a chiastic structure in his sermon in Acts 2:22–36, the focal point of which is Acts 2:32–33. Parsons, following Krodel, notes the following chiastic structure:⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Keener, *Acts*, 145.

⁷⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 113.

⁷⁷ Parsons, *Acts*, 44. See also Gerhard Krodel, *Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 83.

A The kerygma (2:22–24)

B Proof from Scripture (2:25–28)

C Interpretation of Scripture (2:29–31)

D The resurrection/exaltation of Jesus and mediation of the Spirit
(2:32–33)

C' Interpretation of Scripture (2:34a)

B' Proof from Scripture (2:34b–35)

A' The kerygma (2:36)

Grounding his argument in Old Testament texts of promise, Peter preached the miraculous life (Acts 2:22),⁷⁸ death (Acts 2:23), resurrection (Acts 2:24), exaltation (Acts 2:33), ascension (Acts 2:34a), and session (Acts 2:34b–36) of Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah. Queen observes how Peter's sermon is an "example that teaches that Christian preaching should focus upon Jesus."⁷⁹ Peter also connected this gospel proclamation with the manifestation of the Spirit by identifying Jesus as the one who both received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father and subsequently poured out the Spirit in the way that they saw and heard (Acts 2:33).

Peter exhorted the crowd in two ways, once at the beginning of this section of the sermon and once at the end. First, he commanded them to "listen" (Acts 2:22). This message was something they should hear and to which they should pay close attention. Second, he commanded them to "know with certainty" that God had made Jesus, whom they crucified, "both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36). By sandwiching this section in

⁷⁸ Interestingly, James D.G. Dunn notes that this passage and Acts 10:36–39 are "the only passages in the Acts speeches which say anything about Jesus' pre-crucifixion ministry." See James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Narrative Commentaries (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 29.

⁷⁹ Matt Queen, "The Gospel, Evangelism, and Missions: Exegetical Observations and Theological Implications of Apostolic Proclamation and Action (Acts 2:22–41)" *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 63, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 102.

hortatory language, Peter made clear that the gospel he announced to them demanded a response. His identification of the Jews as those who crucified Jesus “helps bring the speech to its climax, and implicitly calls for a response from the listeners.”⁸⁰

The third part of Peter’s sermon is an *invitation*. The crowd was startled at Peter’s message. They were “pierced to the heart” and asked Peter and the rest of the apostles what they should do (Acts 2:37). Peter gave a concluding exhortation and an invitation to respond in Acts 2:38–40. Bock notes that whereas Acts 2:36 constitutes the theological conclusion of the speech, Acts 2:38 constitutes the application of the speech.⁸¹ His conclusion included a *command* and a *promise*. He commanded them to “repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). This forms the crowd’s expected response to the message.⁸² They were to turn toward Christ, express their repentance in baptism, and do so in view of the forgiveness of sin they could receive in him.⁸³ Luke reiterates Peter’s command to repent by stating that Peter used many other words to testify and strongly urge the crowd to “be saved from this corrupt generation” (Acts 2:40).

Peter also extended a promise in Acts 2:38b–39. If those who heard him would repent, they too would “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This closely parallels the language Jesus used in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you...” Peter reaffirmed the promise from Joel 2 that the Spirit would be poured

⁸⁰ Martin M. Culy and Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003) 43.

⁸¹ Bock, *Acts*, 141.

⁸² Queen says, “All that Peter had conveyed to them found its climax in his call for them to repent.” Queen, “The Gospel, Evangelism, and Missions,” 107.

⁸³ Although this verse has been interpreted as teaching baptismal regeneration, Bock argues that “for the forgiveness of your sins” should be understood as “with a view to” or “on the basis of” forgiveness of sins. See Bock, *Acts*, 143. On this view, see also J.H. Moulton and N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3: *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 266; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 369–71.

out on “all people” by stating that the promise was for *them*, the people in the crowd who heard his message and repented, to “all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). The significance of this promise cannot be overstated: the new norm for the church was that the Spirit would be available to *all*, regardless of nationality, gender, age, or class. Witherington says, “The promise is for everyone... anyone who calls on the name of the Lord and at the same time anyone whom the Lord calls.”⁸⁴

The Sermon’s Response and Results (Acts 2:41–47)

In Acts 2:41–47, Luke describes the response of the crowd to the sermon (Acts 2:41) and the resulting effects in the life of the community of the church (Acts 2:42–47). Some commentators include Acts 2:41 as part of the preceding section and designate Acts 2:42–47 as a general summary statement of the life of the church at this point in the narrative of Acts.⁸⁵ Yet there does appear to be a greater unity between Acts 2:41 and Acts 2:42–47 than immediately might be grasped, as can be seen in the following chiasm:⁸⁶

- A People were added, (2:41)
- B They devoted themselves, (2:42)
- C Signs, (2:43)
- D. Unity, vs. (2:44)
- C’ Sharing, (2:45)
- B’ They devoted themselves, (2:46)

⁸⁴ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 157.

⁸⁵ For an example, see D. Edmond Hiebert’s textual outline of Acts 2:1–47 where Acts 2:41 essentially concludes the section of Acts 2:1–41, and Acts 2:42–47 stand alone as a summary statement. D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1: *The Gospels and Acts* (Waynesboro: Gabriel Publishing, 2003), 271.

⁸⁶ While he does not notice the chiasm as I do above, Parsons nonetheless observes the presence of parallelism in this section. He notes the reference to numerical growth at the beginning and end of the paragraph and finds that Acts 2:43–47 illustrate the four elements that characterized early church worship in Acts 2:42. See Parsons, *Acts*, 48.

A' The Lord added, (2:47)

As observed above, the focal point of the chiasm is Acts 2:44, which denotes the unity present in the church following the outpouring of the Spirit. Notably, the language of Acts 2:44 (“they were together and held all things in common”) finds a parallel in the language of Acts 2:1 (“they were all together in one place”). The elements surrounding Acts 2:44 describe the unique realities birthed by the Spirit in the early church.

There are several aspects of what life in the early church was like that are described in Acts 2:41–47. This section gives a unique glimpse into the culture of this new Spirit-filled community. First, the church was full of new believers who had heard the gospel, accepted it, and were baptized (Acts 2:41). Second, the church was marked by a devotion to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42, 46–47a). Third, the church was characterized by supernatural activity at the hands of the apostles, empowered by the Spirit (Acts 2:43). Fourth, the church was known for its unity (Acts 2:44). Fifth, the church was known for its sacrificial generosity (Acts 2:45). Sixth, the church experienced evangelistic growth (Acts 2:41, 47b). R. Kent Hughes writes pastorally about the life of the church described in this paragraph:

The church under the rule of the Holy Spirit is devoted to teaching, fellowship, and worship, and evangelism flows forth as a result. Along with a sense of human sinfulness, the people’s realization of God’s holy presence enabled them to continually feel a sense of awe at his majesty. There was also genuine joy—a church where the Spirit reigned.⁸⁷

These characteristics flow directly from the activity of the Spirit and the preaching of the church described in Acts 2:1–40. Because of the Spirit’s activity and the preaching of the Word, the early church was marked by health, numerical growth, and

⁸⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word Commentary (Wheaton: Crossway, 1996), 51.

favor with God and people.⁸⁸

The New Cultural Norms in the Church

From this brief analysis of the Pentecost narrative, several distinct aspects of early church culture can be discerned. If church culture can be defined as the beliefs, values, and behavior of a congregation, then Acts 2:1–47 becomes a showcase for how the culture of the early church was shaped by the Spirit’s activity, particularly, Spirit–empowered preaching. At least four new cultural norms can be observed in Acts 2:1–47.

First, the church’s makeup and ministry would be characterized by *inclusion*.⁸⁹ Gentiles would be included in the church. The Spirit’s activity in the church would give believers “a new attitude toward others. The ‘other’ is no longer a person who has a different language, a different nationality, a different ethnicity; the other is my brother and sister.”⁹⁰ The fact that the gospel was heard in a variety of languages and heard by people from a variety of nationalities demonstrates this value of inclusion. As Matthew Skinner states, “Two details of Acts 2—to *whom* the Holy Spirit speaks and *how* the Spirit speaks—therefore make Pentecost a story of widespread welcome and inclusion.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Commenting on Acts 2:42–47, Gary Carver observes the following about the culture of the early church: 1) They lived on the promises of God; 2) They were a growing people numerically and spiritually; 3) They were a joyful people; 4) They had a high threshold for persecution; 4) They had a high-risk quotient. See Gary L. Carver, “Acts 2:42–47,” *Review and Expositor* 87 (1990): 477–78.

⁸⁹ By “inclusion,” I mean that anyone who will respond in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ can be included in the church. I do not intend here the view of theological inclusivism which argues that faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation. For a helpful argument against theological inclusivism in Acts 2, see Matthew Barrett, “‘I Will Pour Out My Spirit on All Flesh’: Are Acts 2 and 10 Proof-Texts for Inclusivism?” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 17 (2012): 79–98. Barrett argues that Peter’s call to repentance and faith in Christ makes the case in this text for theological *exclusivism*, not inclusivism. By “inclusion,” I mean rather the sense in which Jenny McDevitt understands it when she says, “The Spirit is an inclusive entity and does not discriminate in choosing through whom it will act.” See Jenny McDevitt, “Between Text and Sermon: Acts 2:1–21,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 66/1 (2012): 72.

⁹⁰ Pinter, *Acts*, 74.

⁹¹ Matthew L. Skinner, “Pentecost as Resistance to Monoculture: On the Inclusive, Hospitable, and Prophetic Community Imagined in Acts 2,” *Journal for Preachers* 41, no. 4 (Pentecost 2018): 11. Emphasis original.

Luke's listing of the "table of nations" in Acts 2:9–11 and his description of the response of the crowd to the preaching of the gospel in Acts 2:41 signify that the gospel was intended for people from every nation. Peter's use of Joel 2 indicated both *everyone* who called on the name of the Lord could be saved (Acts 2:21) and that the Spirit would be poured out on *all people* (Acts 2:17). This inclusion also included both genders, as "sons and daughters" and "both men and women" would prophesy (Acts 2:17–18). People from various generations would also be included, as both "young men" and "old men" would experience the Spirit's activity (Acts 2:17). Even those normally marginalized in society, such as servants, would be included in the church (Acts 2:18). The outpouring of the Spirit as promised by Joel shaped the culture of the early church by breaking all barriers of class. The implications extended beyond defining who could be included in the church. The outpouring of the Spirit also defined who could preach. Keener notes, "God's gift of the Spirit would abolish all distinctions in terms of inspired speaking for God. No longer would this activity be limited to a few prophets, mostly free males; it would characterize all of God's true people."⁹²

Second, because of this new cultural norm of inclusion, the church would be geared for *mission*.⁹³ Pinter poignantly states, "the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost sends believers to the nations because the Spirit draws people from the four points of the compass."⁹⁴ This can be observed in the immediate context of the Pentecost narrative as the magnificent acts of God are proclaimed to people from many nations (Acts 2:4–12), who then hear a proclamation of the gospel with an invitation to believe

⁹² Keener, *Acts*, 147.

⁹³ It's important to note additionally that Acts 2 shows how this mission would be dependent on the Spirit. Queen says, Acts 2 "necessitates that personal evangelists and missionaries consider and incorporate a pneumatological dimension in their evangelistic practices. The Holy Spirit empowered Peter...to preach the gospel boldly and publicly. In addition, the Spirit convicted Peter's hearers (Acts 2:37) of their need for forgiveness through Jesus and to receive him as their promise (Acts 2:38–39, 41). See Queen, "The Gospel, Evangelism, and Missions," 116.

⁹⁴ Pinter, *Acts*, 74.

