

Acts 2:42b

Introduction

Last week we came, in Acts chapter 2, to the result of Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost. Luke tells us:

- Acts 2:41 — So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

The Jews have "received" Peter's word as the very word of God because God, in the fullness of time, has now sent that word to them and effectually worked that word in them. On the human side, we see the people "receiving" Peter's word with meekness and with the joy of the Holy Spirit. On the divine side, we see Jesus, the one whom God has made both "Lord and Christ," adding now three thousand souls to His messianic "end-times" (eschatological) people. The people were witnessing the "end"—the culmination and fulfillment (already/not yet)—of all God's redemptive promises and of all redemptive history. It's because of this that Luke tells us "fear came upon every soul" (2:43). And it's because of this that Luke can go on to tell us in verse 42:

- Acts 2:42 — And they were continually devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.

What Luke means for us to see is the powerful connection between, on the one hand, the salvation-historical reality that the people were experiencing and, on the other hand, the things to which they were now continually devoting themselves. The first thing Luke mentions is "the teaching of the apostles." It's the apostles who have delivered to us all that Jesus said to them as our new, eschatological "Law-Giver"—as the one greater than Moses. It's the apostles who have proclaimed to us all those new realities of life in the Messiah's kingdom. Therefore, as the eschatological people that we are, we ought to be earnestly and faithfully attending upon these times—receiving the word that is preached to us not as the word of men, but as the very word of God, with meekness and with joy. This is to be one of our defining marks and characteristics as the end-times community that we are—as those who are even now participants in the "final drama" of redemptive history. But now Luke continues:

I. Acts 2:42b — And they were continually devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship...

So what exactly is the connection between, on the one hand, the salvation-historical reality that the people were experiencing and, on the other hand, "the fellowship" to which they were now continually devoting themselves?

It's important for us to see that while the activity of the people is assumed insofar as they were "continually devoting themselves *to* the fellowship" "the fellowship," itself, was not an activity of the people. Instead, it was an already accomplished fact. Just like "the teaching of the apostles," we have to hear this reference to "the fellowship" in its redemptive-historical and

eschatological context. The noun, *koinonia* (fellowship), appears only one time in the Old Testament and refers there to the very mundane reality of something being entrusted to someone else or left in someone else's care.¹ In this single use of the word "fellowship" in the Law and the Prophets, there's no hint of the weight of meaning that this word will come to have in the apostolic writings, and especially in the writings of Paul.² Therefore, we have to hear this reference to "the fellowship" in its distinctively redemptive-historical and eschatological context.

When we hear the word, "fellowship," we often think of "fellowshipping," and when we think of "fellowshipping," we often think of conversing and talking and spending time with one another. But this isn't at all the meaning of the Greek word, *koinonia*. Even when the noun, "fellowship," has a more active or verbal sense, it never refers to conversing or spending time with one another, but rather (always) to material or financial sharing with others who are in Messiah's kingdom. Does this already tell us something about what biblical fellowship is? The Apostle Paul writes:

- Romans 15:26–27 — For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to *make* [*poieo*] a **contribution** for the poor ["to *do fellowship toward* (*eis*) the poor"] among the saints in Jerusalem. For if the Gentiles have **shared/participated/fellowshipped** [verb; *koinoneo*] in [the Jews'] spiritual things [dative], they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

Do you see both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions here? On the one hand, the Gentiles have fellowshipped in the Jews' *spiritual things*. This is a vertical fellowship; it's a share and a participation *in* the things of the Spirit. On the other hand, the fact that this is a fellowship *in the Jews'* spiritual things indicates that this vertical fellowship also results in a kind of horizontal "fellowship" (a fellowship between the Gentiles and the Jews). What we have, then, is a *common* sharing in—a *communal* participation in—the things of the Spirit. It's because of this common sharing or fellowshipping in the things of the Spirit that Paul can speak of the horizontal activity of "doing fellowship toward" the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. "Doing fellowship" (contributing money to poor believers) is simply living out our communal participation and fellowship in the things of the Spirit. Perhaps we could say that the basic meaning of *koinonia* (in its eschatological context) is to have a share in something or someone—to participate in something (namely, the kingdom) or someone (namely, Christ). But what happens when two or more people have a common share—a mutual participation—in the same spiritual things? Their fellowship in those spiritual things creates a true "fellowship" between them so that now when

¹ Leviticus 6:2 [LES; Lev. 5:21] — Whenever a person sins and arrogantly disregards the commandments of the Lord, and deals deceitfully in matters concerning his neighbor with something deposited with him or concerning **something left in his care** [περὶ κοινωνίας; MT: "a security entrusted *to him*"] or concerning seized property, or he deals unjustly regarding something with his neighbor...

