

Perseverance

Acts 2: 41-47 (N. Tr.)

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Whilst we are singularly favoured of God with the knowledge of His Word we have nothing of which to boast in ourselves, as it is written, "he that boasts, let him boast in the Lord" (2 Corinthians 10: 17).

Do we so value the wealth of divine revelation that we persevere in the appreciation and practice of it in the face of mounting opposition? How striking it is to read of these early converts that they *persevered*. In what did they persevere? First of all, in the apostles' teaching. The outstanding feature of this is the pre-eminence of Christ. In the words of Scripture "Christ is everything and in all" (Colossians 3: 11). We cannot envisage a confession of the pre-eminent Christ without bowing in thanksgiving before God, for the full knowledge of God has reached us through our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Has He not said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me"? This adorable Person, to whom we are eternally indebted for wealth of divine revelation, is the focal point of the apostles' teaching.

The gospel is "the gospel of God . . . concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord;" it is also the gospel "of the glory of the blessed God" (1 Timothy 1: 11), and the gospel "of the glory of the Christ, who is the image of God." We learn from Ephesians 1 that in the administration of the fullness of time God will head up all things in heaven and earth in Christ. He is the destined centre of the world to come. If we consider the mystery, the revelation of the truth of Christ and the Assembly, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden there. We know that the full truth of all this — Paul's gospel and Paul's doctrine — was not revealed at the time of Acts 2, but we are now favoured with the completion of the Word of God, and it is certainly right to say that the outstanding feature of the apostle's teaching is the pre-eminence of Christ.

We urge our younger brethren to feast their souls upon Christ as presented in the Holy Scriptures. In the gospels for His life of spotless worth; His declaration of God; His manifestation of the Father; His redeeming death; His glorious resurrection; His promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit; and finally, His being received up in glory. Then the Acts with the blessed effects of the coming of the Spirit, and the formation of the Assembly as the vessel for the continuance, morally, of the life of Christ in the very world which had rejected Him; followed by the epistles with their teaching of the galaxy of glory, centring in the Christ of God. The deep things of God are unfolded to us by the Holy Spirit in these inspired writings, but faith and affection for Christ are essential if we are to gain from the Spirit's ministry. Let us remember that the children of Israel in Egypt all fed on the Lamb roast with fire. In the wilderness they were all sustained by the same manna, and all drank of the same refreshing stream from the smitten rock. Do not be afraid of deep truth — do not be deterred from searching out the precious things of heaven. No truth, however simple or deep, is discernible by the natural minds, but be assured that the Spirit of God adapts the divine riches to the feeblest apprehension, leading us on in spiritual expansion. Go in, dear young believers, for the knowledge of Christ. God is going to put the impress of Christ on everything in the world to come and He works now, in the power of the Spirit, to put the impress on our spirits. Christ ". . . filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1: 23).

As Christ becomes pre-eminent in our hearts and lives we shall persevere in the apostles' teaching. We shall not move outside the scope of the divine teaching (see 2 John: 9, 10) — we shall abide in the doctrine. One of the marks of the true disciple is to "hear" the apostles (1 John 4: 5, 6).

The complement of the apostles' teaching is the "fellowship." It would seem that while individual responsibility is everywhere enjoined upon us as believers, we are in danger of treating fellowship as a minimal quantity. Let us not lose sight of the fact that Assembly privilege and responsibility are incumbent upon us. There is an interesting passage in the great faith chapter, Hebrews 11: 28, as to Moses, "By faith *he* celebrated the passover;" then in the next verse, "by faith *they* passed through the Red Sea."

The moment we came under the shelter of the redeeming blood of Christ, we became part of a unique company — the Assembly of God. In the Laodicean condition of religious profession the voice of our Lord sounds as He stands, knocking, outside the door, "If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with Me."

Please note, that while He appeals to the individual He aims at recovery on Assembly lines, for He says, "he that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Assemblies" (Revelation 3: 22).