(Acts 2:14–40), which they accept as they respond in belief and baptism (Acts 2:41). It also can be observed in the broader context of the narrative as the disciples move outward from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1) and eventually to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:2ff). The narrative of Acts ends with Paul in Rome preaching the good news of the kingdom of God (Acts 28:30–31). Mission marked the culture of the early church, beginning with the events on the day of Pentecost.

Third, the church would rely upon and possess the *Spirit's presence and manifest power*. Whereas the Spirit in the Old Testament could hover (Gen 1:2), come upon people (Judg 3:10, 6:34), but also depart from people (1 Sam 16:14), after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, there was a permanence to the Spirit's presence among the people of God. The Spirit descended and “rested” on the disciples (Acts 2:3), and they were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4).⁹⁵

The wind and fire mentioned in Acts 2:2–3 signified God's presence among the disciples. Pinter remarks,

The descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost points us to the personal presence of God... Wind and fire in Scripture indicate the presence of God. When God appears to Job, he speaks out of the storm wind (Job 38:1); when God appears to Abraham, he appears as a blazing torch passing between the animals (Gen 15:17); when God leads his people out of Egyptian bondage, he does so with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (Exod 13:21–22); when God spoke through Jeremiah, it was like a fire shut up in his bones (Jer 20:9); and when God appears on the day of Pentecost, the indicators of his presence are wind and fire. The followers of the ascended Christ receive the transcendent presence of God through the Spirit. The Spirit is God's *personal* presence; it is not divine fireworks.⁹⁶

The powerful events of Acts 2 are a result of the Spirit's presence and manifest power, as can be seen by the “wonders and signs” performed through the apostles (Acts

⁹⁵ Andrew Malone notes, “Most of Luke's verbs describe the once–ever bestowal of the Spirit after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (‘poured out,’ ‘given,’ ‘comes upon,’ ‘falls upon,’ ‘received,’ ‘baptized [with],’).” See Andrew S. Malone, “Appreciating the Pneumatology of Acts, Part 2: Prospect,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 76:2 (August 2017): 121.

⁹⁶ Pinter, *Acts*, 73. Emphasis original.

2:43). The church's culture was marked by dependence on the Spirit's presence and power, which they possessed in full.

Fourth, the church's life would be characterized by *devotion*, *unity*, and *generosity* in the community. Describing the summary statement in Acts 2:41–47, David Garland describes the change the Spirit brought on the day of Pentecost,

This summary is one of the few places where Luke tells us what happens after people are converted, and it emphasizes key elements of the church's life. They regularly meet together and gather in the temple courts because they could accommodate a large gathering and attract a larger crowd. They pray, teach, break bread together, and support the needy among them. The Spirit has transformed cantankerous disciples (Luke 9:46–48; 22:24–27) into magnanimous believers, unstinting in their care for and generosity toward one another.⁹⁷

The believers were devoted to the things that mattered most: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer, meeting together regularly for worship (Acts 2:42, 46). They were “together” in unity (Acts 2:1, 44). They shared in sacrificial generosity with those who had needs (Acts 2:45). Each of these characteristics were a result of the Spirit's activity among them.

These new cultural norms were unique in the church of the first century. Pentecost did indeed inaugurate a new day. What was the cause of these new cultural norms? They developed as a direct result of the Spirit's descent and activity among the disciples and the Spirit-empowered proclamation both of Peter and the men and women who “declared the magnificent acts of God” (Acts 2:4, 11).

Case Study: The Spirit's Role in Acts 10–11

The pivotal work of the Spirit in shaping the culture of the early church is visible explicitly in Acts 10:1–11:18. This narrative presents a fascinating case study in culture change in the early church. This text is “the longest single narrative in all of Acts.

⁹⁷ Garland, *Acts*, 33.

This in itself witnesses to the great importance Luke placed on the incident.”⁹⁸ The episode includes a “second Pentecost” wherein the Gentiles experience conversion and the outpouring of God’s Spirit.⁹⁹ Just as significantly, it would be through this experience that both Peter and the Jerusalem church would have a change of heart about the Gentiles, setting the stage for the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 where the matter of Jew/Gentile relations and the circumcision question would be settled officially.¹⁰⁰ Longenecker explains four reasons this episode is so important in Luke’s narrative of the early church:

Four matters in the account of Cornelius’s conversion receive special emphasis, and, in turn, they provide insight into Luke’s purpose for presenting this material. The *first* has to do with the early church’s resistance to the idea of Gentiles’ being either directly evangelized or accepted into the Christian fellowship apart from any relationship to Judaism (cf. 10:14, 28; 11:2–3, 8). The *second* is the demonstration that it was God himself who introduced Gentiles into the church and miraculously showed his approval (cf. 10:3, 11–16, 19–20, 22b, 30–33, 44–46; 11:5–10, 13, 15–17). The *third* is that it was not Paul but Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem apostles, who was the human instrument in opening the door to the Gentiles (cf. 10:23, 34–43, 47–48; 11:15–17). The *fourth* has to do with the Jerusalem church’s subsequent acceptance of a Gentile’s conversion to Jesus the Messiah apart from any allegiance to Judaism, for God had so obviously validated it (cf. 11:18).¹⁰¹

The narrative is most commonly divided into seven scenes: the first scene is Cornelius’ vision in Caesarea (Acts 10:1–8); the second scene is Peter’s vision in Joppa (Acts 10:9–16); the third scene is where Cornelius’ messengers encounter Peter (Acts 10:17–23); the fourth scene is where Peter and Cornelius meet (Acts 10:24–33); the fifth scene is Peter’s sermon (Acts 10:34–43); the sixth scene is where the Gentiles experience another Pentecost-type outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 10:44–48); scene seven is Peter’s report about this Gentile Pentecost to the church at Jerusalem and the church’s response

⁹⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, 250.

⁹⁹ Parsons, *Acts*, 155. Parsons notes this “Gentile Pentecost” is the fourth outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts. The other occur at Acts 2:1–4; 4:31; and 8:17.

¹⁰⁰ The stage for this new view of the Gentiles was already being set in the immediate context to the events of Acts 10–11. Luke notes in a summary statement about the church in Acts 9:31 that the church had expanded to include “Galilee and Samaria,” indicating that the gospel was expanding beyond the secure confines of Jerusalem toward the ends of the earth in its eventual fulfillment of Acts 1:8.

¹⁰¹ Longenecker, “Acts,” 870. Emphasis added.

to Peter's report (Acts 11:1–18).¹⁰² These scenes are repetitious (Cornelius' vision is told four times, Peter's vision is explained twice, and Acts 11:3–17 is a retelling of the events of Acts 10), but as Polhill notes, this repetition serves two functions: "First, it makes for a vivid narrative; it is related in dialogue, which gives the reader a sense of 'being there.' Second, and more significantly, it underlines the importance of the event. It will be repeated yet a final time in Peter's testimony at the Jerusalem conference."¹⁰³ Russell Morton says the repetition of this story signifies its importance in the overall narrative of Acts, noting that only the conversion and calling of Saul/Paul receives greater attention (Acts 9:1–9; 22:6–11; 26:12–18). Morton also points out that Acts 10:1–11:18

initiate the third phase of Acts 1:8, the preaching of the gospel to the "ends of the earth." Peter's speech is immediately followed by the account of the church in Antioch (11:19–30), where the gospel is shared with Gentiles. It is from Antioch that the Pauline mission is commissioned in 13:1–3, so the implied reader is prepared for a major shift in emphasis, from Jerusalem and Judea, to the Gentile mission to the "ends of the earth." This change is facilitated in part by Peter's speech in Acts 11:1–18, where the significance of the events of Acts 10 is explained.¹⁰⁴

This case study will analyze the story's scenes and draw implications for an understanding of how the Spirit shaped the culture of the early church.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² This understanding of the text as having a seven-part division has a history that dates to the early church fathers. For more on this, see Francois Bovon, *De Vocatione Gentium* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1967), 25. For modern commentators who see this same outline of the text, see, for example, Parsons, *Acts*, 141; Schnabel, *Acts*, 481; Longenecker, "Acts," 869ff; Polhill, *Acts*, 250; Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 345–46; et al.

¹⁰³ Polhill, *Acts*, 250. Pinter notes that the entire event of Cornelius' conversion and the descent of the Spirit on the Gentiles is told in Luke's narrative three times: once in full detail in Acts 10, a second time in summarized form in Acts 11, and a third time briefly in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. See Pinter, *Acts*, 250.

¹⁰⁴ Russell Morton, "Between Text and Sermon: Acts 11:1–18," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 66/3 (2012): 310–311.

¹⁰⁵ The text of Acts 10:1–11:18 was also analyzed in chapter four. In chapter four, the narrative was assessed in relation to Peter's sermon. In this section, the narrative will be assessed in terms of the Spirit's role in shaping the behaviors, values, and beliefs of the church in regard to Jew and Gentile relations.

Scene One: Cornelius' Vision in Caesarea (Acts 10:1–8)

Luke begins the narrative with an introduction of one of the main characters: Cornelius. The first verse sets up the tension of the story because Cornelius is decidedly *Roman*, “a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment” (Acts 10:1). That is, Cornelius was a Gentile. Beyond that, he was a Gentile of important social standing. Luke introduces Cornelius’ Gentile “resume” by mentioning that he is a “centurion.” A centurion would have been a soldier of great prominence in the Roman world.¹⁰⁶ Pinter states, “It usually took a soldier twelve to twenty years of outstanding service to be appointed a centurion. Finally, if this was not enough to demonstrate Cornelius’s Gentile pedigree, he is described as a member of the ‘*Italian Regiment*.’”¹⁰⁷ Luke’s purpose in mentioning these details is clear: “Cornelius is a gentile, living in a significant gentile city, and a prominent and privileged member of Roman society.”¹⁰⁸ Luke draws attention to these details to demonstrate that Cornelius is an important Gentile.¹⁰⁹

Though he was a Gentile, Cornelius was also a devout “God-fearer” who did “many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always prayed to God” (Acts 10:2). At one of his regular times of prayer (“around three in the afternoon”), he encountered an angel in a vision (Acts 10:3).¹¹⁰ The angel instructed Cornelius to send men to Joppa to

¹⁰⁶ For background on the importance of the centurion in Roman society, see A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 156ff.

¹⁰⁷ Pinter, *Acts*, 251.

¹⁰⁸ Pinter, *Acts*, 251.

¹⁰⁹ Though Luke does not specify this, it is possible that Cornelius is the first Gentile convert in Christian history. Yet even if Cornelius was not the first, based on Luke’s portrayal, he is the most prominent convert up to this point in the narrative. It is likely that there were Gentile converts present at the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, listed in the “table of nations” (Acts 2:8–11). Later in the narrative, Luke includes the conversion of an Ethiopian official in Candace’s court (Acts 8:26–40). Though these were likely Gentiles, it is also possible that they were Jewish proselytes who merely lived in other nations. For more on this possibility, see Pinter, *Acts*, 250.