In the Apocrypha, *koinonia* appears only twice:

Wisdom of Solomon 8:17–18 [NRSV] — When I considered these things inwardly, and pondered in my heart that in **kinship with wisdom** there is immortality, and in **friendship with her**, pure delight, and in the labors of her hands, unending wealth, and in the **experience of her company**, understanding, and renown in **partaking of her words** [genitive; καὶ εὐκλεία ἐν κοινωνίᾳ λόγων αὐτῆς], I went about seeking how to get her for myself.

3 Maccabees 4:6 [NRSV] — And young women who had just entered the bridal chamber to **share** married life ["to share married life" (Brenton); πρὸς βίου κοινωνίαν γαμικὸν] exchanged joy for wailing...

² *Koinonia* appears once in Acts (2:42), once in Hebrews (13:6), four times in 1 John (1:3-7), and 13x's in Paul (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16 [2x]; 2 Cor. 6:14; 8:4; 9:13; 13:14; Gal. 2:9; Phil. 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; Philem. 6).

they share materially with each other, it can be said that they are “doing (the) fellowship” toward one another. Perhaps now we could add that *koinonia*/fellowship (in its eschatological context) means not only to share in something (or someone), but to share *with* someone else *in* something (or someone).³ Paul writes to the Philippians:

- Philippians 1:3–5; 4:15 — I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, because of your **fellowship** with reference to [*eis*] the gospel from the first day until now... And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church **fellowshipped** [verb; *koinoneo*] with me [dative] in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone.

We see in these verses that by “fellowshipping” with Paul in the matter of giving and receiving (horizontal), the Philippians were living out the reality of their common share in—their mutual participation and fellowship in—the Gospel itself (vertical). New Testament biblical fellowship is first a participation or sharing *in* something (namely, the kingdom) or *in* someone (namely, Christ), and then by virtue of this common sharing or mutual participation in Christ and His kingdom, a real “horizontal” fellowship is created—even to the point that one believer may now “do” the fellowship to another. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8:

- 2 Corinthians 8:4 — [The churches of Macedonia were] begging us with great earnestness for the blessing of the **fellowship** of the ministry to the saints.⁴

What is “the fellowship of the ministry to the saints”? Is it simply a “participation in” or a “sharing in” the activity of financial giving? Is that “all”? In Paul (and in a context like this), the word *koinonia* is too rich to mean only this (cf. Guthrie, BECNT). What the Macedonian Christians were asking for was the privilege of experiencing and living out the Jews’ and Gentiles’ common share in—their mutual participation and fellowship in—Christ Himself (which is the ultimate fellowship). (Notice, here, that the Gentiles could experience and live out the fellowship with Jews whom they would never meet or speak with in person.) Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:

- 2 Corinthians 9:13 — Because of the proven character given by this ministry [of material/financial giving], they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the generosity of the **fellowship** toward [*eis*] them and toward [*eis*] all...

What is the meaning of this generous “fellowship toward” other Christians? Does this refer only to sharing financial resources? Not at all! To exercise generous fellowship toward other Christians is simply to “live out” experientially our common share in—our mutual participation and fellowship in—Christ Himself. The author of Hebrews exhorts his readers:

³ See Fee (NICNT) on 1 Cor. 10:16 (p. 466; fn. 18).

⁴ Lit., “the blessing and [*kai*] the fellowship of [genitive] the ministry to the saints” (cf. NET). See Harris (NIGTC) for the translation adopted here (epexegetic *kai* versus hendiadys).

- Hebrews 13:16 — And do not neglect the doing of good and **sharing [fellowship]**,⁵ for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Once again, *koinonia* (fellowship) is too rich a word to mean only “sharing” as we generally use this English word. Underlying this sharing (this “fellowship”) with one another is the deeper meaning of *koinonia* in its eschatological context—namely, the believers’ common share in—their mutual participation and fellowship in—Christ Himself. We continue to see this same thing in places where Paul actually uses the verb, *koinoneo*.

