

Basic Truth for Young Believers

Stark Road Gospel Hall

July 19, 2000

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Privileges and Responsibilities of Being in a Local Assembly

*These things write I unto thee... that thou mayest know how thou **oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God**, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tm 3:14,15)*

Preliminary Comments

- Privileges are not entirely exclusive to the assembly, but can only be fully realized in an assembly.
- For every privilege there are corresponding responsibilities.
- Enjoyment of assembly privileges is dependent on the fulfillment of my responsibilities.

1. Participation in the Lord's Supper

Privilege

Its Significance

On the night of His betrayal the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. It serves first as a **remembrance of His death** (1 Cr 11:25). The Lord wants us to keep His suffering and death for us fresh in our minds. It will keep us worshipping and it has a sanctifying affect on our lives. Secondly, it is a **proclamation of His death** (1 Cr 11:26). We proclaim it to observers (1 Cr 14:26-27), to each other, to angels (1 Cr 11:10) and most importantly to God, since worship is primarily for God. Thirdly, it is an **expression of spiritual truth**. It is expressing our fellowship in the blessings that flow from His death (1 Cr 10:16), the oneness of believers –Christ's mystical body (1 Cr 10:17), and the personal application of the death of Christ to each believer (Lk 22:19,20; **Jn 6:54).

** *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life"* (Jn 6:54). This is speaking of accepting the death of Christ for myself. This is what happened at conversion. This is not the Lord's Supper but the Lord's Supper expresses this truth.

Its Importance

The Lord Jesus instituted this Supper prior to His death while He was still with His disciples. It was a personal request. He did not leave this for the Apostles to institute after His ascension. Why? He was stressing how important this Supper is to Him. The request was not only personal, it was His last request. Last requests are usually the most important.

Its Participants

The Lord's Supper was always observed by a local assembly (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cr 10:14-22;11:27-34). We never read of Paul observing it in his travels apart from a local assembly. In Troas he waits seven days for the 1st day of the week. He gathers with the assembly there for the Breaking of Bread then leaves the next day. Therefore it is a privilege that only those in assembly fellowship can participate in.

Responsibility

Participate Regularly

'This do in remembrance of me' (1Cr 11:24). The Lord did not suggest that we remember him –he commanded it. He didn't say, this do if it is convenient, if you feel like it, if you're not tired. He just said, *this do*. The assembly in Jerusalem, *"continued steadfastly...in the breaking of bread"* (Acts 2:42). If you are not in the assembly, you are not in a position to obey the Lord's command. The Lord instituted this remembrance for every believer to observe. But he intended every believer to be in fellowship in a local assembly.

Self Examination

“Let a man examine himself and so let him eat” (1Cr 11:28). Participation requires a proper spiritual condition. Our minds and hearts should be engaged in what we are doing so that we do not participate ritualistically, or flippantly. To come to the Lord’s supper and sleep or daydream and to partake of the bread and wine mechanically is not remembering the Lord’s death. The Corinthians had carried this to an extreme and Paul charged them with participating in an unworthy manner, and in so doing they were not discerning the Lord’s body. Consequently they were bringing God’s judgment upon themselves.

Right Relationships

I can’t worship God if there is an outstanding offense with my brother. *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift* (Mt 5:23,24).

Preparation

The Lord’s Supper is a time of worship and worship involves preparation. Three times a year the Israelites were to appear before the Lord to celebrate feasts that God had instituted. In relation to those feasts God say, *“None shall appear before me empty handed”*(Ex 23:15). They were to bring portions of their harvest to give to the Lord. In the freewill offerings which the Israelites offered there was always preparation and cost involved. The psalmist presented what he had composed concerning the King (Psa 45:1). Mary of Bethany prepared a very costly flask of perfume to anoint the Lord’s feet (Jn 12:3). These examples of worship involved cost and preparation.