¹¹⁰ The Jews observed three regular times of prayer each day. This afternoon prayer time was likely one of them, as Cornelius probably observed the pattern of Jewish prayer. Witherington notes, “Three in the afternoon was a set time for Jewish sacrifice and prayer.” Witherington, *The Acts of the*

find Peter, who was staying at the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:3–6). Cornelius responded in immediate obedience, instructing two servants and a soldier to go to Joppa (Acts 10:8). The movement from Caesarea (a Roman stronghold) to Joppa (a Jewish stronghold) is likely of significance here, marking a crossing of a cultural boundary that would bear out in the rest of the story.¹¹¹

In addition to drawing attention to Cornelius' Gentile heritage, these verses demonstrate two significant elements in this part of the story. First, God is the one who initiated the chain of events that would culminate in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles. Luke's audience would not have missed this significant fact: God himself was the one who called Cornelius in this vision. Later, God would be the one to pour out his Spirit on the Gentiles. God would be the one to break down the walls of division between Jew and Gentile. The triune God is the "primary Actor" in this narrative.¹¹² Second, Luke includes an important detail in mentioning that Peter was staying at the home of Simon the tanner. Simon was engaged in a trade the Jews considered unclean due to the handling of animal carcasses.¹¹³ Further, "On Acts' social map of places...Simon's locale on the literal edge of town by the sea may also symbolize his liminal and marginalized place on

Apostles, 348. See also Keener, *Acts*, 298.

¹¹¹ In a fascinating article, Benjamin Wilson argues that the geographic references in this story (Caesarea, Joppa, Jerusalem) are not coincidental but rather "represent three markedly different contexts for first-century Jew-gentile relations. Hence, the geographic designations in Acts 10:1–11:18 relate closely to the leading theme of Luke's narrative in this sequence of scenes. To move beyond the customary ethnic boundaries between Jew and gentile, the characters in the story must also take steps of faith to move beyond the safe confines of their respective spatial frameworks. Geography and ethnicity are thus inherently intermingled in this sequence of scenes...the geographic progression of the narrative contributes to a contextualized reading of Acts 10:1–11:18 on the theme of Jew-gentile relations." See Benjamin R. Wilson, "Jew-Gentile Relations and the Geographic Movement of Acts 10:1–11:18," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 80 (2018): 82–83.

¹¹² Pinter, *Acts*, 271.

¹¹³ Parsons makes this point and demonstrates that when Luke mentions a person's occupation, the occupation figures prominently in the story (e.g., Acts 8:9, 27; 10:1; 13:6–7; 14:13; 16:14, 16; 18:3; 1924). Luke's mention of Simon's trade is not incidental. See Parsons, *Acts*, 140–141.

the social map of persons.”¹¹⁴ That Peter is staying in the home of a man whose trade was considered unclean contains an irony that will only increase in the remainder of the story.

Scene Two: Peter’s Vision in Joppa (Acts 10:9–16)

The day after Cornelius had his vision, Peter experienced a vision of his own. During the noontime period of prayer, Peter went to pray on the roof of the house where he was staying (Acts 10:9). While praying, he fell into a trance and had a vision (Acts 10:10). The vision was an unusual one, but heavy with meaning. Peter saw an object resembling a large sheet coming down from heaven, lowered by the four corners to the earth (Acts 10:11). Inside the sheet were unclean animals of various sorts, including animals, reptiles, and birds (Acts 10:12). Peter heard a voice telling him to kill the animals and eat them (Acts 10:13).

Peter responded by refusing to kill and eat the animals, stating that he had “never eaten anything impure and ritually unclean” (Acts 10:14). Peter’s ritual purity was more important to him than obeying the voice he heard in the vision. Peter, like other devout Jews, was committed to obey the Old Testament ritual purity laws regarding food (Lev 11; Deut 14).¹¹⁵ Schnabel says, “The reason for Peter’s refusal to obey the voice is obvious: Israel had been commanded by God never to eat anything that is profane or unclean.”¹¹⁶

After Peter refused to eat the animals, he experienced the vision a second time, this time with the voice explaining, “What God has made clean, do not call impure” (Acts 10:15). Perhaps signifying Peter’s continued refusal to eat, Luke says that the vision

¹¹⁴ Parsons, *Acts*, 141.

¹¹⁵ For a helpful explanation of Jewish dietary laws, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991). Milgrom explains how the Jews observed the Jewish dietary laws as a way of maintaining holiness, an attribute of God’s very nature.

¹¹⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, 490.

occurred three times before the object was taken into heaven (Acts 10:16). Peter's reaction at this point was apparent confusion ("Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean," Acts 10:17). God would soon make clear the meaning of the vision.

An important observation should be made at this point related to Peter's location when he experienced this vision. Parsons notes that Luke is likely making a subliminal point in mentioning Peter's location at Simon's house in Joppa:

Peter has, then, taken a first step [toward accepting the Gentiles] by taking up lodging with an ostracized tanner. We should not miss the irony of Peter's reticence to receive the vision of what is ritually clean and unclean in the very home of such a person. Only a conversion of the most radical sort will allow Peter's attitude to catch up with his setting.¹¹⁷

Peter would experience a radical transformation indeed in the events that followed. Yet at this point in the narrative, his willingness to stay at Simon's house notwithstanding, Peter paralleled Jonah in his hesitance to interact with anything or anyone unclean.¹¹⁸ It would take an intervention by the Spirit to change his mind.

¹¹⁷ Parsons, *Acts*, 141. Against this view, see Chris A. Miller, "Did Peter's Vision in Acts 10 Pertain to Men or the Menu," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (July–September 2002): 302–17. He provides two reasons why Peter's staying in Simon's house would not have indicated a softening toward unclean things. He says, "First, Luke portrayed Peter as one whose loyalty to Moses was unflinching. His threefold protest to the thought of eating 'unclean' animals shows that he was not questioning the place of Moses in his own personal practice (10:14–16, repeated in 11:8–10). Second, the prohibitions involving the uncleanness of dead animals applied only to those that died of natural causes (Lev. 11:31–40); otherwise even the priests would have been rendered unclean in their offering of sacrifices... Thus, while the tanner may have been on the lower end of the social scale, he was not a religious outcast... Peter's decision to reside with Simon is thus probably not an evidence of a soft attitude toward the Law." Miller, "Did Peter's Vision in Acts 10 Pertain to Men or the Menu," 304. Miller's observations notwithstanding, Luke's reference to Simon's occupation seems to be intentional; if it was periphery to the meaning of the story, he likely would not have included it. Whether Peter was softening toward that which was unclean or not, Luke's purpose in including this detail in the narrative just prior to a story about that which is clean and unclean seems to be intentional.

¹¹⁸ Garland notes, "Jonah retreated to Joppa to avoid preaching to gentiles (Jon. 1:3). Peter is prodded to leave Joppa to go preach to gentiles. Peter, Simon bar Jonah (Matt. 16:17), is very much like Jonah in his resistance to bringing God's message to gentiles, who are considered by pious Jews to be tainted." See Garland, *Acts*, 105. See also González, *Acts*, 132; R.W. Tall, "Peter, 'Son' of Jonah: The conversion of Cornelius in the context of canon," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (1987): 79–90.

Scene Three: Cornelius' Messengers Encounter Peter (Acts 10:17–23)

While Peter was pondering the meaning of the vision he had experienced, the men Cornelius had sent to Joppa arrived at Simon's house, in a stunning demonstration of God's sovereignty and timing (Acts 10:17). As they arrived at the house where Peter was staying, the Spirit spoke to Peter, who was still pondering the vision, and told him to meet the three men who were there to see him and "go with them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them" (Acts 10:19–20). The Spirit takes a central role in the narrative at this point, leading Peter to understand that what was happening was part of God's plan. The Spirit's voice at this point was important in encouraging Peter to continue down the path that would lead ultimately to a meeting with Cornelius. Bruce comments about the ethnic barrier Peter would face in the experience he would soon have in meeting Cornelius:

A God-fearer had no objection to the society of Jews, but even a moderately orthodox Jew would not willingly enter the dwelling of a Gentile, God-fearer though he were. No doubt some of Peter's inherited prejudices were wearing thin by this time,¹¹⁹ but a special revelation was necessary to make him consent to visit a Gentile.

The Spirit's affirmation for Peter to go with these Gentiles was the special revelation Peter would need to do what he did next. After hearing the men recount Cornelius' experience with the angel, Peter invited them into the home and allowed them to stay the night (Acts 10:21–23). This act of hospitality was itself a surprising act for a devout Jew and may have reflected a softening of Peter's heart toward the Gentiles at this point in the narrative.¹²⁰ This surprising act would be followed by a more surprising one as Peter next would enter a Gentile home to meet with a Roman centurion.

¹¹⁹ Bruce, *Acts*, 217.

¹²⁰ Munck suggests, "Perhaps Peter's hospitality toward the messengers may already be taken as an indication of his new attitude toward the Gentiles." Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 93.

Scene Four: Peter and Cornelius Meet (Acts 10:24–33)

The next day, Peter left Joppa with some associates and Cornelius' servants to meet Cornelius in Caesarea (Acts 10:23–24). When he arrived in Caesarea, he found that Cornelius was waiting for him, along with a group of friends and family he had gathered (Acts 10:24). Cornelius showed deference to Peter by bowing at his feet in worship (Acts 10:25).¹²¹ After Peter protested this act of homage and told Cornelius to stand up (Acts 10:26), he went in to Cornelius' home and saw the large crowd that had gathered (Acts 10:27).¹²²

At this point in the narrative, a significant admission is made by Peter: “You know it’s forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner, but God has shown me that I must not call any person impure or unclean. That’s why I came without any objection when I was sent for” (Acts 10:28–29). As Bruce rightly observes, “A couple of days previously, Peter would not have believed it possible that he should find himself in such company, beneath a Gentile roof; but much had happened since then.”¹²³ What had happened in the days previous? Polhill states it succinctly,

God...had shown Peter that he should not call another person common or unclean (v. 28). Actually, Peter’s vision had only related to unclean foods, but he had understood fully the symbolism of the creatures in the sheet. All were God’s creatures; all were declared clean. God had led him to Cornelius, and God had declared Cornelius clean. The old purity laws could no longer separate Jew from Gentile. Since God had shown himself no respecter of persons, neither could Peter

¹²¹ Bowing like this would have been a common gesture of respect for a Gentile like Cornelius. See Polhill, *Acts*, 258.

¹²² Vanthanh Nguyen makes an interesting observation about the theme of “entering” in the narrative. He notes the repetition of movement from “exterior to interior” throughout the entire story. “Go in, enter” (*eiserhchomai*) is used in Acts 10:3, 24–27; 11:3, 8, 12–13. “Come in or go to” (*proserhchomai*) is used in 10:28. “Invite in” (*eiskaleomai*) is used in 10:23a. “Go away/out” (*aperhchomai*) is used in 10:7. An angel enters Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:3). The men Cornelius sent enter Simon’s house (Acts 10:23a). Peter enters Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:27). This movement indicates a crossing of cultural boundaries. For more on this, see Vanthanh Nguyen, “Dismantling Cultural Boundaries: Missiological Implications of Acts 10:1–11:18,” *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 4 (October 2012): 455–66. Interestingly, Nguyen argues that one of the ways cultural boundaries were crossed in this story is through table fellowship.

¹²³ Bruce, *Acts*, 222.

be one anymore.¹²⁴

Peter's recognition of the meaning of the vision he experienced signaled a massive shift in his beliefs, values, and behaviors related to the Gentiles. Up to this point, he had a bias against Gentiles. Because of this experience, he now understood God was at work among the Gentiles.

Cornelius responded to Peter's statement by retelling his own experience where the "man in dazzling clothes" spoke to him about finding Peter (Acts 10:30–32). Cornelius then informed Peter that those who had gathered were ready "in the presence of God to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord" (Acts 10:33). Peter would preach the gospel to them, in a similar way that he had on the Day of Pentecost and with a similar result.

Scene Five: Peter's Sermon (Acts 10:34–43)

After Cornelius indicated the willingness of those gathered to hear what Peter had been commanded by the Lord to speak, Peter began to preach to them (Acts 10:34). Peter's speech is consistent with the gospel message he had preached earlier in Acts: he preached "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36), explaining the life, death, resurrection, and return of Christ (Acts 10:36–43). Peter acknowledged that everyone who would believe in Christ would receive forgiveness (Acts 10:44).¹²⁵

While this proclamation of the *kerygma* is consistent with the message Peter preached elsewhere,¹²⁶ there are two elements of this speech that are unique. First, Peter

¹²⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, 258.

