

Fellowship & Commitment

The purpose of this pamphlet is to present what Scripture teaches, and we at the Charlottetown Bible Chapel believe, about commitment to and participation in the fellowship of a local Christian assembly.^(a)

What is fellowship?

There are two main thoughts that define fellowship: **Communion** and **partnership**. Communion has the idea of 'walking and talking together', while partnership is 'working together'.^(b)

"Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."^(c) Only those who have eternal life can have communion with God. God's desire is that we all live our lives in communion with Him and that we seek to know and love Him more every day. All Christian service is to be done in partnership with God.^(d)

Not only do we have fellowship with God, but also with one another. Christians are united in the Spirit through Christ to God the Father.^(e) This unity is the basis of both the communion and partnership we have with each other. God has given Christians a task which they are to labour in together.^(f)

Who is to be part of the fellowship of a local assembly?

Fellowship concerns Christians only. You cannot experience any true fellowship with believers in Christ if you are not saved yourself. It is contrary to Scripture for Christians to be "in fellowship" with those who are not believers^(g).

When you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you became a member of the universal assembly consisting of all believers worldwide. The New Testament calls this the **Body of Christ**.^(h)

What does it mean to be a part of 'the fellowship' of a local assembly?

The fellowship of a local assembly is the experience of partnership, companionship, communion, contribution, distribution and communication with one another ⁽ⁱ⁾. The Bible teaches very clearly that Christians belong together ^(j).

We read in Acts 2:42: *"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* (ESV). For the first-century Christians this fellowship was not something they just "attended on Sundays", or were half-hearted about. Rather, it was **their way of life**, something they "devoted themselves to" or "continued in steadfastly". They were saved out of Judaism and paganism. They were then baptized and from then on their allegiance and life focus became the Lord Jesus Christ and His interests ^(k).

Believers in a local assembly share a faith and have common goals. Anyone who is part of the fellowship of a local assembly should recognize the importance of being engaged in the work of that assembly. Rather than being content to sit along the sidelines as an uninvolved observer, the Lord desires that each of us **invests** in His work and people. This is done through prayer, worship and the use of our spiritual gifts, time and money ^(l). When you do that you will be blessed yourself, as Acts 20:35 says, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

What is the purpose of the assembly and its fellowship?

The New Testament uses the illustration of a **human body** to teach us that the assembly is to represent its heavenly **Head**, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is to be first and foremost in our midst.^(m) This emphasis should be the main motive in everything we do in the assembly.

All the members of this body form a **unity in Christ** and each believer has a function to fulfill to enable the body to operate properly and **grow in faith and love**. The Lord wants us to think in terms of what benefits the whole assembly, and not just ourselves as individuals.⁽ⁿ⁾

The Lord also uses the illustration of a **house and a temple** for the assembly ^(o). This teaches us what He wants an assembly to be like when it gathers **locally**.

First, the assembly is the House **of God**, not ours. God dwells in this house and we enjoy His presence and worship Him together. We do this realizing that everything that takes place in His house, His temple, is to be consistent with His holiness. ^(p)

Secondly, this House is not a physical building but **people** who are to be cared for. Together, we are a **work in progress**. The local assembly is called to be the pillar and support of the truth. ^(q) It is our responsibility to effectively give witness of the unchanging truth in an ever-changing world.

Also, like a good home, God's House **has order and authority**. God has placed leaders in the assembly who are accountable to Him. Believers in the local assembly are to recognize and submit to this godly order. ^(r)

When a local assembly is genuinely marked by these virtues, it fulfills the purpose of God in glorifying His Son Jesus Christ and displaying Him to a lost world.

“Why should I commit myself to be part of the fellowship of a local assembly, when I prefer to be independent?”

When the Lord Jesus saved you, He set you free. The Lord wants us to use our freedom to please Him who bought us for Himself. ^(s) *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”* ^(t) The question is not ‘What do I want for myself?’, but ‘What does the Lord want me to do?’

Here are four reasons why we should commit ourselves to a local assembly:

1 Practicing the ‘one anothers’ of Scripture. We are to edify one another, comfort one another, care for one another, bear with one another, be kind to one another, forgive one another, submit to one another, pray for one another, love one another, exhort one another, be hospitable to one another, etc. It is very difficult to fully obey these commands if you're not committed to a local assembly.

2 Using our spiritual gifts. Ephesians 4:15-16 says “every part does its share”. Before a member of a body can function, it first needs to be part of that body. If you’re saved, you are part of the Body of Christ and have a spiritual gift. The local assembly is the expression of the universal Body of Christ. To be able to use your gift to build up this Body, you need to commit yourself to a local assembly.

