

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING A CHRISTIAN**

“The Christian Connected To Other Christians”

Philemon 1, 2

## INTRODUCTION

- A. We have seen that Christianity involves “activity.”
- B. Some of that activity is “together” work with other Christians.
- C. Each Christian needs to understand the importance of this collective work.

## DISCUSSION

## I. THE “TOGETHER” ASPECT OF LIFE IN CHRIST.

- A. The problem of “solo” Christianity.
  - 1. Some have a concept of Christianity which results in minimal involvement with the congregation of which they are a part.
    - a. These are “independent” Christians – aloof, isolated, and solitary in their service to Christ.
    - b. The congregation’s work becomes “what they are doing down there,” etc.
    - c. Some may not understand the congregational facet of life in Christ.
    - d. Others intend to be mavericks and refuse to be a real part of a congregation.
      - 1. Yet it is “not good that man should be alone” (GE 2:18) – if this is true socially, it is also true spiritually.
      - 2. The usual consequences of solo Christianity are dangerous: inactivity, unhappiness, spiritual stagnation, etc.
      - 3. The bottom line is: Christians rarely survive apart from their proper relationship together.
      - 4. Removed from the fire of which it is a part, a glowing ember soon cools...and dies.
- B. Illustrations of the togetherness of Christians.
  - 1. “Fellowship” - koinonia – Strong G2842 – “1 fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse. 1a the share which one has in anything, participation. 1b intercourse, fellowship, intimacy. 1b1 the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office). 1c a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship.” Acts 2:42; 1 CO 1:9; 1 JN 1:3, 7.
    - a. Christians are conscious of an “inside/outside” distinction – 1 CO 5:12-13.
    - b. Christians are “fellows” –Strong’s Greek #4847 συμπολίτης [sumpolites /soom·pol·ee·tace/] “1 possessing the same citizenship with others, a fellow citizen. 1A of Gentiles as received into communion of the saints. 1B of the people consecrated to God.” “Fellow citizens” – EP 2:11-22, esp. v. 19; “Fellow heirs” – EP 3:6; Cf. RO 8:17; 1 PE 3:7; “Fellow workers/laborers/helpers? – CO 4:11; Cf. RO 16:21; 1 CO 3:9; PL 1, 24; 3 JN 8; “Fellow servants” – CO 1:7; Cf. CO 4:7; RE 6:11; “Fellow soldiers” – PH 2:25; PL 2.
  - 2. “Brotherhood” - 1 PE 2:17; Cf. 1 CO 5:11; GA 3:26; 6:10; EP 2:19. Cf. MK 3:31-35. The Christian needs to have a “family” consciousness about other Christians.
  - 3. “Membership.” Cf. 1 CO 12:18, 27; EP 5:30.
    - a. The church is Christ’s “body” – EP 1:22-23; cf. 1 CO 12:13.