¹²⁵ Witherington categorizes the speech as an apologetic sermon, an example of "forensic or judicial rhetoric, which God interrupts. As such it should be compared to Peter's earlier sermons in Acts 2–4." See Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 355. Keener suggests that Peter's sermon may follow a Greek rhetorical structure where "[Acts] 10:36 might be the *propositio* (thesis statement), 10:37–42 the *narration*, and 10:43 the beginning of proofs. See Keener, *Acts*, 305.

¹²⁶ C.H. Dodd says, "the speech before Cornelius represents the form of *kerygma* used by the primitive Church in its earliest approaches to a wider preaching." See C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 56. Emphasis original.

began his sermon with the acknowledgment that he now understood “God doesn’t show favoritism, but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34–35). Second, Peter drew out the implications of this realization in the language he used to describe the universal availability of the gospel for those who would believe. In Acts 10:35, he stressed that people from *every* nation can be accepted by God. In Acts 10:36, he stated that Jesus is Lord of *all*. In Acts 10:38, he explained that Jesus went about doing good and healing *all* who were under the tyranny of the devil. In Acts 10:43, the offer of forgiveness is available to *everyone* who believes in him.

Peter’s beliefs, values, and behavior were changed by the realization that the gospel was for *everyone*. His sermon reflected the revelation that the Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean. Peter understood in a new way that “God shows no favoritism, accepts people from every nation, and that Jesus is ‘Lord of all.’”¹²⁷ This message of the universality of the offer of forgiveness would be reinforced by an outpouring of the Spirit in the middle of Peter’s sermon.

Scene Six: The Gentile Pentecost (Acts 10:44–48)

The Holy Spirit interrupted Peter’s sermon by coming down on his Gentile listeners “While Peter was still speaking” (Acts 10:44). In what could only be considered as a kind of “Gentile Pentecost,”¹²⁸ the Spirit was “poured out” on the Gentiles, resulting in the Gentiles “speaking in other tongues and declaring the greatness of God,” to the amazement of Peter’s circumcised associates (Acts 10:45–46). Keener states,

The climactic message of forgiveness for *whoever* believes (10:43) is confirmed by the outpouring of the Spirit on gentiles (10:44–48). The language of “pouring” (10:45) evokes the quotation of Joel 2:28–29 in Acts 2:17–18 (using a cognate

¹²⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 260.

¹²⁸ Parsons, *Acts*, 155.

term), indicating that Joel's "all flesh" includes gentile believers as well as Jewish ones...In 10:44–48, the Spirit graphically confirms the gentiles' acceptance.¹²⁹

The parallels with Acts 2 are unmistakable. The gospel is proclaimed, the Spirit is poured out, and people begin declaring God's mighty acts in other tongues. Even the response to this outpouring parallels the Pentecost experience. When the Spirit was poured out and people spoke in tongues in Acts 2, the people were "astounded and amazed" (Acts 2:7). They responded in belief and baptism (Acts 2:41). In Acts 10:45, the circumcised believers with Peter were "amazed" and the new Gentile believers responded in baptism (Acts 10:47–48).

What is shocking in this account is that these things are experienced by *Gentiles*. The same benefits experienced by the church in Jerusalem were shared now by the Gentiles. Holladay notes the significance of the location where this takes place:

Especially remarkable is where this outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurs: at Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea and thus a symbol of gentile power. With this report Luke shows that access to the Holy Spirit is no longer confined to Jerusalem and Judea, nor to the temple, bastion of Jewish power. Peter's remarks in Acts 10:47 equates the gentiles' reception of the Holy Spirit with that of the apostles and other Jews at Pentecost: "they have received the Holy Spirit in the same way we did."¹³⁰

It was no accident that the Spirit decided to move in this way, among these people, at this place. The Spirit was revealing several important truths to the circumcised believers who were present, all of which would shape the culture of the early church in significant ways.¹³¹ First, it was possible for the Holy Spirit to come upon Gentiles. Second, these Gentiles could be baptized just as they had been. Third, in what was a further surprise, Peter stayed with Cornelius "for a few days," indicating that the

¹²⁹ Keener, *Acts*, 305. Emphasis original.

¹³⁰ Holladay, *Acts*, 240.

¹³¹ Witherington says, "It must be stressed that what we have here is indeed a story of conversion; indeed, it could be said to be a tale of two sorts of conversions—Peter was converted to a new point of view about Gentiles as part of God's people, and Cornelius and his household were converted to a new view of Jesus Christ. The former was an ecclesiological conversion, the latter a Christological one." Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 360–61.

relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers was forever changed.¹³² The cultural value change was clear: “In Judaism, the uncircumcised Cornelius can be, at best, only a ‘God-fearer.’ As a Christian, he does not have second-class status; he is fully accepted as a brother in Christ.”¹³³

The Spirit’s outpouring on Gentiles meant that there would no longer be any acceptable discrimination between persons in the early church. This was a value that would later be enforced in Peter’s confrontation with Paul, described in Galatians 2:11–14. The culture of the early church would be marked by ethnic inclusion, as a response to the theological realization that “the multi-ethnic composition of God’s people was the ultimate goal of Jesus’ ministry.”¹³⁴

Scene Seven: Peter’s Report to the Jerusalem Church and Their Response (Acts 11:1–18)

The seventh scene of this episode includes Peter’s report to the church at Jerusalem about what occurred in Caesarea with Cornelius and his household, as well as the response of the church to this report.¹³⁵ The report of Peter and the response of the church are instigated by a criticism Peter received from the “circumcision party” (Acts 11:1–3). The criticism Peter received was because he had gone “to uncircumcised men and ate with them” (Acts 11:3). The “circumcision party” is a likely reference to a subgroup in the church in Jerusalem who believed strongly in the need for any Gentile

¹³² González, *Acts*, 133.

¹³³ Garland, *Acts*, 109.

¹³⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, 514.

¹³⁵ Nguyen describes the structure of the discourse of Acts 11:1–18 as follows: “Acts 11:1–18 is a self-contained scene with an introduction (vv. 1–3), which serves as the ‘focalizing process,’ and a conclusion (v. 18), which serves as the ‘defocalizer,’ and a nucleus (vv. 4–17), which consists of a series of actions that constitute an event. In this scene the narrator likewise employs a mixture of ‘telling’ (diegesis) and ‘showing’ (mimesis).” Vanthanh Nguyen, “Luke’s Point of View of the Gentile Mission: The Test Case of Acts 11:1–18,” *Journal of Biblical & Pneumatological Research* 3 (2011): 90.

converts to undergo “full Jewish proselyte procedure, which included circumcision.”¹³⁶

They criticized Peter for having trespassed what he had earlier acknowledged was “forbidden” (Acts 10:28).

Peter’s response to the criticism was straightforward. He simply reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles. Acts 11:4–17 is essentially a retelling of the events of Acts 10. One unique detail in Peter’s retelling of the account is that he does not recount to the church at Jerusalem the sermon he had preached to Cornelius. Instead, he noted that the Holy Spirit came down upon his hearers as he was speaking, reminding him of Jesus’ promise about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Witherington says about the inclusion of this detail,

The falling of the Spirit on the household brought to Peter’s mind the words of the risen Jesus in Acts 1:5, which in turn are an echo of John the Baptist’s words (cf. Luke 3:16 and par.). The interesting thing about this quote is that when Jesus used it, it was addressed to his Jewish followers, but now Peter is applying it to Gentiles. For Peter, the decisive factor was that God gave the same gift to them, the Holy Spirit, as he gave those in the upper room when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus he compares what happened in a Gentile house in Caesarea to what happened in the upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–4).¹³⁷

In Acts 11:17, Peter shared with the Jewish believers his own progressive understanding of what he had experienced: “If, then, God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder

¹³⁶ Polhill, *Acts* 266. Marshall argues this is merely a reference to circumcised believers within the church at Jerusalem and that there was no definite circumcision “party,” to speak of. See Marshall, *Acts*, 195. Alternately, this circumcision party could refer to the Judaizers who required strict observance of the Jewish law in addition to faith in Christ to be considered a full member of God’s people. For this view, see González, *Acts*, 134. González acknowledges, however, that this episode may occur a bit too early in the first century to refer to the Judaizers, a party within the church that came later. Joshua Garroway, agreeing that there was likely no circumcision “party” *per se*, argues that this group represents a number of Christians who were from the sect of the Pharisees. For his argument, see Joshua D. Garroway, “The Pharisee Heresy: Circumcision for Gentiles in the Acts of the Apostles,” *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014): 20–36.

¹³⁷ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 364. Witherington references I. Howard Marshall, who points out that Luke compares the experience of Cornelius and the other Gentiles not just to the believers at Pentecost but also to the original inner circle of Jesus’ disciples. What Luke is doing in the text is demonstrating the full equality the Gentile believers now have with the original Jewish followers of Jesus. See Marshall, *Acts*, 197.

God?” Peter attributed the outpouring of the Spirit, the speaking of tongues by the Gentiles, and his subsequent act of baptizing them as an act of God himself, one which he would have hindered had he not participated in the way he had.

The church responded in a powerful way in Acts 11:18. Luke says, “When they heard this they became silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘So then, God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles.’” Their response to Peter’s retelling of the events in Caesarea reflected the fact that the community had accepted what God was doing among the Gentiles and their place within the community of believers. This was nothing short of revolutionary. If one of the requirements for organizational culture change is when key stakeholders in the community “buy in,”¹³⁸ the church’s response in Acts 11:18 is evidence that there indeed had been cultural change within the early church.

The New Cultural Norm in the Church

The Spirit’s role in shaping the culture of the early church is clearly demonstrated in Acts 10:1–11:18. The Holy Spirit is at the heart of the Cornelius narrative. The Spirit encountered Cornelius and Peter in visions while they prayed (Acts 10:3–6, 9–16; 30–32; 11:4–10). The Spirit spoke to Peter, affirming God’s sovereign orchestration of that which he would experience with Cornelius (Acts 10:19–20). The Spirit taught Peter that he must not call any person impure or unclean (Acts 10:28). The Spirit came upon the Gentile believers who heard Peter preach (Acts 10:44–46). It was Peter’s memory of the Spirit’s work at Pentecost that caused him to conclude that the Gentiles had indeed been baptized with the Spirit (Acts 11:15–17). At every point in this episode, the Spirit was actively at work, first to change Peter’s posture to the Gentiles (Acts 10:28–29, 34–43), then to change the Jerusalem church’s perspective on the

¹³⁸ Laurie K. Lewis, *Organizational Change: Creating Change through Strategic Communication* (Chicester, UK: Wiley–Blackwell, 2011), 8.