3 Being accountable to one another and assembly leadership specifically. We live in an age where people dislike authority. The Bible, however, has much to say about submission to authority^(u). When we build relationships with other believers, this accountability and submission will add to our spiritual progress and sanctification.

4 Fulfilling the Great Commission. Christians are called by the Lord Jesus to make the Gospel known to a lost world.^(v) Part of this commission is to make disciples. Rather than being left on their own, these new disciples need to be brought into a Christian community where they receive spiritual care and teaching. By being committed to a local assembly ourselves, the Lord can use us more effectively in this process of discipleship.

“Can I partake of the Lord’s Supper without coming into the fellowship of the assembly?”

The Lord’s Supper is an expression of the fellowship we have with the Lord Jesus and one another. “*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*”^(w) While the “one bread” reminds us of the body of the Lord Jesus given for us, it also symbolizes the unity of the Body of Christ, the assembly. The New Testament, therefore, does not separate the Lord’s Supper from assembly fellowship. In Acts 2 people were saved, baptized and then continued in all the privileges and responsibilities of assembly life. The Lord’s Supper is only one of those privileges.

The Scriptural pathway, therefore, is for believers to come into the fellowship of a local assembly before partaking of the Lord's Supper.

When believers from another area or Christian fellowship are visiting with us, we will receive them to the Lord's Supper, unless they're under discipline for moral sin or heresy. In most cases these Christians are part of an assembly where they live and are known to at least some of us. They often bring a letter of commendation and their visit is usually of a short duration. If such a visitor is from the local area and keeps coming to the Lord's Supper on a regular basis, he/she is no longer "just visiting". We recognize that it takes some time for a believer to find out about this assembly before committing to it. If you're a believer and have been attending this assembly for a long time or since childhood, we encourage you to be obedient to the Lord's will by taking your place in the fellowship of the assembly. Not doing so contradicts the fellowship which the Lord's Supper expresses.

"How can I become part of the fellowship of this assembly?"

If you've trusted in Christ as your personal Saviour and Lord and have been obedient to the command to be baptized, speak to one of the elders to let them know of your desire. The elders will be happy to meet with you to have a conversation. The purpose of this conversation is so the elders can hear why it is you'd like to take this step and what it means to you personally.

Please, consider the following questions before you meet with the elders:

Do you have a willing attitude to obey God's Word?
Are you willing to serve the Lord for the building-up of the rest of the body?

Are you willing to submit to the authority of the elders, who are responsible to care for you with Christ's love?

Are you willing to be held accountable before the Lord to the assembly?

(Please Note: There is an Emmaus study available to help believers better understand the topic of Christian fellowship. You can speak to one of the elders if you would like a copy.)

In order to allow feedback from the whole assembly, we typically announce a believer's desire to become a part of the assembly and give a two-week period before the believer is welcomed.

We hope that this brochure has addressed some of the common questions surrounding the topic of Christian fellowship in our local assembly.

— The elders at the Charlottetown Bible Chapel

NOTES:

(a) The word "assembly" rather than "church" is used in this pamphlet, as it is a better translation of the Greek word "ekklesia".

(b) Genesis 5:22-24; 6:9;
Luke 5:7, 10

(c) 1 John 1:3

(d) Mark 16:20; 1 Peter 4:10-11

(e) Ephesians 4:3-6

(f) 1 Corinthians 3:9

(g) 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

(h) 1 Corinthians 12:12-14;
Romans 12:4-5

(i) Acts 2:42; Romans 15:26;
1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:16;

2 Corinthians 6:14;

Philippians 1:5; 2:1; 3:10;

Hebrews 13:16; 1 John 1:3-7

(j) Acts 4:23; 1 Corinthians 1:9

(k) Acts 2:40-47;

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

(l) 1 Corinthians 12; 14:26;

Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:7-11

(m) Colossians 1:18

(n) Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:1-16

(o) Matthew 16:18;

1 Timothy 3:14-15;

Ephesians 2:19-22;

1 Corinthians 3:9-17;

Hebrews 3:1-6; 1 Peter 2:4-10

1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Psalm 93:5

1 Timothy 3:15 (NASB)

(r) 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:5-16;

Acts 20:17-38; Hebrews 13:17

(s) 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23;

Acts 20:28; Romans 6:18-22

(t) Galatians 5:13

(u) 1 Corinthians 16:16;

Ephesians 5:21-24;

1 Timothy 5:17-20;

Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5-6

(v) Matthew 28:18-20;

Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49

(w) 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

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