

Lifeworld.org

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

Participation

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

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.

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

INTRODUCTION—Joining the church is a most serious matter. Our covenant states “in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, (we) most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.” This step is important in view of the witnesses, “God, angels, and the assembled brethren.” It is important because of the declaration it involves, “upon confession of our faith.” It is important because of the nature of the church, “one body in Christ.” Neglect of the opportunity for membership in the Lord's church is far too prevalent today. Surely the Lord will not hold one guiltless who counts the church as an unimportant thing. The church is the body of Christ “which he hath purchased with his own blood,” Acts 20:28.

God is interested in your church and every member of it. Each individual is important in His eyes. Read I Corinthians 12:12-31 to see God's estimate of a church. He has united each church by His Spirit. He has given each individual member of the church a special function to perform for the welfare of the whole. (Therefore, there is no such thing as an unimportant member of the church.) He has made each member interdependent upon every other. (Therefore, one cannot live as well without the church as he can with it.) He intends that there be no divisions within the body. He desires

each member to be sympathetic toward every other member. He purposes the church members to work together so as to build up one another in Christ. As a part of your local church you share this ministry.

EXPOSITION

I. Christ's Exaltation, Colossians 1:18-19.

One great reason for the high honor due the church is that her head is the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15-19 sets out the beautiful person of our blessed Saviour. It describes Him in the following designations: He is the image of God, the firstborn of every creature, Creator of all things, before all things in time and rank, head over the church, the first-begotten from the dead, preeminent over all, and possesses the fullness of the Godhead! It is His headship over the church which is stressed in this lesson. In truth, the church is “one body in Christ.”

The Lord Jesus is the Head of the church in that He gives it existence, unity, and government. His resurrection from the dead is the title to the headship of the church; for 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 pleased God that He should be over the church likewise. As He is possessed with the indwelling fullness of God, being the only begotten Son of God, He has the right to the Headship. Blessed thought! All the divine perfections—he completeness of the divine character—abide in Christ and He supervises His churches. Moreover, these perfections “dwell” (i. e. have permanent abode) in Him! 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!

II. Full Reconciliation, Colossians 1:20-22.

Membership in the church is limited. It is limited specifically to those who have been reconciled unto God by the death of His Son and have confessed that reconciliation in the ordinance of baptism. Only the redeemed can truly constitute the membership of a true New Testament church.

1. Reconciliation comes through the blood of Jesus. It is a most blessed fact that “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,*” II Corinthians 5:19. While it is true that without shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22), it is also true that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's

Son, cleanses us from all sin, I John 1:7. Only those who have participated in the cleansing rebirth that comes by the crucified and risen Jesus are qualified to participate in the privileges of the Lord's church.

2. Reconciliation is effective even among the worst of men. Read Colossians 1:21. Even those who, through exercise of their minds (by choice) were made alien to God are now reconciled. Those whose "sins be as scarlet" soon find them "as white as snow" through the Lord Jesus, Isaiah 1:18. The Lord has come to seek and to save that which was lost, Luke 19:10. Where sin abounded grace has much more abounded and thus salvation can be offered to all, Romans 5:20. No sin is too serious for God to forgive so long as the sinner feels the conviction of the Spirit calling to repentance and faith.

3. Reconciliation works a new creation in the redeemed. To be saved is to be "in Christ" and those who are in Him are a new creation, II Corinthians 5:17. The redeemed are "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God," Ephesians 2:19. It is the purpose of Christ to present the redeemed "holy and unblameable and unreprouvable" before God. This is possible only because salvation makes a man a new creature. Only those who are born again and compose the heavenly company of the redeemed can properly participate in the membership of the Lord's church.

III. Faithful Continuation, Colossians 1:23-24.

It is expected that those who are born from above will live in dedication to their Redeemer. Obedience by faithful service in the church is one step in the obedient life. However, baptism and church membership only begin that life of service. It is important that all one's life be "grounded and settled" in the faith, Colossians 1:23. Abiding in "the faith" (meaning the true system of doctrine) is necessary for one who yearns to hear God's "Well done." False teachers may publicize their heresy but those who know the Lord in salvation are to remain true to the faith, Galatians 1:8-9.

