



“And they continued stedfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,” Acts 2:42.

Participation

Covenant: We do now in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

Aim: To aid the realization of the fact that the saved are immediately to become participants in His service

Text: Acts 2:42-47; Colossians 1:18-24

INTRODUCTION — How important is church membership? It is very important as is evident from the statement in the church covenant: “We do now in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.”

Three things are evident which testify to the importance of one’s relationship to the church. (1) Church membership is important in view of the witnesses who observe it: “God, angels, and the assembled brethren.” (2) Church membership is important because of the declaration it involves: “upon the profession of our faith.” (3) Church membership is important because of the nature of the church herself: “one body in Christ.”

Neglect of the church is far too common today. Some who claim to be Christian believers have never united with the church and followed their Lord in baptism. Others who have united in membership neglect to follow on to commitment in service. Yet, each church is a body of Christ “which He hath purchased with his own blood, Acts 20:28. The church is important.

God is interested in your church and each member of it. In I Corinthians 12:12-31 an analogy is drawn between the church and the human body. Paul makes these statements. (1) God has set each member in the church and united them by His Spirit. (2) He has given each member a

special function to perform. (3) He has made each member interdependent upon the other members. (4) He intends that there be no divisions in the church. (5) He desires sympathetic understanding between the members. (6) He intends for the members to work together so as to build up one another in Christ. Yes, each church is important because she is “one body in Christ.”

EXPOSITION

I. ONE BODY, Acts 2:42-47

The total membership of each church congregation makes up “one body in Christ.” Each member shares the spirit, faith, and ministry of every other member. They study, pray and witness together because they are “one body.” The church in Jerusalem (Acts 2) demonstrates the areas of unity among those who compose one of the Lord's churches.

1. One in doctrine, verse 42a. Those who were saved and united with the church in Jerusalem knew they were at the beginning, not the end, of Christian experience. They wanted to know more truths concerning the Lord Jesus whom they had trusted. So, they were “constantly applying themselves unto the teaching of the apostles” (literal translation). Here is a congregation with spiritual hunger to hear more of the Word that they may delight in obeying it.

The apostles' “doctrine” was the truth concerning Jesus Christ. In this truth the believers found fellowship and spiritual nourishment. All Christians can find unity in doctrinal agreement but never in external denominational union. **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity,”** Psalm 133:1. Doctrinal agreement is the only basis for Christian unity.

2. One in fellowship, verse 42b. The body of Christian believers can share a fellowship no others know. They are bound not only by mutual beliefs and aims, but by spiritual relationship also. Fellowship in the Lord is based upon the new birth.

So important is fellowship in the church that broken fellowship is looked upon with dismay in the Scriptures. Broken fellowship makes an observance of the church ordinances impossible, I Corinthians 11:17-21. It sets one portion of the body of Christ against another portion. Such a thing is a monstrous sin. No wonder the Spirit-filled church in Jerusalem was marked by the spirit of fellowship between her brethren.

3. One in worship, verse 42c. Brethren in a Spirit-filled church delight to pray together. It is no wonder the church in Jerusalem won three thousand

one day (Acts 2:41), five thousand another day (Acts 4:4), and uncounted numbers on other occasions, Acts 5:14. From the place of prayer and worship the disciples went forth with strong and united testimony. People were attracted to the place where God was worshipped in spirit and in truth. They still are!

4. One in service, verse 43. The Apostles had power to perform “many wonders and signs” The rest of the brethren bore testimony concerning Jesus to those whom they met. Testimony, teaching, miracles and preaching were united in one grand witness to Jerusalem that Jesus had risen. The church still urgently needs the help of all her members in the service of the Lord. Attendance in worship services, participation in prayer meetings, cooperation in visitation, and faithfulness in financial stewardship are common areas of service in which each church member should have a part.

5. One in daily life, verses 44-46. Blessed is the congregation where each member looks upon his personal possessions as not his own but holds them as subject to the use of the church as they are needed. What a spirit of love motivates the Jerusalem brethren to split their property as need arose that the brethren might be provided for and the gospel message might be extended. “Their charity was as eminent as their piety.”—Matthew Henry. No wonder God's blessings were upon this church.