2. The Presence of Divine Persons

Privilege

It has always been God’s purpose to dwell with His people collectively –Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the local assembly, the New Jerusalem *“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them”* (Rv 21:3). Every believer enjoys the indwelling Holy Spirit and the promise of Christ, *“We will come unto him and make our abode with him”* (Jn 14:23). But in a special way Christ dwells with His people collectively who are gathered to His name (Mt 18:20). Paul also calls the assembly the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cr 3:16). He also speaks of the assembly as the house of God (1 Tm 3:15). So those in assembly fellowship make up the temple, the household, and the gathering where divine persons have chosen to reside.

Responsibility

Reverence

Because divine Person’s are present in our assembly gatherings, our conduct ought to show reverence and respect. Whenever people were in the presence of God in the Bible they were never flippant or casual. They were overcome with a sense of awe. Remember when the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he was told to remove his sandals from off his feet because the place where he was standing was holy ground, (Ex 3:5). When the priests carried out their responsibilities in the tabernacle they would take great care because it was God’s dwelling place. The presence of God in our gatherings is no less real. We should be conscious of His presence and we should conduct ourselves appropriately.

Attendance

If Christ is present in our gatherings, we should be too.

Righteous Living

The psalmist asked the question, *‘LORD who shall abide in thy tabernacle?’* He answers his own question by saying, *‘He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart* (ps 15:1-2). Since the assembly is God’s dwelling place it demands holy living. For specified sins, not only does a person’s sin defile himself, but also his sin defiles the assembly. A man had to be ‘put away’ from the assembly in Corinth because of sexual sin (1 Cr 5:1-8). Paul likens sin of this nature to yeast in dough. A tiny bit will permeate the whole lump. This can be taken two ways: 1) if not judged others may be influenced to sin; 2) it defiles God’s dwelling place. By removing the

offender the assembly purges itself of the sin. Sin that defiles the assembly can be moral or doctrinal. The moral standards for being in a local assembly are high because it is the dwelling place of God.

3. Fellowship

Definition: a mutual sharing, a common interest in anything, a partnership.

Privilege

Clubs, fraternities, sororities, brotherhoods, societies are all man's attempts to enjoy fellowship with his fellow man. Sin has not only separated man from God, but also man from man. Men establish these associations to try to reunite. They are commonly formed around something that each member shares in common—a common interest, or hobby, political viewpoint. Fellowship in an assembly goes far deeper. Fellowship is not merely being in an assembly. When Luke says of the church in Jerusalem that 'they continued steadfastly in...the fellowship', it doesn't mean merely that they just continued to be members of the assembly. A. Stenhouse is worth quoting, he says that fellowship, "is the merging of human spirits in the enjoyment of God-given privileges, and a sharing of experiences of Christ himself" (Church Doctrine and Practice, 1970). It is a spiritual link between believers, not merely an outward association. So true fellowship of believers in an assembly involves the mutual enjoyment of Christ and of truth we hold in common.

- 1) Fellowship is based on the blood of Christ (1Cr 10:16). No one can be a part of the fellowship that is not redeemed by the blood of Christ. Associations frequently will have membership fees. Fellowship in the assembly can only be purchased by the blood of Christ, (Acts 20:28)
- 2) Fellowship is with divine persons -with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (1Jn 1:1-3; 1 Cr 1:9; 2 Cr 13:14).
- 3) Fellowship is based on doctrine, "*They that received His word continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine, in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread....*" The order is significant. They can have fellowship because they continue in the Apostles doctrine. The assembly is then able to give practical expression to the fellowship through the breaking of bread, (1Cr 10:16-17).
- 4) Fellowship has a very practical side to it. It involves sharing burdens (Gal 2:1-2; 1 Cr 12:26), resources (Rm 15:26; 16:1-2), serving one another (Phlp 2:4), laboring together in gospel work and other spiritual work (Phlp 1:5), encouraging one another (Hb 10:24; Eph 5:19).

Responsibility

If the assembly is to be a place where there is true spiritual fellowship and not merely nominal association, then in order to contribute to fellowship we cannot be carnal or worldly in our behavior and attitudes. For example, if we are not enjoying Christ individually, when we gather as an assembly for the Breaking of Bread, our fellowship will be in outward form only. There will not be the uniting of our spirits in worship and in the enjoyment of Christ. There will be no affinity toward one another because of our common appreciation of the person of Christ. Our gatherings will be cold and formal. To share burdens and to share in service we must be actively involved in the assembly. Sitting on the sidelines and making occasional appearances to the assembly meetings is not *continuing steadfastly... in the fellowship* (Acts 2:42).