Through the apostles' teaching we are brought together by the Spirit's power under the attraction of the pre-eminent Christ. This fellowship, divinely formed, is regulated by the apostolic teaching. Fellowship is a "sharing together," a joint participation. In our case it is related to the acknowledgment of the Lordship of Jesus, and in the light and enjoyment of what is revealed in Him as Son of God — "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

We are not just so many individual believers bound for heaven some day; we are associated together, we have a common status and common blessings and responsibilities. We are in this fellowship by the calling of God. Our bond is the Spirit of God. The basis of the fellowship, as we learn from 1 Corinthians 10, is the blood of Christ. While we sing "In that death all love was centred" let us not forget that God's judgment upon all that we were according to the flesh, and upon all that the world is, has been clearly set forth in that death. The fellowship is established by God outside of all human organisation and association. Christ is owned as Lord there, and those in it rejoice in the divine blessing administered there by Him.

1 Corinthians 10 distinguishes the Assembly of God from everything belonging to this world, hence the apostle exhorts us to "give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." The Assembly is a distinct entity, and the fellowship of believers is Assembly fellowship. For fellowship to be practically realized there must be unity of heart and mind. We are exhorted to "be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

Whose mind is to predominate in this blessed fellowship? The Spirit would immerse our minds in the mind of Christ, "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." This is the lowly mind, the self-effacing mind, the mind to go down. This certainly is unnatural to us — there is no rush to take the lead in being least among the brethren. Do we not like to be recognised? To be thought something of? Think on the Cross, dear brethren, our blessed Lord made Himself of no reputation, He humbled Himself even unto the death of the Cross. What are we? What is our dignity, our opinion, our reputation, in the light of the Cross of Christ? As we are led into communion with Christ His mind will be formed in us and true fellowship result.

1 Corinthians 2: 16, speaks of "the mind of Christ." This is a different word from that used in Philippians 2. We have the ability to think right. We have a thinking faculty (in having the Spirit) which is "of Christ." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God."

How richly favoured is the fellowship in which God has set us, for there by His Spirit dwelling in us, is the ability to think according to God, and this way of thinking translates itself in moral power into a way of living. The beautiful graces of Christ are reproduced in those who have part in this wonderful fellowship.

There are no spectators where fellowship is known and enjoyed; all believers are active participators. How sad if we are content to sit back and leave everything to others. Responsibility is commensurate with privilege. May we have grace and diligence to shoulder our responsibilities. Whilst the spirit of grace would give us to share sympathetically in helping any who are experiencing pressure under the weight of trial, none of us is excused from carrying his own load in the service of God (Galatians 6: 2, 5). When the camp of Israel set forward in its wilderness journeyings the Levites carried their own appointed load. True Levitical service is open to us all in the fellowship, for we are, each and all, privileged as well as responsible to bear the testimony of the Lord.

Do not let us make room for the disruptive spirit of clergy and laity amongst the saints. WE have *one* Lord, *one* Head — Christ. anyone who has received gifts from the ascended Head must exercise it in the fellowship as the Lord's servant. We are all servants of the pre-eminent Christ. "Let every man prove his own work."

May we give all that we are and have in the support of the testimony of our Lord. What we have received is certainly not for self-glory but for the glory of the Lord and for the good of all. We are all "stewards of the manifold grace of God." "As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another . . . If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4: 10, 11).

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The first feature of the second couplet of those things in which these believers persevered is "the breaking of bread." The fellowship which is regulated by the apostles' teaching is expressed in the breaking of bread. As believers gather on the first day of the week for the remembrance of their Lord in His appointed way, they give expression to at least two things. One is that the fellowship is based upon the death of their Lord, and the other is that it embraces all who are redeemed in virtue of their having been baptized by one Spirit into one body. "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" (1 Corinthians 10: 16, 17).

When we bless the cup we declare that our fellowship is based upon the shedding of His blood. This has bought us justification from our guilt; cleansing from our sins; and has given us boldness for entering the holiest of all — the presence of our God. As we break the bread we declare that the love of Christ has been expressed in the offering of His body, once for all, and that we have been sanctified, set apart to God. This involves the solemn teaching that all that was contrary to God in us has been dealt with in holy judgment at the cross. Consider such Scriptures as these: "Our old man has been crucified with Him" (Romans 6: 6) "Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Romans 7: 4).

