

What you need to know about church fellowship PART 1



(Act 2:42-47)

Though verse 42 reveals more than “fellowship” as that which the early church committed themselves to, this particular discipline is clearly the authors’ emphasis given its focus in the remaining verses (vv43-47). As such, it behooves every church (and Christian) to know what God is telling us about it. What (then) these verses teach us about this important discipline:

1. We must be committed to fellowship...

(42) “devoted” [προσκαρτεροῦντες] = a constant and frequent loyalty or commitment (Act 1:14, 6:4, 10:7; Col 4:2).

2 things must be acknowledged based on what the author is communicating to us about the members of the early church’s commitment to fellowship:

1.1. They had less “free time” for other things since this is the obvious implication of commitment – especially one that is frequent in nature (e.g. web dictionary definition of commitment = an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom).

The restriction/constriction placed on the freedoms/free-time of the early Christians by their commitment to frequent fellowship should not surprise us given how Jesus describes the Christian life (Mat 7:13-14) “hard” [θλιβω] = restrictive/constrictive; to crowd against (Mar 3:9).

1.2. The paradigm/pattern of frequent fellowship established by the members of the early church is what God expects us to adopt as our paradigm for fellowship (as well).

IOW: God expects us to adopt the same pattern of commitment in our own fellowship.

(How do we know that?) = B/C such biblical patterns/paradigms are authoritative (or mandatory) versus optional (e.g. Mat 19:3-6 w/Gen 1:27, 2:18, 21-24).

So then, we must be committed to fellowship...and the frequency w/which we are to give ourselves to that – will mean less free-time for other things. This however is what it means to be a Christian.

“The family of God is where I lose my life in order to gain it.” – Joseph Hellerman (*When The Church Was A Family*)

2. We must be committed to fellowship *with our church family*...

(42-44) “were together” = The members of the early church were not committed to fellowship w/unbelievers but Christians – or more specifically, the other members of their (particular) church.

“The [covenant] community must take precedence...for we are born for fellowship, and he who sets its claims above his private interests is specially acceptable to God.” – Josephus (*Contra Apion*, 2.197)

In establishing this truth, 3 implications follow:

2.1. It w/b the members of the church whom I will seek for wisdom and choose to have the greatest influence over my thinking, decisions and life.

This is what Luke is getting at when he says that the early church members were of “one heart and soul” (Act 4:32 = same mind/way of thinking, decisions made in conjunction/conformity w/the community, life centered on the needs of the Body – Act 4:32b w/2:44b-45; Jer 32:39; 2Chr 30:12; 1Co 1:10; Phi 1:27, 2:1-4; Pro 15:22; Gal 2:1-2; 1Co 12:21; CONTRA the concerns/thinking/advice of the world – Rom 12:2; 1Co 3:18-19; Col 2:8).

“In a church imitating those found in biblical times the person perceives himself or herself to be a member of a group and responsible to the group for his or her actions, destiny, career, development, and life in general. The individual person is embedded in the group and is free to do what he or she feels right and necessary only if in accord with group norms and only if the action is in the group’s best interest. The group has priority over the individual member, and it may use...the members of the group itself to facilitate group oriented goals and objectives.” – B. Malina (*Christian Origins And Anthropology*)

2.2. It w/b the members of the church whom I will seek to know best and will choose to open up to in relation to my own life.

This is where the Corinthian church members struggled and may have caused many of them to forfeit heaven since God views those we are closest to (relationally thru getting to know them and them us) as a sign of our holiness and relationship w/Him (2Co 5:11-7:1 = commitment/closeness to our church family is how we live for Christ, complete holiness and remain the people of God).

2.3. It was the members of the church to whom I choose to give my greatest loyalty (Mar 3:31-35)

“The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb”

“The loyalty conflict [in Scripture] is not about making a choice between God and people. Rather, it is about choosing between one group of people and another – between our natural family and our eternal family.” – Joseph Hellerman

3. We must be committed to fellowship with our church family that includes getting together weekly with limited and varying members in the personal setting of our/their individual homes...

3.1. Whereas “the apostles’ teaching...the breaking of bread and prayers” (v42) refer to those commitments carried out in the context of the Lord’s Day/Sunday assembly (i.e. learning through preaching/teaching, cleansing through the Lord’s Supper/Table [e.g. 20:7; 1Co 11:20] and supplication through corporate prayers), the commitment to “fellowship” (v42) involves a different scope and setting. It was to take place w/limited and varying members in the personal setting of their individual homes (v46 – “breaking bread in their homes”). Consider the phrase:

3.1.1. “breaking of bread...” = This phrase is not a reference to the Lord’s Table (as is the phrase, “the breaking of bread” found in verse 42). It instead refers to the meals shared by the early Christians as they frequented each other’s homes in fellowship. This is evidenced by: 1) its anarthrous construction (*κλῶντες...ἄρτον* versus *τῆ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου*)¹; 2) the specific meaning associated w/the word “food” used to further describe the activity (“they received their food” [*τροφῆς*] = food for physical nourishment/sustenance (Mat 3:4, 6:25; Luk 12:23; Joh 4:8; Act 9:19, 27:33; Jam 2:15)².

