

CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONS IV: CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Christian living is not an isolated affair, but a matter of belonging with others in God's countercultural society, the church.

Teaching section

N.T. descriptions of the church

Each of these pictures emphasises a different aspect of Christian belonging. What do they imply?

The family of God (Gal.4.4-7, Eph.2.17-19)

The bride of Christ (2 Cor.11.1-3, Eph.5.25-33, Rev.21.2-8)

The temple of the Spirit (Eph.2.19-22, 1 Cor.3.16)

The colony of heaven (Phil.3.20)

The body of Christ (Eph.4.15,16)

The army of God (Eph.6.10-20).

Functions of the Church

Worship – our responsibility to God

Fellowship – our responsibility to each other

Witness and Service – our responsibility to the world for which Christ died.

1 Peter 2.1-12 interweaves all three.

The unity of the church

Jesus prayed for his followers to be one (John 17.20f) and they managed it (more or less) in the early days. In due course, human frailty and particular emphases led to denominations. But God hates division in his people. Despite all appearances, there *is* a God given unity among all Christians (Eph.4.4-6) We must seek to preserve and regain that unity.

The N.T. knows nothing of a clergy-laity hierarchy. It knows nothing about denominations. It is clear that nominal membership is not enough. The church is a one-class society transcending all barriers of gender, education, class, and nationality (Eph.2.14-18, Gal.3.28). It knows no differing status among Christians, only differing functions (Eph.4.11,12). Love is the bond which should unite us all (Col.3.14).

The church is both universal (Matt.16.18) and local (eg.Col.1.2). It is both invisible and has visible manifestations. Repentance and faith is the gateway into God's invisible church (1 Peter 2.4) and baptism is the mark of members of the visible church (Ac.16.30,31). Outward profession does not guarantee inward commitment, but should accompany it (Rom.10.9,10).

If you have not been baptised you should request it (Matt.28.19, Gal.3.26,27) Then you will be able to take part in the family meal, the Holy Communion, or Eucharist, which Jesus enjoined on his followers in memory of his death, as a means of growing in grace, and as a foretaste of heaven (1 Cor.11.23-6).

Verse to learn 1 Cor.12.27 'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.'

Bible study section Romans 12.1-13

1. What does true worship involve?
2. The church is Christ's body on earth. What implications flow from this? Do you see them in your local church?
3. If 'each member belongs to all the others' (v.5) what does this mean for our relationships?
4. According to Paul we all have different gifts and abilities. What do each of you think you have? What do others in the group think you have? How is it being used for the common good in your Christian community?
5. Examine the practical fruits mentioned in this passage which flow from wholehearted surrender to the Lord. Is anything holding you back from 'presenting your body as a living sacrifice'?

Prayer time

Get into pairs. Pray over the discernment and use of each other's gifts. Then think of one thing you would love to see happen in your church. Pray for it and commit yourself to do so each day during the coming week.