Gentiles (Acts 11:18). The Spirit was shaping the beliefs, values, and behaviors—the culture—of the early church. The new cultural norm that the Holy Spirit was shaping into the life of the church was an attitude of *inclusion* of the Gentiles in the church’s mission.¹³⁹ González observes how radical this new cultural norm would have been in the context of the first century:

The enormity of what Peter has done escapes us, because we think as Gentiles and it is difficult for us to see matters from Peter’s perspective. It is natural for us to see that event through the lens of almost twenty centuries of mission among the Gentiles. But in order to understand what is actually taking place we must look at it though the lens of many other earlier centuries of insistence on absolute obedience to the Law, for that was Peter’s perspective. He was convinced that contact with Gentiles must be avoided... The last thing Peter would have expected the day he abandoned his fishing nets by the Galilean lakeshore was that as a result some day he would visit a Gentile and dwell in his house. Yet now... Peter accepts such Gentiles as his brothers and sisters, and he has them baptized... Although this entire episode is usually called “the conversion of Cornelius,” it is just as much the conversion of Peter himself.¹⁴⁰

The inclusion of the Gentiles was the goal and climax of Jesus’ commission to the church: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The church would now understand its mission within the broader framework of what God intended to do in forming a multi-ethnic people. Schnabel says,

The multiethnic identity of the church means that no one may be regarded as a second class member of God’s people. Christians must be willing to give up prejudices concerning people with other ethnic and cultural backgrounds... the truth of God’s acceptance of Gentiles is a truth that Christians in all contexts need to grasp and live out in their encounters with people from other ethnic or social backgrounds. Salvation is not limited to particular groups of people, as God seeks the salvation of all people, including Gentiles, polytheists, and Romans, since Jesus

¹³⁹ Sanders Willson argues that Peter’s changed heart in this episode amounted to a renunciation of racism. See Sanders L. Willson, “‘God Does Not Show Favoritism’ Acts 10,” *Presbyterion* 29/1 (Spring 2003): 6. Similarly, David Goatley calls this event the equivalent of “crossing the color line” for Peter, noting, “Peter is called to color outside the lines of his cultural norms. Peter was a Jew. His culture and religion taught him that Jews did not relate on an equal footing to people who were not Jews. His culture, tradition, and religious practice taught him that some people were less important than his people based on their ethnicity. God revealed to Peter, however, that all people have value.” David E. Goatley, “Coloring Outside the Lines: Acts 11:1–18,” *Review and Expositor* 108 (Fall 2011): 581.

¹⁴⁰ González, *Acts*, 134.

‘is Lord of all’ (10:36).¹⁴¹

This experience functioned as a transformative moment in the life of the early church. The church would now consist not simply of one ethnic group, but people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev 7:9).

Conclusion

The research above describes how the culture of the early church was shaped in large part by the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the behavior, values, and beliefs of the early church—particularly in some of the changes the church experienced, such as their changed views of Jew/Gentile relations—cannot be explained apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Bock summarizes well the significance of the Spirit’s role in the life of the early church as recounted in Luke–Acts:

The work of the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts reveals the new era and equips the new community with enablement for witness. As a result, her leaders are bold and wise in testimony. The Spirit also guides the community at key points. He sometimes reveals what the church is to do in mission and where one should go... In sum, the Spirit directs the new community in the new life as he clothes it with power from on high.¹⁴²

The ten major activities of the Spirit help explain how the early church’s culture was shaped. The Spirit’s work is clearly needed for culture change within the church. The Spirit often worked in implicit ways (such as by guiding, correcting, sending, etc.). Yet the Spirit also worked at times in explicit ways, such as through the proclamation of the Word (as in Acts 2:1–47), or by giving visions and direct revelation to people (as in Acts 10:1–11:18).

The Spirit’s role, both in his implicit and explicit activity, demonstrates that while table fellowship and teaching are necessary culture–shaping activities, they are not, in and of themselves, sufficient for shaping the culture of the church. The Holy Spirit was

¹⁴¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 514.

¹⁴² Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 225–26.

needed for the church to experience such significant transformation. As can be seen in the activities noted in table 3, the Spirit shaped the culture of the early church in implicit ways.

Table 3. The Spirit's implicit culture-shaping work in Acts

<i>Examples</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Cultural Implications</i>
Acts 1:2; 16; 4:25; 8:29; 10:19; 11:28; 13:2; 21:4, 11; 20:23; 28:25	The Spirit Speaks and Informs	The church listened to the instructions of the Holy Spirit. Their mission had divine authority because it was rooted in divine instruction.
Acts 8:39; 16:6–7; 18:5; 19:21; 20:22–23	The Spirit Guides and Directs	The early church was obedient and yielded to the direction of the Spirit. The church was dependent on the Spirit's guidance.
Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 52	The Spirit Fills	The Spirit animated the church in moments of great spiritual import and ministry. The church did not rely on its own strength, ability, or wisdom, but upon the presence of the Holy Spirit.
Acts 5:1–11	The Spirit Corrects and Disciplines	The church, while ruled by Jesus Christ, is at the same time subject to God's discipline through the Spirit when that rule is ignored. The church was to be submitted to the authority of Jesus Christ and subjected to the discipline of the Spirit.
Acts 15:22	The Spirit Decides	The church prioritized submission to the decisions of the Spirit. What the Spirit said, the church would do.
Acts 1:5, 8; 2:17–18, 33; 10:44–45; 11:15; 19:6	The Spirit Comes Down and is Poured Out	The coming of the Spirit signified the permanent presence of the Spirit in the church. The church would now rely upon the gift of the Spirit in a new way, transforming every aspect of their life together.

Table 3. continued

<i>Examples</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Cultural Implications</i>
Acts 1:8; 4:8, 13, 20; 5:18–32; 6:10	The Spirit Empowers and Gives Witness	The Spirit himself would direct and empower the witness of the church. The church's witness was enabled by God himself. The Spirit would join the church in its work of bearing witness to the gospel.
Acts 9:31	The Spirit Encourages	The church would endure persecution with joy and grow in the midst of opposition because the Spirit was actively encouraging the church.
Acts 13:1–3	The Spirit Sends	The church understood itself primarily as a people sent out by the Holy Spirit. If the church was to rely upon and be yielded to the Spirit, it would necessarily involve assuming a missionary posture.
Acts 20:17–38	The Spirit Appoints	The church was sensitive to the calling of the Holy Spirit and the placement of leaders within the church. Leaders were not self-appointed; they were appointed by the Spirit. The church could trust the Lord to provide leaders in his own time and in his own way.

The Spirit's activities in Acts (as described in the ten categories above) are implicitly related to church culture. The Spirit's activities in Acts 2:1-47 and Acts 10:1–11:18 are explicitly related to church culture. The behavior, values, and beliefs of the church related to issues such as Gentile inclusion, mission, unity, generosity, and dependence on God's power were changed fundamentally by the Spirit's activity on the Day of Pentecost, through the encounter between Peter and Cornelius, and the subsequent interactions among the believing community in Jerusalem and beyond. These activities and their cultural effects can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The Spirit's explicit culture-shaping work in Acts

<i>Text</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Cultural Components Shaped</i>
Acts 2:1–47	The Day of Pentecost	Beliefs, values, and behavior regarding inclusion of the Gentiles, mission, dependence on the Spirit, devotion, unity, and generosity.
Acts 10:1–11:18	The Conversion of Cornelius and other Gentiles	Beliefs, values, and behavior regarding inclusion of the Gentiles in the church's mission.

This provides evidence that the leaders and members of the early church submitted to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the result of which was the experience of immense cultural change within the church. They relied upon the guidance, wisdom, and power of the Spirit as they sought to be obedient to the commission Jesus gave them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and beyond (Acts 1:8). Indeed, it was their dependence upon the Holy Spirit that empowered them to accomplish the mission to which God called them.

This is where a uniquely biblical model for culture-shaping differs significantly from secular models. As Schein argues, culture can be manipulated by leaders.¹⁴³ Yet Christian leaders recognize an important truth: there is a limit to what leaders in the church can do. Christian leaders need the Spirit to work in the church if the church is going to experience a transformed culture. J.I. Packer explains how vital the work of the Spirit is to the life of a believer and the life of a church:

The Holy Spirit of God, the Lord, the life giver, who hovered over the waters at creation and spoke in history by the prophets, was poured out on Jesus Christ's disciples at Pentecost to fulfill the new Paraclete role that Jesus had defined for him. In his character as the second Paraclete, Jesus's deputy and representative agent in men's minds and hearts, the Spirit ministers today... Jesus, the original Paraclete, continues his ministry to mankind through the work of the second Paraclete. As

¹⁴³ Schein says, "Culture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated by leaders." Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 3.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, so is his Spirit; and in every age since Pentecost, wherever the gospel has gone, the Spirit has continued to do on a larger or smaller scale the things that Jesus promised he would do when sent in this new capacity. It is well that he has! Had he ceased to do these things, the church would long ago have perished, for there would have been no Christians to compose it. The Christian's life in all its aspects—intellectual and ethical, devotional and relational, upsurging in worship and outgoing in witness—is supernatural; only the Spirit can initiate and sustain it. So apart from him, not only will there be no lively believers and no lively congregations, there will be no believers and no congregations at all.¹⁴⁴

Wise Christian leaders will recognize the centrality and necessity of the Spirit's work for experiencing congregational culture change. The church must rely upon the power of the Spirit through prayer. Stetzer and Rainer have observed that churches which experience transformational change are marked by “prayerful dependence.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, if a leader wants to see the culture of the church shaped in healthy ways, creating a culture of prayer is key.

In previous studies of effective culture change in a local church context, one of the disciplines of an effective change leader is “deep spiritual vitality in their relationship to God.”¹⁴⁶ Thom Rainer advises leaders who seek to change the culture of a church to “stop and pray” as the first step in the change process. He states, “I have never seen successful and sustaining change take place in a church without prayer.”¹⁴⁷ These leaders understand that effective and lasting change within any church culture will not be possible unless the Holy Spirit enables it. The leader's only way to access the work of the Spirit is through prayer.¹⁴⁸ When a leader guides a church toward prayerful dependence,

¹⁴⁴ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 15.

¹⁴⁵ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 125.

¹⁴⁶ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 97–98.

¹⁴⁷ Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2016), 36.

¹⁴⁸ Both prayer and the Holy Spirit are key themes in Acts. They are key themes in Luke's Gospel as well. Consider, for instance, how Luke records that Jesus prays during key moments in his life

the Holy Spirit can shape the church's culture in ways that are more powerful and effective than that which any human strategy can produce. By leading a church toward prayerful dependence on the Spirit, Christian leaders can embrace a uniquely Christian model for shaping church culture that reflects the pattern of the early church in Acts.

and ministry. Of the Synoptic Gospels, only Luke records that Jesus was praying during his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on him (Luke 3:21). Luke records Jesus withdrawing to deserted places to pray (Luke 5:16). Luke records Jesus praying before calling the twelve apostles (Luke 5:12–13). Luke records Jesus praying before feeding the 5,000 (Luke 9:16). These and other references demonstrate the importance of prayer in Jesus' life, and the importance of this theme for Luke. Jesus prayed at every crucial moment in Luke's Gospel. Mark, by contrast, only records Jesus praying three times (Mark 1:35; 6:41; 14:32–41). Consider also the repeated reference Luke makes in his Gospel to the Holy Spirit at pivotal moments in the Gospel. John the Baptist would be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15). The Holy Spirit would come upon Mary (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit was on Simeon, revealed the future to him, and guided him (Luke 2:25–27). John promised that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22). Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (Luke 4:1). Jesus began his ministry "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 1:14). The first words of Isaiah 61:1–2 from which Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth included the declaration: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me" (Luke 1:18). These and other references throughout the Gospel demonstrate that the Holy Spirit was a key theme for Luke not only for the story of the church in Acts but also for the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Organizational health is a central indicator of organizational success. Patrick Lencioni states, “At the end of the day . . . few other activities will seem more worthy of our effort and more impactful on the lives of others, than making our organizations healthy.”¹ Yet organizational health cannot be achieved without developing healthy organizational culture. Developing a biblical church culture is vital to experiencing church health. While this dissertation has not delineated every characteristic of healthy church culture, it has suggested some primary ways through which healthy church culture can be shaped and reinforced.