- Romans 12:12–13 — ...rejoicing in hope, persevering in affliction, being devoted to prayer, **sharing/fellowshipping** in [dative] the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality.

What does it mean to “fellowship in the needs of the saints”? Certainly, it means giving materially to meet those needs. But to fellowship in the needs of the saints also assumes that this giving materially is the “living out” experientially of the believers’ common share in—their mutual participation and fellowship in—Christ Himself. We assume the same reality when Paul writes in Galatians:

- Galatians 6:6 — [T]he one who is instructed in the word is to **share/fellowship** in all good things [*en* plus dative] with the one who instructs [dative] him.

There’s a horizontal fellowship, here, between the Christians in Galatia and their teachers—a fellowship which consists in supporting their teachers financially. But this fellowship is only possible because of its eschatological context. This is a derived fellowship, made possible only by a common participation/fellowship in Christ Himself.

So far we’ve been looking at all the places where “fellowship” refers to the more active, horizontal practice of material giving (dative/*eis/en*) and showing that this horizontal “fellowship” always refers to the “living out” of a common fellowship/participation (vertically) in Christ. Now we’ll look at those places where the emphasis is not on anything verbal or active (like giving to the poor or supporting teachers or church planters), but rather on an already finished and accomplished reality (genitive). Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 1:9 — God is faithful, through whom you [plural] were called into [*the*] **fellowship of His Son** [genitive], Jesus Christ our Lord.

What is the “fellowship of His Son” into which we were “called”? Is this the horizontal fellowship that Jesus has created among His people (subjective genitive; Barrett) or is this the vertical fellowship that we have with Jesus (objective genitive; Fee)? Or is it both?—Is it our mutual/common participation in the life of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (Thiselton)? Perhaps we could speak of the union/fellowship that we have with one another in Him (or: “in Him, with one another”). Whatever the case may be, the fact that we’ve all been called into fellowship with Christ (obj. genitive) means that we now share this life in common with one another (cf. Garland); and whatever fellowship we have with one another (subj. genitive) can only exist if it’s grounded in the reality that we all share together in the life of Christ. It’s this

⁵ Epexegetic *kai* (or a hendiadys)

eschatological reality of having been called into “the fellowship of [God’s] Son” which explains Paul’s words in Philippians chapter three:

- Philippians 3:8, 10 (cf. 1 Pet. 4:13)⁶ — I count all things to be loss... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and [the] **fellowship** of His sufferings [genitive], being conformed to His death...

Underlying Paul’s use of *koinonia*, here, is the assumption that all Christians are to share in common in these sufferings because all Christians share in common in Christ (Hansen; PNTC). Therefore, our common experience of suffering is an experience not only of our fellowship with Christ, it’s also an experience of the fellowship that we have with one another. Only in this eschatological context of the kingdom could Paul speak of “the fellowship of [Christ’s] sufferings”! In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul speaks of the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. In Philippians 2, Paul speaks of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

- Philippians 2:1–3 — Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any **fellowship of the Spirit** [genitive], if any affection and compassion, fulfill my joy, that you think the same way, by maintaining the same love, being united in spirit, thinking on one purpose...

Once again, what is this “fellowship of the Spirit”? Is this the horizontal fellowship that the Spirit has created among us (subjective genitive; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:18; 4:3; Hawthorne & Martin; Silva) or is this the vertical fellowship that we have with the Spirit (objective genitive; Rom. 5:5; 8:9-16; O’Brien)? Or is it both?—Is it our “common sharing in the Spirit” (Hansen)? Perhaps we could speak of the fellowship that we have with one another in the Spirit. Whatever the case may be, the fact that we all partake of the Spirit *means* that we now share a life in common with one another (Fee); and whatever fellowship we have with one another can only exist if it’s grounded in the reality that we all share together in the Holy Spirit. It’s in this light that we read Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 13:

- 2 Corinthians 13:14 — The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the **fellowship of the Holy Spirit**, *be with you all*.⁷

Finally, Paul writes in Philemon:

- Philemon 4–7 — I thank my God, always making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus [vertical] and toward all the saints [horizontal]; and I pray that the **fellowship of your faith** may become effective through the full knowledge of every good thing which is in you for the sake of Christ. For I

⁶ 1 Peter 4:13 — But to the degree you are **sharing** [*koinoneo*] in [dative] the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing...