- b. “Corporate” responsibilities attend membership in the body.
    - c. Body members are functionally interdependent – RO 12:3-8; 1 CO 12:12-27; EP 4:16.
    - d. There are no “vestigial” organs or “decorative” parts, no useless or unimportant members.
    - e. Christians are “members of one another” – RO 12:5; EP 4:25.
  - C. Church “membership.”
    - 1. The “local” church is something different from the “universal” church.
    - 2. The “church of Christ” universally is the sum of all Christians – MT 16:18; EP 1:22
    - 3. The “church of Christ” locally is a specific group of Christians who function together as a “congregation” – Acts 14:23; 1 CO 1:2; GA 1:2; etc. A local church can assemble or “congregate” – that is why we call it a “congregation” Cf. 1 C) 11:18; 14:19, 23, 28, 34, 35. The universal church is a relationship – it has neither function nor organization. The local church has both – e. g. PH 1:54; 4:15
    - 4. One “automatically” becomes a part of the universal church when one obeys the gospel – Acts 2:47; RO 6:3; 1 CO 12:13; GA 3:27 – but an individual must himself carry out his intention to become a part of a local congregation – Acts 9:26-28.
    - 5. The mere provision by God of this congregational relationship implies an important divine purpose for it, and a corresponding responsibility of Christians to avail themselves of it.
    - 6. The idea of becoming “just a Christian” does not mean one will have no connection to the local congregation. Those who are baptized and then disappear, never again to see their new brethren, misunderstand what is to follow baptism!
  - D. At the local level especially, Christianity is a “community” affair. Universally, Christians do share a common relationship to God – 2 PE 1:1; Cf. TS 1:5; Jude 3. But it is in the local congregational relationship that this results in an actual common life together – e. g. Acts 2:42-47.
  - E. Christians are obligated to participate in the life of a faithful congregation. The command to withdraw fellowship from certain ones implies that participation in the fellowship by faithful Christians is not optional – 1 CO 5:1-13; 2 TH 3:6. Much of what the Christian does is “for the common good” – 1 CO 12:7 NASV. One’s bond to his brethren has a bearing on his bond to God.
  - F. Christians have responsibilities to other Christians. And each Christian ought to assume responsibilities and commitments to a particular group of other Christians – HE 10:24-25.
- II. SOME SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES TO OTHER CHRISTIANS.
  - A. Attitudes to maintain.
    - 1. Concern, care – 1 CO 12:25-26; PH 2:20.
    - 2. Humility, lowliness – RO 12:3; EP 4:2; PH 2:3-4; 1 PE 5:5-6.
    - 3. Peaceableness – RO 14:17; EP 4:3; 1 TH 5:12; JA 3:17-18; 2 PE 3:14.
    - 4. Appreciation for others and their work – e.g. PH 1:3-5; 1 TH 1:2-3. True appreciation will eliminate destructive criticism, gossip, factiousness, etc.
    - 5. Willingness to cooperate, work together – 1 CO 12:21.
    - 6. Friendliness, warmth, openness – e. g. Acts 2:44-47; cf. PL 7.
    - 7. Gentleness, meekness – GA 6:1; 2 TI 2:24-26; TS 3:2.
    - 8. Forbearance, longsuffering, patience – EP 4:2; CO 3:12-13; 1 TH 5:14; 1 TI 6:11.

9. Forgiveness – EP 4:32; CO 3:13.
10. Love – JN 13:34-35; RO 12:10; 13:8-10; 1 PE 1:22. Cf. JN 15:12, 17; EP 1:15; 4:2; 5:2; PH 2:2; CO 1:4; 2:2; 1 TH 3:12; 4:9; HE 13:1; 1 PE 2:17; 3:8-9; 1 JN 3:23; 2 JN 5. Love of God implies love of one's brethren in Christ – 1 JN 4:20-5:2; Cf. 1 JN 3:10-11, 14-18; 4:7-8, 11-12. Love edifies – 1 CO 8:1; Cf. GA 5:13-14.

B. Things to do.

1. Identify as a member of a faithful congregation - "place membership" – Acts 9:26 – "join" Strong's G2853 κολλάω [*kollao* /kol-lah-o/] "1 to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together. 2 to join or fasten firmly together. 3 to join one's self to cleave to." Cf. 1 CO 6:16, 17. Drifters, "floating" members, "members at large," etc. are missing an important aspect of Christianity. The same is true for passive "spectators," those "just along for the ride," "permanent visitors," etc. One places membership with the intent of being an actual, functioning member – not a mere "appendage" to the body. Real commitments are involved.
2. Pray for other Christians – especially those of our congregation – e. g. PH 1:9-11; CO 1:9-11; Cf. CO 4:12; 1 TH 5:25.
3. Submit to the congregation's elders – 1 TH 5:12-13; HE 13:7, 17.
4. Attend and participate in the assemblies of the congregation. The Christian enjoys and benefits from private and family service to God every day – but one must not neglect God's provision for collective, congregational worship, Bible study, etc. Each aspect of the congregational assemblies is vital to the Christian.
  - The Lord's Supper – Acts 20:7; 1 CO 11:17-34.
  - Praying – Acts 4:23-31; 12:12; 1 CO 14:15-17.
  - Singing – EP 5:19; CO 3:16.
  - Preaching/Teaching – Acts 20:7.
  - Giving – 1 CO 16:1-2.
 Special assemblies of the church are no less important than the regular, weekly ones – e. g. Acts 14:27; Cf. Acts 15:30; 20:7; 1 CO 5:4.
 

The congregational assembly is an opportunity for 3 different involvements:

  - (1) Help in providing for the assembly – e. g. cleaning the building, preparing the communion.
  - (2) Actual attendance at the assembly. 100% involvement here is critical.
  - (3) Participation in the assembly, to the extent of one's opportunity.
 

Worship is not a "spectator" activity. The crucial question is not "How did the preacher do?" But "How did I do?" If one can do no more than listen, there is such a thing as active listening.