Research Conclusions

This dissertation has revealed important insights about organizational culture in the light of the biblical material in Luke–Acts. Edgar Schein said, “Just deciphering a culture for curiosity is as vague as just assessing personality or character in an individual. Assessment makes more sense when there is . . . some specific purpose for which we need information.”² The purpose for which this research was conducted was to explore the primary means Jesus and early church leaders may have used to shape the culture of the early church.

The following questions were the primary research questions driving this

¹ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2012), 193.

² Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2010), 177.

study:

1. In what ways and through what means did Jesus and early church leaders shape the culture of the early church?
2. How and to what effect did Jesus shape early church culture through table fellowship?
3. How and to what effect did early church leaders shape early church culture through teaching?
4. How and to what effect did the Holy Spirit shape early church culture?

The research suggested that Jesus and early church leaders intentionally shaped the culture of their followers through table fellowship and teaching. Their actions affected the behavior, values, and underlying beliefs of the early church. The research also revealed the critical role the Holy Spirit played in shaping early church culture and the importance early church leaders placed on relying on the Spirit for wisdom, guidance, and power. Many of these cultural elements were related to Jew/Gentile relations (Acts 11, Acts 15), as well as the relationship Jesus' followers would have with tax collectors, sinners, and other outsiders (Luke 5:29–39, Luke 7:36–50, Luke 19:1–10). Other cultural elements included behavior, values, and beliefs regarding hypocrisy (Luke 11:37–54), Sabbath regulations (Luke 6:1–5), status and humility (Luke 14:1–24, Luke 22:14–34), Jesus' identity (Luke 9:10–17, Luke 24:13–43); the disciples' obedience (Luke 9:10–17, Luke 10:38–42), and leadership selection and responsibilities (Acts 1:15–26, Acts 20:17–38).

The primary means or “imbedding mechanisms” Jesus and early church leaders used for shaping and reinforcing new cultural norms were table fellowship, teaching, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. In Luke, table fellowship was the primary means Jesus used to shape the culture of his followers. This was demonstrated through the prominence of eleven meal scenes in Luke, all of which addressed one or more cultural elements. In Acts, teaching was a primary means church leaders used to shape the organizational culture of the early church. This was demonstrated through the five

paraenetic sermons addressed to the church in Acts, all of which addressed two or more cultural elements. Additionally, early church leaders relied on the Holy Spirit for guidance, power, and wisdom. The Spirit shaped the culture of the early church in significant ways, including the formation of cultural elements such as inclusivity, mission, dependence on the Spirit, devotion, unity, and generosity, as can be seen in the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2) and the Cornelius narrative (Acts 10).

These means generally were effective (e.g., the disciples' obedient response to Peter's sermon in Acts 1 or James' recommendations in Acts 15). However, in some cases Jesus' actions were rejected (e.g., the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus after their experience with him at the table in Luke 11:53–54). Still, these encounters generally were significant, including life-transforming exchanges such as the repentance of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 after dining with Jesus.

Contribution of the Research

This research is significant in that it fills a void in the current literature in the field of organizational culture and change by suggesting that a biblical pattern may exist for shaping church culture. Although much research had been conducted on organizational culture and change in secular organizations such as businesses, hospitals, and educational institutions,³ and while some church leaders have appropriated the secular research for the purpose of shaping church culture,⁴ no research had been conducted to discover patterns of organizational change that may exist within the text of

³ E.g., Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*; John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002).

⁴ E.g., Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000); Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013); Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

Scripture itself. By discovering the importance of table fellowship, teaching, and reliance on the Spirit for shaping the organizational culture of the church, this dissertation provides a unique contribution to the existing research in the field of organizational culture and change.

For the church leader who is interested in biblical patterns for shaping the culture of his church, as opposed to appropriating a model designed for secular organizations, this research provides three unique methodologies for shaping and reinforcing church culture. By teaching what God's Word says about the church, reinforcing change through the personal influence exerted over the meal table, and active reliance on the Holy Spirit, leaders can shape church culture using distinctively biblical patterns. This does not negate the importance of the secular research, but does provide a new contribution to the research for change methodologies.

Although this research is primarily beneficial to church leaders, there is some relevance of the research for secular organizations as well. For instance, if a business leader attempts to change an organization based merely on his or her opinion about the way things should be done, the change may be unsuccessful. However, if the leader will ground the change in an authority higher than his or her opinion, the change effort might be more effective.⁵ Furthermore, if the leader will reinforce the cultural changes through personal influence exerted over the dinner table, it may be that the members of the organization will learn to trust and follow the leader's changes because of the personal relationship that has developed. Though leaders in secular organizations hardly can be expected to rely on the Holy Spirit, certainly Christian leaders in secular environments

⁵ While many secular leaders will not attempt to ground change in the authority of Scripture, the appeal to an authority beyond the leader may still be helpful. For instance, in politics, a leader might ground an argument in the U.S. Constitution to lend weight to an appeal. A business leader might refer to precedent experience or case studies of effective organizations. In general, if a leader will teach the organization's members that the change is grounded in some authority beyond the leader, they might agree to the changes more easily.

can demonstrate a reliance on the Spirit for guidance, power, and wisdom. In other words, teaching, table fellowship, and reliance on the Holy Spirit have relevance beyond the church. Christian leaders of secular organizations can use teaching, table fellowship, and reliance on the Spirit to shape and reinforce the culture of their organizations.

Areas for Future Research

There are several areas where future research is needed in order to enhance the present study. First, further research on organizational culture could be conducted in Luke–Acts. As noted in previous chapters, there are several important sub–themes in Luke–Acts that could be explored. For instance, one could examine the role confrontation played in Jesus’ ministry. One could also trace the importance of community in Acts. For that matter, although the meal motif has been thoroughly traced in Luke, one could examine the role meals played in Acts in the creation of cultural norms in the early church.⁶

Second, this dissertation has only researched organizational culture creation methodologies in Luke–Acts. Further work could be done on other New Testament books. For instance, one could examine the elements of organizational culture present in the seven churches described in Revelation 2–3. Or, one could examine the confrontational nature of Paul’s letter to the church at Galatia to examine how it was used to change the culture of the Galatian church. In addition to examining other New Testament books, research could be conducted on organizational culture in the Old Testament, such as in the life of Israel under the various Israelite kings.

Third, the study of organizational culture could be approached from a purely

⁶ As mentioned in the previous chapter, research has been conducted on the importance of meals in Acts, although not with a view toward how they shaped church organizational culture in particular.

theological perspective.⁷ For instance, one might trace how the kingdom of God necessarily reshapes cultural norms in the church. Or one might explore the implications of the Doctrine of Man for organizational culture. Additionally, a biblical–theological approach might trace the “horizontal” theme of the *people of God* to discover its impact on a Christian understanding of organizational culture. Or perhaps research could be conducted on how a particular strand of the Spirit’s work might come to bear in the life of a leader as he or she leads organizational change. For instance, how might the Spirit’s “anointing” on a leader be relevant for his or her attempts to lead organizational culture change in a church or Christian ministry context?⁸ This approach could be developed from a further study of Luke–Acts or by expanding the scope of the research to do a biblical theology of anointing and its application and relevance to Christian leadership in a local church context.

Fourth, further research could be done to assess the effectiveness of this biblical model of shaping culture in the context of modern churches. Research could be conducted in a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed–method project to develop and apply assessment tools to measure how effective it would be to attempt culture change through the means described in this dissertation. If a leader tried to change a measurable belief, value, or behavior in a congregation through table fellowship, teaching, and intentional prayer, it would be helpful to measure how effective the results would be. A “real world” application and assessment of these biblical principles in a modern church context would further substantiate the relevance of the present research.

⁷ Angela Joan Ward includes a brief overview of the biblical and theological nature of organizational culture in her doctoral dissertation. Angela Joan Ward, “Church Organizational Culture: Construct Definition and Instrument Development” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 10–29.

⁸ The theme of anointing in Luke–Acts would prove fascinating. Walt Russell has written an overview of this theme in Luke–Acts, but much could be done in applying this theological theme to the field of theological leadership. See Walt Russell, “The Anointing with the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts,” *Trinity Journal* 7/1 (1986): 47–63.

Methodological Application

Modern church leaders should be aware that every church carries its own unique culture. The Christian leader “begins ministry in the congregation by engaging it where it is, rather than where the pastor wants it to be.”⁹ That is, when a leader first engages a church, he must recognize that it is already carrying a culture of its own. The place to begin is where the church’s culture is already; only when a leader understands the culture of the church as it already is can intentional steps be taken to bring new, healthy cultural norms.

Leaders should realize the importance of pro-actively shaping church culture so that it reflects biblical norms. Since Jesus and early church leaders seem to have shaped intentionally the culture of the early church, modern church leaders should realize their responsibility to be aware of the culture realities of their church and take intentional steps to shape them. The culture of every organization is constantly changing. The change happens naturally as the organization evolves but the changes will be unpredictable. The effective church leader will guide change with intentionality. The implications of the research findings in the present study are that leaders can most effectively and biblically shape church culture through table fellowship, teaching, and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Table Fellowship

There are many practical implications that can be drawn from the survey of the meal scenes in Luke. Eating with someone is a powerful act of unity and community. Barclay writes, “The simple act of eating together has always been an expression of fellowship.”¹⁰ Leaders who want to shape the culture of their organization would do well

⁹ George B. Thompson, Jr., “Leadership for Congregational Vitality: Paradigmatic Explorations in Open Systems Organizational Culture Theory,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 75.

¹⁰ William Barclay, *The Lord’s Supper* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), 95.

to consider the influence that can be exerted through meals. Sometimes, people can be reached more effectively through the personal influence wielded over a dinner table than any other means. Meals can express caring, concern, love, and influence in a way that few other things can. Hospitality is influence. Mittelstadt echoes this sentiment when he says,

Christians would do well to consider the everyday opportunities afforded through loving table fellowship. Luke demonstrates that the table creates space for openness and vulnerability and posture us to be recipients and agents of God's renovation . . . Given the value placed upon relationships in our culture, creative hospitality might be the key to church unity and evangelism.¹¹

Hospitality is one of the most consistent themes throughout Scripture. Israel was instructed to show hospitality to strangers (Lev 19:33–34). Jesus modeled hospitality, as demonstrated in Luke. The early church practiced table fellowship and hospitality (Acts 2:46). The author of Hebrews, who some believe may have been Luke, encouraged believers not to neglect hospitality (Heb 13:2).¹² In the eschatological Age to Come, the consummation of all things will be celebrated with a meal (Rev 19:7–9).¹³ Modern Christian leaders would do well not to overlook the importance of meals, especially for shaping the organizational culture of the church. It may be that one of the most beneficial ways a church leader can spend his time is to eat with those he leads and thus embed cultural norms within the church, one meal at a time.

If a leader wants to shape the behavior, values, and beliefs of his church, he should prioritize the importance of eating meals with church members. Table fellowship is powerful. Hospitality is influence. Over a meal, a leader can exert personal influence

¹¹ Martin William Mittelstadt, "Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: A Theology of Hospitality in Luke–Acts," *Word & World* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 139.

¹² For a thorough defense of this view on the authorship of Hebrews, see David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

¹³ Blomberg notes that several of the meals Jesus ate with his disciples, including the Last Supper, likely foreshadowed this eschatological banquet. Craig Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 29.

effectively and build relational credibility that can be leveraged to affect change at a micro-level. As an increasing number of individuals change through personal encounters with the leader, the organization as a whole will experience changes in its culture that reflect these personal encounters. Michael Lindsay states, “At its root, leadership hinges on the relationship between followers and the leader.”¹⁴ According to Francis Fukuyama’s research on organizational culture, “trust” is a vital aspect of reshaping the ideas, values, and social relationships in any organization.¹⁵ Trust is built through relationship.