⁷ Guthrie (BENTC) argues for a subjective genitive. Barnett (NICNT) and Hughs (NICNT) both argue for a subjective genitive which is assumed to be rooted in the “objective” reality. Harris (NIGTC) argues for an objective genitive that “inevitably results” in the “subjective” reality. Barrett (BNTC) argues for “an objective genitive of that which is possessed in common.”

have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

What does Paul mean by “the fellowship of your faith”? Paul is thinking of the believers’ mutual participation in a common faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Beale, BECNT; contra Moo, PNTC). It’s our fellowship “vertically” that has resulted in the powerful “fact” of that fellowship that now exists among us. And so it’s this already accomplished fact of the “fellowship of [Philemon’s] faith” that Paul prays would become “effective” as he continues to have much joy and comfort in Philemon’s love and as the hearts of the saints continue to be refreshed through him. The Apostle John brings together both the (primary) vertical and the (secondary) horizontal dimensions of *koinonia*.

- 1 John 1:3, 6–7 — ...what we have seen and heard [“concerning the Word of Life”; vv. 1-2] we proclaim to you also, so that you may also have **fellowship with** [*meta*; et. al.] **us**; and indeed our **fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ**... If we say that we have **fellowship with Him** and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not do the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have **fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Remember, now, that in the single use of the word “fellowship” (*koinonia*) in all the Law and the Prophets (lxx), there’s no hint of the weight of meaning that this word comes to have in the apostolic writings. In the New Testament, this word is invested with new, redemptive-historical and eschatological meaning. It’s almost as if this word—though it’s still spelled and pronounced the same as it was before Christ—is now an entirely new and different word.⁸ This is why Paul can speak, now, of “the fellowship of [God’s] Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,” of the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit,” of the “fellowship of [Christ’s] sufferings,” and of the “fellowship of our faith.” When Luke writes here in Acts chapter 2 of “the fellowship,” he’s speaking of a reality that didn’t exist before Christ.⁹ We see, then, why those whom Christ has just added to His “end-times” (eschatological) people were so zealously devoting themselves not only to “the teaching of the apostles,” but also to “the fellowship.” “The fellowship” is that eschatological reality of having come to share with one another in Christ insofar as we have come to share with one

⁸ The older more “mundane” meaning is not entirely abandoned.

1 Timothy 5:22 — Do not lay hands upon anyone hastily and thereby **share** [partake / have fellowship] in [dative] the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

Hebrews 2:14 — Therefore, since the children **partake** of flesh and blood [genitive], He Himself likewise also partook [*metecho*] of the same...

2 John 10–11 — If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting, for the one who gives him a greeting **participates** in [dative] his evil deeds.

2 Corinthians 6:14–16 — Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what **partnership** have righteousness and lawlessness, or what **fellowship** has light with [*pros*] darkness? Or what **harmony** has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer **in common** with an unbeliever? Or what **agreement** has a sanctuary of God with idols?

Galatians 2:9 — ...James and Cephas and John... gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of **fellowship**, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

⁹ As a close associate of Paul, and as one who was writing Acts after almost all of Paul’s letters had already been written, there is no reason to assume that Luke’s reference to “the fellowship” cannot carry any of the same weight that this reference would carry if it appeared in Paul. Indeed, Luke clearly means for us to see that the context of Pentecost automatically invests “the fellowship” with a theological and eschatological meaning identical to what we see in Paul.

another in the Holy Spirit whom He has poured out upon us. And how were these new believers devoting themselves continually to “the fellowship”? I believe the answer is to be found in the next two things to which Luke says they were continually devoting themselves.

II. Acts 2:42c-d — And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, **to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.**¹⁰

I believe “the breaking of bread,” here, refers not just to any “fellowship meal” (cf. Jer. 15:36-37; Mat. 16:7; Lk. 9:16-17; 24:30, 35), but specifically to the Lord’s Supper (cf. Lk. 22:19; Acts 20:7, 11; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24).¹¹ The Lord’s Supper is an eschatological meal—a meal that didn’t exist before Christ and that *could only* exist after Him. Listen to Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:

- **1 Corinthians 11:23–26** — For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was being betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.