3.1.2. “...in their homes” = We can be assured that such gatherings in “their homes” required limited numbers and therefore also a rotation of varying members from week to week given the size of the Jerusalem church. At this point in their history, they were over 3,000 people (v41), an impossible number to accommodate all at once given the size of the first century home (850-1800 sf.).³

3.2. When we consider the frequency of the other disciplines/obligations (as discussed, they occur weekly on Sundays or the Lord’s Day), the exact frequency w/which we are to be getting together (in these limited and special formats as an aspect of fellowship) immediately emerges. IOW: it (too) should be weekly. This we can be confident was the commitment of the early church based on:

3.2.1. God’s expectation that His leaders establish a clearly defined/specific metric (or standard) for all of His precepts/principles that is objective (based on the biblical evidence/instruction available and respectfully relevant to the culture and time of the church’s existence – 1Co 7:25-26; Act 15:19-21; Deu 17:6-13 w/19:15 w/Mat 18:15-20 w/1Ti 5:19-21) and equitable (achieving/requiring the same for all – Num 15:16) versus subjective (based on preference) – including (especially in re: to) those precepts/principles which are deliberately more general (or less specific) in their communication (e.g. Exo 22:1; Heb 10:24-26).

3.2.2. The discipline of fellowship’s close and integrated grammatical grouping w/the other disciplines and equal association with a unique form of devotion (one whose frequency of commitment we know to be weekly).

3.2.3. No mention by the author (Luke) or other writers of Scripture offering an alternative or contesting this view.

3.2.4. Anything (therefore) other than this position would be presumption (and sin) (acting on what you don’t know – i.e. w/o prescribed/proper evidence – Deu 17:6-13 w/19:15 w/Mat 18:15-20 w/1Ti 5:19-21).

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION/CHALLENGE: (1Th 3:12, 4:10; 1Pe 4:8-9) = Getting to heaven/remaining a Christian requires more than simply being on the right path. It requires also that we are running at the right pace – 1Co 9:24 = we must run to win; e.g. Leadville 100 = cut off time of 30 hrs to be “win” – be considered among those who have accomplished such a task; *Is your pace/commitment to fellowship where it needs to be to get to heaven?*

¹ “In Acts 2:42 there is a reference to the disciples ‘breaking the bread.’ Notice the article preceding ‘bread’ (not translated in our common versions, but present in the Greek text). The article indicates that a special ‘bread’ is under consideration, i.e., the Lord supper (cf. Acts 20:7 ‘the breaking of bread’ and 1 Corinthians 10:16 ‘the bread which we break’). However, in Acts 2:46 there is no article in connection with ‘bread,’ hence a distinction seems to be drawn between the ‘bread’ of 2:42 and 46.” - A. Campbell (*The Christian System*, pp. 272-273). Numerous scholars do not believe that the Lord’s supper is referred to in Acts 2:46 (cf. R.C.H. Lenski, A.T. Robertson, J.W. McGarvey, W. E. Vine, etc.).

² “The term ‘breaking bread’ in this passage does not refer to the Lord’s supper; rather, it denotes a *common meal*. This is evidenced by the fact that they are paralleled with “eat their food” in the same clause. The word ‘food’ translates the Greek ‘*trophe*’, which essentially means *nourishment*. The term (employed some sixteen times in the Greek New Testament) is *never* used of the communion, for such was not designed to nourish the physical body – F.W. Danker (*Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1017); “Here [‘food’] means all kinds of sustenance; that which nourished them – ‘*trophes*’ – and the use of this word *proves* that it does not refer to the Lord’s supper; for that ordinance is nowhere represented as designed for an ordinary meal, or to nourish the *body*” – Albert Barnes (**Commentary on Acts**, p. 59).

³ It is not an oversight on this author to make no mention of the phrase “day by day” which begins verse 46 since it has no bearing on the fellowship meal but only as to their daily attendance of the activities at the Jewish temple. This is supported by: 1) the grammar (the phrase modifies only the action of temple attendance); 2) the examples found in chs. 3 and 6; 3) Second temple Jewish history (Herod’s temple was daily attended by the Jews living in Jerusalem).