Leaders develop real relationships through hospitality. Though there are many meals that leaders should share with church members beyond the Lord’s Supper, N. T. Wright argues about the Lord’s Supper that it is not the end of the church’s unity but rather the means. He states, “It ought to be the means, the thing we already do, that will create a context in which we will be able to understand and respect one another, and grow towards a richer unity.”¹⁶

An example of the effectiveness of hospitality from recent history is the practice of former President George H. W. Bush. President Bush was well known for using his home to build personal relationships with foreign dignitaries. This “personal diplomacy” often involved cooking hamburgers and hot dogs. While he was in Congress, the “hamburger lunches” he hosted proved effective in building friendships with politicians from both parties who would work with him for the rest of his career.¹⁷ Hospitality proved to be one of the most effective elements of his statecraft.

¹⁴ D. Michael Lindsay, *View from the Top: An Inside Look at How People in Power See and Shape the World* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2014), 139.

¹⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 26ff.

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us: Understanding Holy Communion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 81–82.

¹⁷ George W. Bush, *41: A Portrait of My Father* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2014), 83.

Karris poignantly remarks that “eating is a serious and dangerous, but also a joyful business.”¹⁸ Incorporating table fellowship as a component of one’s leadership practice can be one of the most fruitful and personally rewarding activities in a leader’s life. Blomberg notes that the purpose of Christian meals is to draw believers into greater intimacy.¹⁹ It may be in the context of that greater intimacy that a leader can influence his followers the most. Tim Chester notes, “If you share a meal three or four times a week and you have a passion for Jesus, then you will be building up the Christian community and reaching out in mission.”²⁰

There are several ways a leader can incorporate table fellowship into his ministry. First, on a regular basis a leader should take members to eat at restaurants during the week. These one-on-one encounters allow the leader to embed cultural norms through the exertion of personal influence and care for the member. Second, a leader should host people for meals in his home. Church members get an authentic glimpse into the leader’s life when they visit his home for a meal. If the leader’s life is consistent with his teaching, he can replicate norms of behavior, values, or belief powerfully among the members as they receive his hospitality. Third, the leader should provide opportunities for table fellowship within the life and organization of the church. This can take place in a regular weekly fellowship meal, frequent participation in the Lord’s Supper, or occasional get-togethers throughout the year. These experiences will allow personal interaction between members and can provide a context in which fruitful conversations can occur and cultural norms can permeate the congregation.

¹⁸ Robert J. Karris, *Eating Your Way Through Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 97.

¹⁹ Craig Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 179.

²⁰ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, & Mission around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 16.

Teaching

Teaching is a common culture creation methodology in modern organizational change theory.²¹ More importantly, however, it has featured prominently in the life and history of God's people. The Israelites were instructed to "teach" generation after generation to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut 6:4–9). King Solomon viewed himself as "the Teacher" of Israel (Eccl 1:1). Those who encountered Jesus were "astonished at His teaching because His message had authority" (Luke 4:32). The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy, "Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things, for by doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:16). Paul said that Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). Teaching was central in Acts, as has been demonstrated above and could be demonstrated further in the narrative, such as when Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos home and "explained the way of God to him more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Peter, James, and Paul serve as commendable examples of those who took seriously the responsibility of teaching and understood how it would influence the early church.

The sermonic examples of Peter, James, and Paul have important implications for the modern church and the way in which church leaders shape church culture. Specifically, this study of the paraenetic sermons in Acts and their effect contributes to the importance of teaching Scripture in the life of the church and its benefit for shaping church culture. The place of Scripture is so essential to the book of Acts that "Scripture is used to give shape to the narrative."²² The mandate for the modern church is to follow the

²¹ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 236.

²² Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 223.

apostles' example and make the teaching and preaching of Scripture primary in the church. Cullman stated that the church's proclamation of the gospel "gives to the period between Christ's resurrection and Parousia its meaning for redemptive history."²³

A powerful way to shape and change a church's culture is through teaching what God's Word says about the church. When Jesus wanted to change the culture of the temple in Jerusalem (the way things were done behaviorally), he did so by confronting them with God's Word (Mark 11:15–19). The renowned German theologian Karl Barth spoke of the commitment the preacher must have to God's Word,

We stand before holy scripture. This bears witness to revelation, establishes the church, and gives the command, and vocation comes through it. The act of those who live by justification, then, can be no other than that of understanding and expounding the scriptural word, and to that extent repeating it.²⁴

Teaching God's Word requires a leader to submit other agendas, priorities, and ideas to it. William Willimon encouraged preachers to consider all the "skills of biblical interpretation as skills in service of faithful listening to the text."²⁵ Kerr agrees, stating, "The preacher who follows in the apostolic succession is consecrated to proclaim a definite, unchanging message. This message is something given, not something discovered."²⁶ That is, if a church's culture is going to change, it must not be grounded in what the leader thinks but in what God thinks. Change must be grounded not in the leader's word, but in God's Word. The leader must not ground his teaching in his own authority, but in God's authority, as revealed in Holy Scripture. Haddon Robinson notes that preachers may fill the pulpit with many things, "Yet when a preacher fails to preach the Scriptures, he abandons his authority. He confronts his hearers no longer with a word

²³ Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 157.

²⁴ Karl Barth, *Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 75.

²⁵ William H. Willimon, *Proclamation and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 42.

²⁶ Hugh Thomson Kerr, *Preaching in the Early Church* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1942), 43.

from God but only with another word from men.”²⁷ For a believing community, cultural changes grounded in the authority of Scripture will take effect in more powerful ways than if the changes are grounded in human authority.

In order to change the observable artifacts or behavior of a church, the values of the church must change. In order to change the values of the church, the presuppositional underlying beliefs of the church must change. One of the most effective means of addressing people’s deeply held assumptions and beliefs is to teach God’s Word. If leaders desire to shape church culture, they must seek eagerly to understand Scripture and then must commit faithfully to teach it to others. In doing so, the behavior, values, and beliefs of the church will begin to align with God’s Word. The apostles understood this to be true. The open-ended conclusion of the book of Acts serves perhaps as an invitation for the generations of Christians who would follow them to continue in the pattern of their teaching as they lead the church and shape church cultures that reflect biblical norms.

Leaders shape church culture effectively by grounding any organizational movement in the teaching and preaching of Scripture. Church members will likely adapt to cultural changes more readily when they know that the changes are driven by a correct understanding of God’s Word. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., summarizes the role of teaching in the life of the leader most precisely when he states,

The most effective leaders are unstoppable teachers. They teach by word, by example, and sheer force of passion. They transform their corporations, institutions, and congregations into learning organizations . . . To lead with conviction is to seize the role of the teacher with energy, determination, and even excitement. What could be better than seeing people learn to receive and embrace the right beliefs, seeing those beliefs and truths take hold, and then watching the organization move into action on the basis of those beliefs?²⁸

²⁷ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 18.

²⁸ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 72–73.

Teaching and preaching the Bible must be central in the local church. Healthy church culture will not be created without it. Andy Stanley notes that one of the most important considerations about a leader's communication is the *outcome* of teaching: "life change."²⁹ Indeed, Christian teaching should always lead to change. When a church leader opens God's Word and teaches it to a congregation, the church is called both to hear and do the Word (Jas 1:22). When the church obeys Scripture, organizational transformation results. John Stott remarked that "disturbing the complacent" is one of the duties of the preacher.³⁰ As the church is disturbed from its present cultural reality, new cultural norms can begin to develop as the behavior, values, and beliefs of the church conform to Scripture.

The teaching ministry of the leader can occur at three levels. First, the leader should teach members on a one-on-one basis through personal discipleship. This practice reflects Jesus' teaching that the church should "make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19–20). Leaders can shape the behavior, values, and beliefs of individual members through one-on-one Bible teaching. Second, teaching should occur in the context of small groups. Stetzer and Rainer note that a mark of a "transformational church" is the centrality of small groups, and "the anchor of a transformational small group is the Word of God."³¹ Culture permeates an organization as groups of people adapt to the new cultural norms. If a leader can influence small groups through teaching, the organization as a whole will begin to experience change. Third, teaching Scripture should occur in the pulpit ministry of the pastor. Paul told Timothy to "pay close attention to your . . . teaching" (1 Tim 4:16).

²⁹ Andy Stanley and Ronald Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 92.

³⁰ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 310.

³¹ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 193.

Expository preaching should be the primary means of teaching Scripture in the pulpit because it allows God's Word to be central.³² The leader who grounds organizational change in Scripture will demonstrate that the change is rooted in God's authority and not his own. A powerful way to change a church's culture is through teaching what God's Word has to say about the church.

The Spirit

The Spirit's role in shaping church culture is vital. In fact, no lasting and healthy culture change can occur without the influence of the Spirit. The Spirit works in the church in many ways, such as through speaking, guiding, directing, sending, correcting, filling, encouraging, and empowering. Through these and other means, the Spirit shapes God's people and creates new cultural norms in the church.

Though the Spirit's activity in the church should be a source of great encouragement for church leaders, the fact that the culture of a church cannot truly change without the work of the Spirit may be a difficult reality for a leader to embrace. It is difficult because the Spirit's work in the church is something God must do and therefore is outside the control of the leader. However, the leader has a responsibility to rely on the Spirit for wisdom, guidance, and power. David Garland explains that the disciples understood they must wait for the power of the Holy Spirit before doing anything effectively in the church. "Therefore," Garland says, "they must wait patiently in prayer."³³ This element of waiting on the Lord was present in the book of Acts. In fact, Jesus explicitly instructed his disciples "not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise" (Acts 1:4). They waited for the Spirit by gathering in the Upper Room and praying together (Acts 1:14).

³² Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 42.

³³ David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 17.

Reliance on the Spirit is demonstrated primarily through *prayer*. This attribute of Christian leadership is what Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer call “prayerful dependence,” an attribute they argue is key for leading healthy churches.³⁴ Stetzer and Rainer state the importance of relying on the Spirit succinctly when they say, “Where people pray, God works. Where God works, transformation happens.”³⁵ Cultural change in the church can be influenced by the leader’s teaching and table fellowship, but lasting and healthy change occurs when the Spirit of God transforms the church. Therefore, healthy churches must be “humbly dependent on God for the vitality of the church.”³⁶ God is eager to work in the church through the power of the Spirit. Far from producing passivity in Christian leaders, the Spirit’s power that is available to the church should drive Christian leaders to pray for the power and activity of the Spirit in the process of leading their churches to embrace new cultural norms.

J. Oswald Sanders observes that the “Spirit’s help in prayer is mentioned in the Bible more frequently than any other help he gives us.”³⁷ Luke emphasizes the importance of prayer in the book of Acts by using either the verbal or nominative form of “prayer” nearly thirty times throughout the narrative.³⁸ The “action” that Christian leaders are called to embrace in light of the ministry of the Spirit is to make prayer central in the life of the church. Table fellowship and teaching done without the power of the Spirit will not produce healthy church culture. Leonard Ravenhill, the English revivalist, once

³⁴ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 125.

³⁵ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 144.

³⁶ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 125.

³⁷ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 88. Of course, the Spirit helps the church in other ways as well.

