

## God has called believers to be active participants in the local church

Recap week 1 - identification. We are believers brought in to be members of the household of faith by the grace of God, and as identifiable members of this body we are to represent God in this world.

This morning we move into participation, which is the natural progression from our identification. We become children of God, called into his family, and now we participate in that family. There are privileges and there are responsibilities, as there are with any earthly family. These last 3 weeks are all closely linked together. Participation, discipleship (discipline), and evangelism are all about our relation to each other and representation to the world.

### Scripture Passage: Acts 2:36-47

I want to begin us this morning in the book of Acts, where we've been studying together as a church since February. Acts is really an excellent place to look at membership from, as we see the early church growing, learning to relate to each other, stay actively engaged as lights in the world, and distinct from the world. And it's here in the book of Acts that we see participation in and with the church take shape. In Acts 2 Peter preaches this New Covenant sermon and many come to faith in Jesus. What was their experience following their salvation? What were they busy about? What was their purpose, what were their priorities, how were they investing their time and focusing their energy? Following their conversion and identification with Jesus and the church, we pick up in Acts 2:42 to read about their devotion to this new community - the church.

### The Privileges of Participation

1. Acts 2:42 *"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* - Before we even begin with the privileges of participation with the church, however, I want to stress that they were devoted to these things which made up their gatherings together as a church. Not occasional participation, but devoted participation. The word means close association, perseverance, holding fast.
  1. Teaching - Receiving preaching and teaching is a privilege of regular participation with a local church. You can find excellent preaching through podcasts and online sermons, but the sermons prepared especially for and preached specifically to a local church body are unique.
    1. Acts 20:28 One of those ways of working for the good of the church is watching out for and protecting against false teaching. This is why Paul writes regarding elders, *"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1:9)"* When you read the NT epistles, each of them are written to a specific church, and each one deals with problems specific to that church.
    2. But not only correction or protection against false teaching, but formation specific to the needs of the local church. A sermon prepared specifically for Pillar Bible Fellowship could be preached in another church, and by God's grace it would prove to be useful, but not as readily applicable as it would be here. Another factor in that are the relationships between the elders and the congregation.
  2. Fellowship - This word can actually be translated as "participation". Sharing, communion, contribution. Not just receiving, but also contributing. Community Groups are a place where we see fellowship flourish. Relationships, centered on Jesus, are established and strengthened, and lives are interwoven in a way that enables every-member ministry.
    1. Acts 2:44-45 *"And all who believed were together and had all things in common..."*
    2. Acts 4:32 *"...but they had everything in common."*
3. Breaking of bread - Celebration and remembrance of the Lord's Supper is a privilege of participation with the local church. It's not a meal designed to be celebrated alone, apart from the local church, but in the context of the local church.
  1. 1 Cor. 11:17-22 Paul corrects the Corinthian church for their distortion of the Lord's Supper. Some were going through heaping their plates while others went hungry. Some were getting drunk. But, he doesn't tell them to stop practicing, but instructs them so they can correctly practice (vv.33-34).
4. Prayers - Prayer is an awesome privilege in the local church.
  1. In Acts 12 Peter is imprisoned and it seems that he is headed toward execution. *"...but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church (v.5)."* And angel visits Peter and frees him, and where does Peter go? To the praying church, gathered in the house of Mary.
  2. To give you one example from this last week, our Community Group received a group text on Friday that something we've been praying for since December of last year was answered just this week.

2. **Acts 2:47** "...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." -

**Transition:** We are called into relation with God by God. We're also called to be representatives of God.

### The Responsibilities of Participation

1. It is only as each of us take on the responsibilities of participation in the local church that the privileges of participation will be fully realized. It's even a little difficult to separate privileges and responsibilities. As we work through these responsibilities, pay attention to the privileges associated with the carrying out of these responsibilities.
2. **Acts 2:44-45** "And all who believed were together and had all things in common..." - This doesn't mean that they all liked the same foods, listened to the same music, wore the same clothing styles, and enjoyed the same hobbies. Having all things in common is so much deeper than those superficial things. The church was united, the believers were together, and in their devoted participation with each other they saw the needs of the church met.
3. Stewardship - "Managing, maintaining, and making the most of all God has entrusted to us for the furtherance of his interests, as we look to future reward." (Stuart Scott - The Exemplary Husband)
  1. Talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts
    1. **1 Peter 4:8-11** "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve **one another**, as good **stewards** of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."
    2. **Ephesians 4:11-16** "...to equip the saints for the work of ministry..."
    3. **Romans 12:1-8** Members each with unique gifts that are to be used. Praise God for the variety of gifts in the church!
  2. Resources
    1. **Romans 12:9-13** "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality." This is largely what we read about earlier in **Acts 2, 4**.
    2. 2 Cor. 8-9 The Macedonians were begging Paul to let them contribute to the needs of the saints.
    3. **Galatians 6:10** "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."
      1. Personally, I could fill up the rest of our day telling you about how my family has been blessed in our home project over the last months through the generosity of this church. Laundry, meals, tools, labor, know-how, tents and cots. Prayer and encouragement. And ice cream. And I don't think this is only because we're in a privileged position with me being one of the pastors here, but because we participate along with you, and the needs are known. I've seen the same generosity extended to others in the church as well.
  3. Time (attendance on Sunday and availability during week)
    1. **Acts 2:46** "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,"
    2. **Acts 20:20** "how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house,"
    3. **Hebrews 10:24-25** "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."
    4. We could have all the gifts, all sorts of talents, and endless resources, but without the commitment of time they wouldn't be of any use.

**Conclusion:** There are privileges and there are responsibilities. I would ask this morning, are you committed to the local church, as God would have you? Have you seen the fruit of participation in your life? If not, could it be because of a lack of participation? And have you used what God has entrusted to you for ministry in the church (not just Sunday morning ministry, but every-day, every-member ministry)? It's only as every part is working properly that the body is built up in love.

# Family

## Table Talk



September 16, 2018

### Family Discussion

1. John tells us in his gospel and first epistle the most wonderful news! What is it? How about Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus and Rome? Who are we? For what purpose have we been given this identification?
2. Just like a family, we serve and bless one another as we participate in the family. How do you serve and bless your family? Read the listed Scriptures for #2. Are we to serve and bless those in our church family? How? What do you see the church devoting and committing themselves to? For what ultimate purpose?
3. Consider your participation in your church family. How are you encouraged, convicted and/or instructed after reading these Scriptures? Is there anything you have neglected? Take time to pray together over the body of Christ, His church, that He has placed you in. Pray for people individually; pray for God to strengthen you in your participation within your church family. May you know Christ more, and may you understand His sacrifice more fully, as you love the church.

### GOD'S TRUTH

God has called believers to be active participants in the local church!

#### Key Verse

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

#### TABLE READING

Lead your kids into God's Word...

1. John 1:12; 1 John 3:1; Ephesians 2:19; Romans 8:15
2. Acts 2:42; 1 Peter 4:8-11; Romans 12:1-8; Ephesians 4:11-16; Galatians 6:10
3. Hebrews 10:24-25



#### Scripture Memory: Ephesians 4:13

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)