

Why Church? #4

“Koinonia” and Church Ordinances

What are the Valid Activities of the Church? (what do we do that makes church church?)

We are seeking to identify, from scripture, the activities of the church. From these we should be able to see more clearly what is the purpose of the church, and then compare ourselves to this. That is, how do the actual activities and purposes of churches today compare with what we see in the Bible?

From previous lessons:

1. *Regular meetings (by tradition on Sundays)*
2. *Recognized leadership (pastors, deacons, teachers, etc.)*
3. *Reading, preaching and teaching of the Word*
4. *Discipleship training*
5. *Worship*
6. *Prayer*
7. *Evangelism*

This time we will look at a Greek word that encompasses at least three other activities of the church:

κοινωνία (koinonia) – This word can take on a variety of meanings, depending on the context. According to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, it can mean “communion, fellowship, association, community, or joint participation”

Note - the English definitions in italics below are from an online dictionary.

8. Koinonia as Fellowship – a common sharing and participation in the life (and sufferings) of Christ

Fellowship - 1. friendly association, especially with people who share one's interests
2. a group of people meeting to pursue a shared interest or aim

In the NT the fellowship of believers arises from our shared experience of God’s grace and forgiveness, and having the Spirit, and our activities together to advance God’s kingdom in the earth. It involves genuine friendship, trust, and love, for encouragement, edification, and comfort together. Our fellowship together is because we are in Christ. Words highlighted below are forms of “koinonia”.

Ac. 2:42 – “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and **fellowship**, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

1 Cor. 1:9 – “God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the **fellowship** of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1 Jn. 1:3, 6-7 – “... that ye also may have **fellowship** with us: and truly our **fellowship** is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. ... If we say that we have **fellowship** with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the the light, we have **fellowship** one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Phl. 3:10 – “That I may know him, and ... the **fellowship** of his sufferings ...” Our association with the name of Christ brings us into a participation with him in sufferings. We are faithful to him, as he is to us.

It can be an acknowledgement that we share the same spiritual goals and purpose in life.

Gal. 2:9 – “... they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of **fellowship** ...”

Phl. 1:5 – (thanking God in prayer) “For your **fellowship** in the gospel from the first day until now.”

9. Koinonia as “Communion”

Communion - 1. the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level
2. the service of Christian worship at which bread and wine are consecrated and shared

Phl. 2:1 – “... **fellowship** of the Spirit ...”

2 Cor. 13:14 – “... the **communion** of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.”

2 Cor. 6:14 – “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship [*partnership*] hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what **communion** hath light with darkness?” In this verse, I think ideas of both “fellowship” and “communion” can be understood.

1 Cor. 10:16-17 – “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 being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (a participation in the sacrifice of Christ’s body and blood)

10. Koinonia as Financial Relief of Poor Saints

Rom. 15:26 – “For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain **contribution** for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.”

2 Cor. 8:4 – (of the churches of Macedonia) “Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the **fellowship** of the ministering to the saints.”

2 Cor. 9:13 – “Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal **distribution** unto them, and unto all men”

Heb. 13:16 – “But to do good and to **communicate** forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

11. Participation in the “ordinances” (things commanded by Christ for the church to continue practicing)

A. Water baptism

1. Practiced by John the Baptist and Christ’s disciples, as a baptism of repentance and a sign that the kingdom of God was soon to come, or had come. Mt. 3:1-12, Jn. 3:22-26, 4:1-2
2. Commanded by Christ in the “Great Commission” – Mt. 28:19, Mk. 16:16
3. Practiced by the church throughout the book of Acts

2:38-41	– on the day of Pentecost	16:15	– Lydia and her household
8:12-13	– Philip preaching in Samaria	16:33	– the Philippian jailer
9:18	– Saul’s conversion	18:8	– Crispus and the Corinthian believers
10:47-48	– Cornelius’ household	19:4-5	– the Ephesian believers
4. Its significance explained in

Rom. 6:3-7	– we were baptized into Christ’s death, then raised up into a new life
1 Cor. 12:13	– we are all baptized into one body (the church) by the Spirit (see v. 18)
Gal. 3:27	– to be baptized into Christ is to “put on” Christ

B. “Communion” (i.e., the commemorative bread and cup)

1. First done by Christ with the twelve disciples, following the last supper – Mt. 26:20-30; Mk. 14:22-24; Lk. 22:17-20
2. Referred to in 1 Cor. 10:16-17, as a “communion” (koinonia), and Paul gives corrections and cautions in 11:23-30
3. It is sometimes associated with a church meal, sometimes called a love feast. Although not an ordinance, the love feast was the subject of some corrections and warnings (1 Cor. 11:20-34, 2 P. 2:13, Jude 12. Ac. 20:7 may be an example, when they “came together to break bread”. Some churches today have special meals and services that they specifically call “love feasts”.

- C. **Foot washing** – This is following the example of Christ in Jn. 13:4-17. Not all churches interpret this as an actual ordinance but some do, although generally not on the same level of importance as baptism and communion. In the Bible it was associated with the last supper and the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine, and so many churches today would have foot washing and communion done together.