4. Exercise priesthood

Privilege

There are two aspects to priesthood: a priest ministers to the heart of God on behalf of the people (1 Pt 2:5); a priest ministers to the people by bringing God to the people (1 Pt 2:9). When a brother leads the assembly in public worship on behalf of the assembly he is functioning as a priest—he is ministering to the heart of God. When a brother ministers to the assembly, he is bringing God to the people. In organizations where there is one man who leads the worship, and ministers to the people and prays on behalf of the people, a believer's opportunity to function fully as a priest is stifled. The assembly has been designed by God to believers to fully function as priests—every brother can lead the assembly in worship and prayer, various brothers, according to their gift, can minister to the assembly.

Responsibility

Quotation from D. Vallance regarding worship, “It is our highest calling, greatest privilege, and **most pressing duty**” (Basic Truths for Young Believers -The Lord’s Supper 8/3/97). God is seeking worshippers. And those who worship Him **must** worship in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23,24). If we are to worship God **in truth**, then we will follow God’s prescribed method of worship, which includes public worship. For sisters this is gathering with the assembly to worship. For brothers, it involves leading the assembly audibly in worship.

5. Exercise of gifts

Privilege

The Holy Spirit presides over the assembly. He distributes gifts and leads in the exercise of those gifts (1Cr 12:7-11). All spiritual gifts are never in one man. The Apostle Paul likens the assembly to a human body with its many members all having specific functions. He states in the passage that *‘if the body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the smelling be?’* (1Cr 12:17). He is emphasizing the importance of each gift being exercised in the assembly. Where there is one man ministry, many gifts lie dormant as one man exercises his particular gift. As a result, within the congregation spiritual gifts that could be of great value to God’s people remain undeveloped. Within an assembly there is a variety of people and a variety of needs. No one person’s gift will address all the needs of the assembly. No one person’s gift will even address all the needs of an individual. There is room in the assembly for every Spirit given gift to be exercised

Responsibility

In parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30) the first man is given five talents, the second man two talents, and the third man, one. The first two brought their master 100% return on the Talents given to them. The lesson is that God distributes gifts according to His will. We are not all gifted in the same way or to the same degree. God wants us to live up to what he has given us. Paul exhorted Timothy to *“stir up the gift of God that is in thee”* (2 Tm 1:6)

6. Shepherds (elders, overseers)

Privilege

Shepherds, in the secular realm, guide, feed, and protect their flocks from harm. A sheep on its own is very vulnerable. It can’t fend for itself. It is easily lost and is defenseless against predators. The safest and the healthiest place for a sheep is to be part of a flock under the care of a shepherd. In the assembly the Holy Spirit raises up overseers to do the work of shepherding –to **guide** (Hb 13:7; 1 Pt 5:1-4), **guard** (Hb 13:17; Acts 20:28-31), and to **feed** (Hb 13:7) the flock of God. The assembly is the safest and the healthiest place for a believer in a spiritual sense. God not only designed the role, He raises individuals up to fulfill the role and to do the work. By being in an assembly a believer puts himself under the care of shepherds raised up by God for the care of His people.

Responsibility

While the spirit of the age says ‘challenge authority’, ‘be your own man’, ‘do your own thing’, ‘don’t let anyone tell you what to do’, the Bible says that authority has been established by God and we are to submit to it. Authority is essential for the stability of the nation, the family and the assembly. Authority in the assembly has been given to those whom God has raised up to do the work of an overseer. Overseers are not to be Lords, but rather examples for us to follow. They are not legislators, but rather administrators. Overseers are under the authority of scripture and of the Chief Shepherd. Our responsibility is to submit to them (Hb 13:17; 1 Pt 5:5) and to imitate their faith (Hb 13:7).