In regard to the abolition of the distance which sin had brought in between us and God — "and you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death" (Colossians 1: 21, 22). The whole question of sin and guilt has been dealt with to God's entire satisfaction in the death of Jesus. The breaking of bread in which we participate expresses our hearty identification with Christ in His death. May we truly answer

to that by standing apart in holy separation from all that has been judged in His death.

Let us draw attention here to the fact that all believers are viewed as blessing the up and breaking bread. It is *abnormal* for any believer not to participate in "breaking bread." The act of partaking of the Lord's supper is before us in 1 Corinthians 11, while in chapter 10 we have the solemn obligation resting upon those who do partake. That act puts us under responsibility to be true to the Lord whose table it is. As we break bread together we express that we are one loaf, one body. We are thus responsible to be true to that membership of the one body of Christ. Faithfulness would lead us to stand apart from every religious *organisation* which virtually denies the existence of this living *organism*, the body of Christ. Whilst we may break bread only once a week, on the first day, or as often as we do, we are always at the Lord's Table. We are always in the fellowship and so always responsible to be true to it, and to our Lord.

As we take account of the Lord's own words spoken from the glory to the apostle Paul, "This is My body which is for you," we are reminded of the love which brought Him down from glory to the death of the cross. Think of all that was sacrificially involved for Him there — being made sin, being abandoned of God — and let us praise Him again and again. As we think of Him bearing the judgment of God let us say, "Grace and obedience brought Him where sin and disobedience brought us." The distance now is gone and in consequence standing in the known favour of God, let us partake of the Lord's Supper in responsive love to Him as in fellowship with all saints and with an intelligence gained from thankful acceptance of the apostles' teaching.

The last feature of the things in which these believers persevered is — "and in prayers." Not just one prayer meeting a week but "prayers." The whole tenor of our way is to be marked by prayer. We read, "persevere in prayer" (Colossians 4: 2).

The fellowship regulated by the apostles' teaching, expressed in the breaking of bread, is sustained by prayer. Praying, individually and collectively, bespeaks awareness of our own need and weakness, and at the same time expresses our complete dependence upon and confidence in God. How soon would our difficulties and troubles which do arise — often because we have been untrue to the fellowship through disobedience to the apostles' teaching — be solved were we brought down together before God in believing prayer. Our Lord is the Master of Assemblies, and He is sufficient for every situation and would gladly be entreated of. Instead of trusting to any fancied ability of our own let us get quickly to Him in prayer. He hears and He answers prayer. If we give ourselves to prayer we shall gain in His presence needed wisdom, so that every exigency might be met to His honour with consequent blessing. James says, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Let us pray more and talk less. In the presence of God we are all brought low, but if brought low He will lift us up. How much need there is for prayers. Pray for one another; pray for the Lord's servants; pray for the prosperity of His Word among the saints; pray for the out-going of the gospel; pray for all saints; pray for all men; pray for rulers and all in authority; pray in all things, pray in all places, persevere in prayers. A trusting people is a confident, contented and serviceable people.

There was an issue from all this in Acts 2. Fear came upon every soul. There was a powerful spiritual influence exerted and felt inside the company and felt also outside the company. While a transitional character is obvious in this book we simply observe that though they continued daily in the temple there was a divinely formed perception which discerned between the old earthly order soon to go out and the new heavenly order coming in. They broke bread from house to house. They distinguished the breaking of bread from the temple order. The element of separation early manifested itself. May we in our late day in the testimony of our Lord separate the precious from the vile — "Let

us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13: 13).

Finally, verse 47, there were "praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added . . . daily." There was blessing upwards — praising God, there was blessing downwards — such as should be saved.

God grant that we may be powerfully affected by His Word, to the end that we might persevere in these blessed things under the attraction of the PRE-EMINENT CHRIST.