Not only is the Lord’s Supper an eschatological meal, it’s also the sign of our mutual participation in, and fellowship in, Christ; it’s the sign of the fellowship that we have with one another (horizontal) in Christ (vertical). So Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 10:

- **1 Corinthians 10:16–17** (cf. Lk. 22:14-20) — Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a **sharing/partaking** [together] of the blood of Christ [lit. “a fellowship of (genitive) the blood of Christ”? Is not the bread which we break a **sharing/partaking** [together] of the body of Christ [lit. “a fellowship of (genitive) the body of Christ”? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake [*metecho*] of the one bread.¹²

As the eschatological people that we are, we ought to be continuously devoting ourselves to this meal—to this cup of blessing which we bless and this bread which we break. We ought to be faithfully and earnestly attending to this sign of that fellowship that we have now with one another in Christ.

And what about “the prayers”? As with “the teaching of the apostles,” “the fellowship,” and “the breaking of bread,” “the prayers” must also be seen in their eschatological context. They almost certainly refer not just to the Jewish prayers at the temple (cf. Acts 3:1), but especially to the believers’ now calling upon the name of Jesus as “Lord and Christ” (cf. Acts 2:21; 9:14, 21;

¹⁰ While it seems that most commentators reject the view that “the breaking of bread and... the prayers” is in apposition to “the fellowship,” I find this view to be the most attractive/convincing (cf. Polhill, NAC; Bruce, NICNT).

¹¹ The context of v. 42 seems to me to require this, especially if the meaning of “the fellowship” that I have argued for is correct (cf. Polhill, NAC; Bruce, NICNT; Schnabel, ZECNT; contra: Peterson, PNTC).

¹² Cf. Fee (NICNT); Barret (BNTC); Thiselton (NIGTC); Garland (BENTC)

22:16; Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 1:2) and offering up prayers to the Father in Jesus' name (cf. Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16). Remember what Jesus said to His disciples on the night that He was betrayed:

- John 16:23–24, 26–27 — “[I]f you ask the Father for anything *in My name*, He will give it to you. **Until now** you have asked for nothing *in My name*; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made complete... **On that day** you will ask *in My name*...”

“The prayers,” then, are just as eschatological in nature as the Lord’s Supper. Furthermore, just like the Lord’s Supper, the prayers are also a sign of our mutual participation and fellowship in Christ—of our fellowship with one another in Christ. This is so because it’s the whole congregation that participates together in the prayers with the congregational “Amen” (cf. 1 Cor. 14:16). We read in Acts one:

- Acts 1:14 — These all *with one accord* were continually devoting themselves to prayer.

And, of course, so much of the New Testament teaching on prayer has to do with prayers for one another as fellow partakers of life in Messiah’s kingdom.¹³ As the eschatological people that we are, therefore, we ought to be continuously devoting ourselves to “the prayers.” We ought to be faithfully and earnestly attending to this expression of that fellowship that we have now with one another in Christ.

In short, as the eschatological people that we are, we ought to be faithfully and earnestly attending upon these times: receiving the word that is preached to us not as the word of men but as the very word of God, sharing together in “the breaking of bread,” and engaging together in “the prayers.” Indeed, it’s our continual devotion to “the teaching of the apostles” and to “the fellowship” that is to be our defining mark and characteristic as the end-times community that we are—as those who are even now participants in the “final drama” of redemptive history.

Conclusion

May God give to us that same “fear”—that same “trembling awe”—that came upon every soul in Acts 2. May He cause us to be always faithfully and earnestly attending upon these times as the eschatological people that we are. May God graciously work in us this whole-hearted obedience for His glory and our joy.

¹³ Eph. 1:16; 6:18; 2 Cor. 1:11; 9:14; Rom. 1:10; 12:12; 15:13; 2 Cor. 13:9; Phil. 1:4, 9, 19; Col. 1:3, 9; 4:2-3, 12; 1 Thess. 1:2; 3:10; 5:25; 2 Thess. 1:11; 3:1; 2 Tim. 1:3; Philem. 4, 6, 22; Heb. 13:18; James 5:16; 3 Jn. 2