³⁸ Luke repeatedly references Jesus praying in his Gospel as well. Jesus was praying during his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on him (Luke 3:21). Jesus withdrew to deserted places to pray (Luke 5:16). Jesus prayed before calling the twelve apostles (Luke 5:12–13). Jesus prayed before feeding the 5,000 (Luke 9:16). Jesus prayed at every crucial moment in Luke’s Gospel. These and other references demonstrate the importance of prayer in Jesus’ life, and the importance of this theme for Luke.

lamented the lack of prayer in the church,

Poverty—stricken as the church is today in many things, she is the most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few prayers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere.³⁹

Perhaps the reason Christian leaders struggle to lead their churches to embrace healthier cultural norms is because of a lack of prayer. With the plethora of resources available to modern church leaders, it is easy to embrace man-made methodologies and ignore the necessity of the Spirit. Stetzer and Rainer note this danger when they observe,

Church environments that cause people to pray consistently experience answers to prayer... We are missing our most significant resource when we neglect the spiritual discipline of prayer. We live in an age where we have so many other methods or activities to resort to besides prayer. We need prophetic voices to embrace the need of calling the church to prayer... Our only hope is divine intervention, not our latest revitalization tool or church-planting strategies.⁴⁰

A temptation for any leader is to believe that clever tactics and strategies can automatically cause the church to change. Leaders may be tempted to try to manipulate the culture change process to produce the change they want. Christian leaders must reject this impulse. Every method of culture change the Christian leader tries must be submitted to the leadership and influence of the Holy Spirit through prayer.

There are several ways Christian leaders can incorporate prayer in the life of the church.⁴¹ First, the leader needs to be a person of prayer in his own life. Eugene Peterson identifies prayer as one of the most basic functions of pastoral ministry: “For the majority of Christian centuries most pastors have been convinced that prayer is the central and essential act for maintaining the essential shape of the ministry to which

³⁹ Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1987), 25.

⁴⁰ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 144.

⁴¹ Prayer is not the only way of relying on the Holy Spirit. As Eph 5:18–20 demonstrates, there are other important ways of engaging in the life of the Spirit, such as through worship and thanksgiving. However, in the passages examined in this dissertation, the primary means of relying on the Spirit is prayer. Further research could be conducted on these other means as they relate to church organizational culture.

[pastors] are called.”⁴² Second, the leader can organize a weekly church-wide prayer meeting. Jim Cymbala attributes the great success experienced by the Brooklyn Tabernacle to the power of God demonstrated in their weekly Tuesday night prayer meeting.⁴³ Third, the leader can incorporate intentional moments of public prayer in weekly corporate worship services. The early church in Acts modeled this practice as they devoted themselves to “the prayers” when they gathered for worship (Acts 2:42). Fourth, the leader can incorporate prayer in the life of the church through the private ministry of intercessory prayer. The apostle James instructed believers to “pray for one another” (Jas 5:16). Paul told the church in Galatia to “carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). The leader can create opportunities for private intercessory prayer during worship services. The leader can be available during the week to pray with members of the church as they have needs. The leader can take the initiative to make visits to hospital rooms and homes to intercede for the members. In these ways, the leader will prioritize prayer and prepare for the Spirit to work in the church and shape it in healthy ways.

Conclusion

Among other things, a biblically qualified pastor must be “hospitable, an able teacher” (1 Tim 3:2). The juxtaposition of these two elements is not accidental. Additionally, the earliest church leaders were “full of the Spirit,” committed to “prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:3–4).⁴⁴ In teaching, eating, and relying on the

⁴² Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 26.

⁴³ Cymbala describes the story of the Brooklyn Tabernacle and the centrality of their weekly prayer meeting to the ministry of the church in his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*. See Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God’s Spirit Invades the Hearts of His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

⁴⁴ Jimmy Atkins notes that the Spirit’s presence in a leader as a basis for leadership is important elsewhere in the New Testament as well. He cites as prominent references the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism (Matt 3:16), the Spirit’s leadership of Jesus into the wilderness after his

Spirit through prayer, a modern church leader can embed cultural norms in the church in ways that are consistent with the practice of Jesus and early church leaders. The leader can follow the pattern set by Jesus and early church leaders not only in the nature of the cultural norms that are shaped but also in the very means of shaping these norms. The practices of table fellowship, teaching, and reliance on the Spirit are also consistent with the most current research conducted on healthy churches.

For instance, Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer describe “relational intentionality” as one of the major marks of a “transformational church.”⁴⁵ Hosting church members, guests, and lost friends for meals is a biblical way of demonstrating relational intentionality. While secular models of organizational change stress the importance of “relational capital,” Christian leaders understand the secret to building real relationships through the caring and personal investment that can take place over the course of a meal together.

Furthermore, Rainer notes that “breakout churches” have leaders who are characterized by “fierce biblical faithfulness,” wherein “they not only give mental assent to key doctrinal truths, but they also practice these beliefs in their preaching, teaching, leadership, and ministry.”⁴⁶ A simple commitment to biblical preaching may be the means through which God affects cultural change in the church. Mohler says,

The awesome power of authentic preaching is seen in the fact that God uses preaching to present His saints complete in Christ. How are Christians going to

baptism (Luke 4:1), and Jesus’ reference to the Spirit’s teaching and guidance for what the disciples would say as Jesus sent them on mission (Luke 12:12). Atkins notes, “The same Spirit of the Lord that was upon Jesus to heal [and] exorcise is the same Spirit that empowered the Twelve to do likewise. From this view, the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts empowers leaders to further the gospel through the practicing of social values such as love and altruism, service to others, and building community.” See Jimmy A. Atkins, “Led by the Spirit: An Inter-textual Analysis of Acts, Chapter 2,” *American Journal of Biblical Theology* vol. 2/3 (Jul–Sep 2019): 33.

⁴⁵ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 99–122.

⁴⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 66.

grow? How are they going to be matured? How is the process of Holy Spirit-directed sanctification going to be seen in them? All by the preaching of the Word.⁴⁷

Finally, scholars in the field of Christian leadership are recognizing the limitations of human strategy when it comes to culture change. Researchers like Stetzer and Rainer recognize the necessity of prayer for lasting and effective change in the church.⁴⁸ Leaders can use secular methodologies such as effective communication plans or biblical methodologies such as table fellowship and teaching, but such methodologies have limits. Experience has taught practitioners that there are many leadership situations in which, if effective change is going to take place, God must intervene directly. Perhaps the best approach a modern leader can have in leading a church is to cease worrying about the latest church growth methodologies or ministry fads and focus his ministry on teaching Scripture faithfully, practicing the kind of hospitality that allows him to lead church members to greater Christlikeness, and relying on the Holy Spirit to do what only he can do.

The burden of leadership weighs heavily on leaders who desire to effect change in their organizations responsibly and in ways that ultimately honor the Lord. Every organization changes naturally. Indeed, this change is needed. Due to the broken nature of mankind, by necessity organizations must change and reform so that unbiblical cultural norms can be transformed in ways that honor Christ. In God's sovereignty, leaders are sometimes placed into organizations for the express purpose of serving as agents of God-glorifying change. Hans Finzel states,

At times, I suspect, God places individuals into organizations where they don't fit for a reason, either to teach the organization things it needs to learn, or to work on the development of the person who is the poor fit.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 86.

⁴⁸ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 144.

⁴⁹ Hans Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs, CO: NexGen, 2000), 154.

Leaders who guide their organizations to develop cultures that are healthy and biblical experience both the benefit and the burden of change. The burden is that change is difficult and sometimes very costly. The benefit is that if successful, the leader observes the positive outcomes of the organizational change. Beyond that, the leader himself experiences positive change in the process of leading the organization to change. Yet these observations rely on another, more fundamental truth: no lasting or healthy change ultimately happens without the influence of the Spirit. Intentionally shaping church culture through table fellowship, teaching, and relying on the Holy Spirit through prayer glorifies God, edifies the leader and his followers, and grows the church in ways that honor Jesus.

APPENDIX

THE SPEECHES IN ACTS

Marion L. Soards provides the following list.¹

1. The words of the risen Jesus and the angels to the apostles (1:4b–5, 7–8, 11)
2. Peter’s speech and the disciples’ prayer prior to the enrollment of Matthias (1:16–22, 24b–25)
3. Peter’s speech at Pentecost (2:14b–36, 38–39, 40b)
4. Peter’s speech in Solomon’s portico of the Temple (3:12–26)
5. Peter’s speech to the Jewish authorities after his and John’s arrest (4:8b–12, 19b–20)
6. The prayer of the apostles’ and their friends (4:24b–30)
7. The speech of Peter and the apostles to the council (5:29b–32)
8. Gamaliel’s speech to the council (5:35b–39)
9. The speech by the Twelve prior to the appointment of the Seven (6:2b–4)
10. Stephen’s speech (7:2–53, 56, 59b, 60b)
11. Peter’s speech in Cornelius’ house (10:28b–29, 34b–43, 47)
12. Peter’s speech to the circumcision party (11:5–17)
13. Paul’s speech at Antioch of Pisidia (13:16b–41, 46–47)
14. The speech of Barnabas and Paul at Lystra (14:15–17)
15. Peter’s speech at the Jerusalem gathering (15:7b–11)
16. James’s speech at the Jerusalem gathering (15:13b–21)
17. Paul’s speech in the middle of the Areopagus (17:22–31)
18. Paul’s speech to the Corinthian Jews (18:6b–d)
19. Gallio’s speech to the Corinthian Jews (18:14b–15)
20. Demetrius’s speech (19:25b–27)
21. The speech of the Ephesian town clerk (19:35b–40)
22. Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders (20:18b–35)
23. Agabus’s speech in Caesarea (21:11b–c)
24. Paul’s speech to the disciples in Caesarea (21:13b–c)
25. The speech of James and the Jerusalem elders (21:20b–25)
26. The speech of the Jews from Asia (21:28)
27. Paul’s speech to the Jerusalem Jews (22:1, 3–21)
28. Paul’s speech before the council (23:1b, 3, 5, 6b)
29. The Pharisees’ speech in the council (23:9c–d)
30. Tertullus’s speech (24:2b–8)

¹Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 21–22.

31. Paul's speech before Felix (24:10b–21)
32. Paul's speech before Festus (25:8b, 10b–11)
33. Festus's speech (25:14c–21, 24–27)
34. Paul's speech before King Agrippa (26:2–23, 25–27, 29)
35. Paul's speech(es) during the sea voyage to Rome (27:10b, 21b–26, 31b, 33b–34)
36. Paul's speech to the Roman Jewish leaders (28:17c–20, 25b–28)

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ABSTRACT

SHAPING CHURCH CULTURE: TABLE FELLOWSHIP, TEACHING, AND THE SPIRIT IN LUKE–ACTS

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This dissertation examines Luke–Acts to explore how and to what effect Jesus and early church leaders intentionally shaped the culture of their followers. In Luke, table fellowship was a primary means Jesus used to shape the culture of his followers, as demonstrated through the prominence of eleven meal scenes. In Acts, teaching was a primary means early church leaders used to shape the organizational culture of the early church, as demonstrated through five paraenetic sermons addressed to the church. Additionally, the Spirit influenced the culture of the early church through various means and in various ways. Table fellowship, teaching, and the Spirit shaped the behavior, values, and underlying beliefs of the early church related to Jew/Gentile relations (Acts 10–11; Acts 15), who should be considered as insiders/outsideers (Luke 5:29–39; Luke 7:36–50, Luke 19:1–10), hypocrisy (Luke 11:37–54), Sabbath regulations (Luke 6:1–5), status and humility (Luke 14:1–24; Luke 22:14–34), Jesus’ identity (Luke 9:10–17; Luke 24:13–43); the disciples’ obedience (Luke 9:10–17; Luke 10:38–42); leadership (Acts 1:15–26; Acts 20:17–38); mission (Acts 2); unity (Acts 2); devotion (Acts 2); generosity (Acts 2); prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit (Acts 2); and attitudes of inclusion toward people of different generations, genders, and ethnic groups (Acts 2; Acts 10–11).

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Lead Pastor, Taylor Memorial Baptist Church, Hobbs, New Mexico, 2012–2016

Lead Pastor, Paramount Baptist Church, Amarillo, Texas, 2016–

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Adjunct Professor, Criswell College, Dallas, Texas, 2010–2012

Adjunct Professor, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, 2020–