The dedicated Christian is soon taught of the Spirit that what he has is not his own for selfish use, but is God's possession placed in his stewardship care. When a person gives himself to God in true surrender he also gives all that he has or will ever have. The religion which does not give sacred meaning to one's daily life is not New Testament Christianity. 6. One in rejoicing, verse 47. “Gladness and singleness of heart,” with “praising God,” marked the church in Jerusalem. They who were united in doctrine, fellowship, worship, service, and benevolent concern found great joy in their oneness of spirit. They rejoiced in answered prayer. They rejoiced in souls won to Jesus. They rejoiced in spiritual growth of the converts. They rejoiced in the numbers added to the church. They rejoiced at their own increasing insight into the riches of God in Christ Jesus. The church which is united in the Lord will have many reasons to rejoice in the Lord.

7. One in increase, verse 47. “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Blessed fact! Upon such a congregation as this the Lord could pour out His blessings. This is His plan for every congregation. When the church is united as “one body in Christ,” busy in prayer and witnessing, the Lord will still save people “day by day.” How many people has your church won to Jesus this year? There is no limit to God's blessings when He finds a people truly dedicated to Him. Missionary evangelism is the purpose

for the existence of each church. Whether your entire church is burdened for souls or not, at least you can be and God will use you to enlist others in this blessed ministry.

There is no excuse for divisions and factions in the church. It is contrary to the purpose of our union. It is opposed to the Spirit who unites us. It is a grief to the Son of God. It is a slander to the gospel in the eyes of the unregenerate. The church is more important than any person in it. She must be united in the great work assigned her of the Lord.

II. IN CHRIST, Colossians 1:18-24.

The unity of the church is more than sociological; it is spiritual. A common relation to the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, unites the church. She is more than just “one body.” She is “one body in Christ.” The Christ of the church is set out in His majestic person in Colossians 1:18-24.

1. The pre-eminent Christ, verses 18-19. God is determined that His Son be pre-eminent in all things. He has given Him a name that is above every name, Philippians 2:9-11. He has exalted Him with His own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, Acts 5:31. He has commanded angels to worship Him, Hebrews 1:6. He has made His Kingdom an everlasting dominion, Hebrews 1:8. He has set a date when all enemies of righteousness will be subjected to the Lord Jesus, I Corinthians 15:25. With God the Father, He is “above all, and through all, and in you all,” Ephesians 4:6.

(1) He is Head of the church, verse 18:1. The importance of the church lies in the fact that Jesus Christ is her head. He is the head of the church in that He gives her existence, unity and government. The “power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10) is the life of the church. As He is already head over all things of the universe, so it pleases God that He should be over the church likewise.

Who else could be head of the church? Jesus died for her. She is united in His Spirit. She bears witness for Him. She is waiting His coming as the “blessed hope.” She offers prayers to the Father in His name. Who else could be head of the church?

As the Son of God, Jesus is possessed with all the divine fulness. What a blessed privilege of participating in a body of believers whose Head is such a glorious personage. Thank God for the privilege of membership in a New Testament church.

(2) He is the Firstborn of the dead, verse 18b. Life and immortality was brought to light in Christ Jesus, II Timothy 1:10. In His resurrection Jesus answered once for all that old, old question, “If a man die, shall he live

again?” His word of assurance is, “. . . **because I live, ye shall live also,**” John 14:19c. In His resurrection, Jesus became the “firstfruits” which guarantees the resurrection of all the redeemed. As head of the church, Jesus is the undying One. All human institutions pass from one head to another. Because Jesus is “alive forevermore” (Revelation 1:18) He is the eternal Head of the church.

(3) He is the fulness of the God-head, verse 19. All the divine perfections—the completeness of the divine character—abide in Christ. It is no temporary fullness which He enjoys for they “dwell in permanent abode” in Him.

The fulness which resides in Christ is not for His benefit alone. It is communicated to those who compose the “one body in Christ!” Consider the implications of Colossians 2:9-10a: **“For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him . . .”** We actually share in His glorious fullness. Paul writes, **“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God,”** II Corinthians 3:5. Again Paul writes, **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”** II Corinthians 9:8. **“And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace,”** John 1:16.

The Head of the church is filled with the fullness of God. He so fills the church that she is capable for every task which the will of God requires of her. Blessed privilege to be a member of one of the Lord’s churches!