Assemblies of the congregation are not merely a routine to perform, but a God-given provision for our spiritual good. 1) Our quibbles and questions about whether we have to, our complaints, our neglect, etc. reveal a tendency to take lightly the opportunity for Christians to be together. God wants to give us something in our assemblies – our involvement or non-involvement reveals something of how much we desire to accept what God has for us.

To minimize this aspect of Christianity is to jeopardize not only one's own soul, but also that of others – HE 10:24-25.
5. Contribute financially to the work of the congregation – 1 CO 16:1-2; 2 CO 9:6-7.
6. Engage personally and directly in the three-fold work of the congregation.

Evangelism – e. g. Acts 8:4; 11:19-21.

Edification – RO 15:14. Spiritual maturity is the goal for which Christians aim – EP 4:11-16; CO 1:28. Edification is the process which produces maturity, and Christians are duty-bound to edify each other -RO 14:19; 15:2. Cf. 1 CO 14:26; EP 4:29; 1 TH 5:11,14; HE 3:13. It is not enough to grow; we must help others to grow! Cf. LK 22:32. b) It is not enough to be faithful, zealous, interested, etc.; we must help others to be so! Enthusiasm is indeed infectious, but there must be some contact. It is not enough to bring others to Christ; we must help them be strong in Christ! 3) The older, more mature spiritually have a special responsibility here - e.g. TS 2:3.

All need nurture: Strong, faithful Christians – RO 1:12; New Converts – 1 TH 3:1-3; Those who have failed to develop and achieve full usefulness in Christ – HE 5:12-14; Weak, erring Christians – GA 6:1-2; 2 TI 2:24-26.

Each Christian is “leaven.” The only question is whether that influence will be for good or evil. Cf. 1 CO 5:6.

As we edify other, we must also receive edification for the blessing it is. Cf. PR 27:6-7. We must stand together against the weakening influences that surround us, or we probably will fall – HE 10:23-25.

We must take care not to underestimate either our ability or opportunity for strengthening and influencing for good other Christians — our example itself is more powerful than we think. Cf. 1 TI 4:12.

Benevolence – Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35.

7. Help maintain unity in the congregation -JN 17:20-23; RO 15:5-7; EP 4:1-3. Cf 1 CO 1:10; 2 CO 13:11; PH 2:1,2.
8. Participate in the discipline of the congregation, instructive as well as corrective -1 CO 5:4-5; GA 6:1-2; 1 TH 5:14; 2 TH 3:6, 14-15.
9. Extend courtesy and hospitality – RO 12:13; HE 13:2; 1 PE 4:9.
10. Find an individual role and fill it – CO 4:17; 2 TI 4:5.

### III. THE NEED FOR INVOLVEMENT.

#### A. The nature of involvement.

1. Words which describe the congregational relationship: participation, cooperation, collaboration, teamwork, joint effort, etc.
2. The crucial need of the congregation: involvement. Cf. engagement, interrelation, interconnection, interaction, etc. Involve is derived from Latin in (in) + volvere (roll, turn) = to enwrap. Cf. revolve, etc. 1) Involvement means being “enwrapped” as a participant, enmeshed in a joint undertaking. 2) The Christian is “intertwined” with his brethren — e.g. the strands of fiber in a rope. What is needed is total involvement by the individual Christian. Arbitrary limitations on congregational involvement, even seemingly “insignificant” ones, convey a strong negative message to our fellow Christians, children, neighbors, etc. There is a double result of congregational involvement. 1) The congregation as a whole is stronger. 2) The individual is not as likely to be separated from the Lord and the Lord’s people. Consider the strands “involved” in a rope!

#### B. The benefits of involvement.

1. These include: Friendship, companionship. Strength, encouragement to do right. Admonition, correction, reproof. Instruction, knowledge. Prayers offered for us. Benevolent help when in physical need. Comfort in sorrow, help in troubled times. Assistance in difficulty.

- The joy of congregational assemblies.
2. The benefits are mutual. Cf. RO 1:12. The congregational relationship is the Golden Rule exemplified –MT 7:12.

CONCLUSION

- A. A. Nowhere is the wisdom of God more beautifully displayed than in the relationship of Christians together. Cf. EP 3:10.
- B. In the local congregation, Christians may come to understand Paul's feelings about his brethren in Christ - e.g. 1 TH 2:19,20.