The Apostle seems to realize that some will not abide true to the faith. Once and again he warned that a failing away would come in the later days, I Timothy 4:1-3. The faithful minister is to warn his hearers concerning these heretics, I Timothy 4:6. In spite of this, some professed followers of the Lord will be turned aside into error and led to deny the teachings of the Bible and the redemption which is in Christ. These who turn aside have not "fallen from grace" in the sense that they are lost after having been saved. Instead, those who depart from the truth reveal that they never were a part of

the family of the redeemed, I John 2:18-20. Those who are truly saved will remain faithful to the end, I John 5:1, 4-5.

Sooner or later every person has to face things in Christian service which are unpleasant. Even in church life problems arise and times of severe testings come. Remember, when you are tempted to drop by the wayside, that you were saved to serve. As a member of the Body of Christ you share a divine obligation to be faithful to your profession.

IV. Steady Progression, Acts 2:42.

The second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles presents a beautiful picture: A preached sermon, a convicted congregation, a public confession, a baptized congregation, a progressive church! All this materialized within one day, by the grace of God. Pentecost had come and the power of the Holy Spirit had been expressed through the little congregation of believers in Jerusalem. A wonderful evangelistic service had added three thousand new converts to the church. What shall they do now? The Bible says they kept right on growing because they kept right on studying, praying, and witnessing.

1. They progressed in their faithfulness to the things of God, verse 42. Observe the church sought to know more and more of the gospel which they had received. They were constantly applying themselves unto the teaching of the apostles” (literal translation). (The apostles' doctrine refers to their teaching.) What a great sight when a whole congregation is hungry to hear more of the Word that they may delight in obeying it! Faithfulness to doctrine will surely lead to increasing fellowship. There is a holy bond between those who hold the truth in a pure heart which nothing in the world can break. *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* Psalm 133:1.

2. They progressed in their love and piety toward one another, verses 44-45. Matthew Henry has suggested, “Their charity was as eminent as their piety, and their joining together in holy ordinances knit their hearts to each other, and very much endeared them to one another.” Here is a congregation where each member looked upon his personal possessions not as his own, but held them as subject to the use of the church as they were needed. Their custom was to dispose of their property as the need arose and use it to the advantage of the church and the brethren who composed it. No wonder God's blessings were upon this church!

3. They progressed in the blessings of God, verses 43, 47. Naturally those who bear a likeness to Christ will find God's approval upon them. It is

only to be expected that the Lord sent spiritual power upon this early church so that “many wonders and signs were done by the apostles,” verse 43. Upon such a congregation God could pour out His blessings. These blessings included growth for “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” This is His desire for every church. If your church is not progressing in the Lord's work, take a careful inventory and set yourself where God can use you to make it so.

V. Great Jubilation, Acts 2:46-47.

The church whose people walk in the ways of the Lord is sure to experience great joy. This joy is expressed in worship, “continuing daily with one accord in the temple,” verse 46a. It is manifest in those who delight in the privilege of worship. “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord,*” Psalm 122:1. This joy of public worship should not be neglected, Hebrews 10:25. It is very rare (if ever) that a person who consistently neglects the church is a productive, soul-winning Christian.

This joy is manifest in brotherly fellowship, verse 46b. Christian faith establishes a brotherhood. We become children of God and fellow-citizens of the Kingdom. Those who are thus likeminded find delight in one another's company. Exclusion from the privileges of church membership and fellowship is a severe punishment to the man who really loves God. Of all the people of the world, Christian brethren should find delight in one another's company. “*Let brotherly love continue,*” Hebrews 13:1.

This joy produces favour with other people, verse 47a. There is something contagious about a smile. When that smile is produced by the love of God and is on the face of a man who is at peace with God, it becomes doubly impressive. Even unsaved people soon recognize and respect true Christian dedication. (No one respects the professed Christian who acts as the devil directs, however.) Many churches have redeemed their reputations in their local community by a genuine revival which put their people close to the Lord. Then their community “took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus,” Acts 4:13. Is your life and church marked by a sincere delight in the Lord? A joyous Christian witness is the most effective kind. Try it in your own community.

QUESTIONS

1. What portion of the Church Covenant do we study today?
2. What does I Corinthians 12:12-31 teach about the church?

3. Discuss: "Jesus is the Head of the church."
4. How are men reconciled to God?
5. Discuss: "Church members should be faithful to their church."
6. Describe the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
7. What evidence is there of growth in the Jerusalem church?
8. Describe the Christian joy set out in Acts 2:46-47.
9. Discuss: "The Lord added to the church."
10. How does this lesson apply to your own church?