2. The redeeming Christ, verses 20-22. Christ Jesus is the Head of the church because He is the Saviour of those who compose her membership. Colossians 1:20-22 speaks of the reconciliation Christ has made possible between God and men. It is based upon three wonderful truths. (1) Man is at enmity with God because of sin. (2) God desires to bestow peace upon man. (3) To secure our peace, Jesus Christ laid down His life. In these three statements lies the message of the Gospel.

(1) Man needs to be redeemed and reconciled to God, verse 21. He is in a continuing state of estrangement. The heart is in a state of deliberate opposition to God. Alienation involves actual hostility to God because the assertion of self implies rebellion against Him. Such enmity indicates the sinner’s heart is corrupted, the mind warped, and the affections mutilated. The dreadful condition was expressed in wicked works. The inner corruption expresses itself in evil deeds. See the picture as Paul draws it in Romans 3:9-12. “The task of reconciling man to God is too difficult for anyone except the Head of the church.”—Clyde Lee Jackson.

(2) Man’s redemption and reconciliation was provided for, verses 20,

22. The ground of man's reconciliation is through the sacrificial substitutionary death of Christ. **"But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons,"** Galatians 4:4-5. **"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth upon the tree,"** Galatians 3:13. Christ poured out His life in His blood on the cross because "without the shedding of blood is no remission," Hebrews 9:22. His death was effective for redemption. He "washed us from our sins in his own blood," Revelation 1:5. The matter has been settled so far as God is concerned. Man has but to accept the offered atonement in Jesus to be saved.

(3) The redemptive work of Christ is universally applicable. Paul said Jesus has reconciled "all things" to Himself through His cross. Sin threw the entire universe out of harmony with God. Christ paid the price to bring it back again. The destruction of the old earth and creation of a new one (II Peter 3:7-12; Revelation 21:1) is assured through the sacrifice of Jesus. The whole creation groans in pain waiting for that blessed day, Romans 8:22-23. The outreach of the redemptive work of Christ is sufficient to include people from every "kindred and tongue, and people, and nation," Revelation 5:9. Even so, only those who repent of sin and trust Jesus as Saviour will be saved.

(4) The redemptive work of Christ is sanctifying in results. In our redemption, Christ purposed to set us up for official inspection before God. He intends that we be found there "holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight," verse 22. "Holy" means "separated unto God." "Unblameable" means "without blemish, without censure." "Unproveable" means "without charge, absence of any accusation." The believer is saved that he may be "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ," I Corinthians 1:8. Here is described internal and external purity—the inward principle of consecration and devotion to God which expresses itself in stainless conduct and unblemished character. Such a holy condition is made possible in the redemptive work of Jesus.

3. The indwelling Christ, verses 23-24. The secret of Christian living is not external affiliation but spiritual assimilation. The believer lives victoriously because Christ dwells within him. "Christ in you, the hope of glory" is the secret of sanctification, verse 27. To be crucified with Christ is to gain victory over the flesh, Galatians 2:20. Let each believer let down his anchor in the substitutionary death of Christ knowing that thereby "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world," Galatians 6:14. Even

when suffering comes upon one in the way of Christian service, he can rejoice if Jesus dwells in him, verse 24.

When Christ dwells in one's heart by faith the believer will be “rooted and grounded in love,” Ephesians 3:17. The indwelling Christ guarantees the supply of every need. **“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, And ye are complete in him . . .”** Colossians 2:9-10. Claim the victory, Christian brother, for Christ has brought it to you. When you received Christ as Saviour you received all that God gives through Him. By faith claim this divine provision. It is the secret of Christian victory.

CONCLUSION—You are important to God. Christ has died to save you; God desires to be glorified through you. Your church is important to God. It is the body of Christ of whom each member is a part. In uniting with the church you declared yourself on the Lord's side. You said that you wished to serve the Lord in cooperation with other Christian believers. By the common spirit which joins each believer in the Lord, the church is “one body” in Christ. Do nothing which would destroy the unity of that body. Live up to its daily privileges and God will be honored in you.

QUESTIONS

1. What portion of the Church Covenant is studied today?
2. How does it testify to the importance of church membership?
3. How does I Corinthians relate to this study?
4. What creates the unity of the church body?
5. In what areas should church unity be expressed?
6. In what sense is Christ the Head of the church?
7. How does the indwelling of Christ promote church unity?
8. How does the Lord add to the church?
9. How does this lesson apply to your own church?
10. How does this lesson relate to next week's study?