

## Lesson 5: Being added to the church (Psalm 92:13)

Today we will study Foundations Class lesson 5, "Being added to the church." It's neither about "going to a church" nor "attending a Sunday service."

I used to think that "Now I've got a ticket to heaven. Why do I have to be added to the church? I can be a Christian by myself."

The truth set me free from this illusion. Repentance, to believe in God and turn back to him is not the goal of Christian's life. We believe Jesus and accept him as our savior and the Lord. We are born again by the work of the Holy Spirit, and remain in Jesus, live with him, and love him, follow him, obey him, serve him. We will know him more and be transformed more like him in the relationship with him. For those things, we must be added to the church.

### 1. God Adds His People to the Church

Jesus said "I will build my church." (Matt 16:18) This is his purpose to come to the earth. He would build his church. It was not enough for him to call individual sinners to the Father only. He adds people to a flock of disciples. (Acts 2:41, 47) He never keeps his followers away from one another, but he leads them to a local church and connects one another so that they can grow. (Eph.2:21-22, 4:16)

If you are connected to Christ, you are taking a part of His body, and you are supposed to be added to a local church, and be equipped through teaching there, and function as a part of the church, and grow with the church. (Col. 2:19, Eph. 2:21-22)

### 2. The Church is Universal and Local

The Church is universal, the universal company of people who have experienced the saving grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the church is local, the local assembling of God's people, the local congregation at a specific place.

Some people have this kind of thought. "I want to be connected to Christ directly. Therefore, I join the universal Church, not one particular local church only." At first sight, it seems good thought, but it is actually not practical. If you look at your body, you can see it clearly. If any part of your body does not take any part of one organ of your body, it is impossible for it to be connected to your body. For example, an elbow. If your elbow is connected to your body, the

elbow has to take part of your arm. If your elbow doesn't take part of your arm, how can your elbow be connected to your body?

Some people have this kind of thought. "I want to be connected to Christ deeply. If I attend only one church, my faith may become partial. Therefore, I go to any church as the Spirit leads me." At first sight, it seems very spiritual, but actually it doesn't work that way. If you do that, you can relate to each church only superficially, you will never be connected close enough to understand or experience Christ's whole being deeply, as you don't deal with something in your gut level. It's something like you always eat at buffet. You can just eat what you like as much as you want to. God uses people and occasions to shape us up, to change us more like Jesus. But when you are uncomfortable, you just move and move and move. You feel good always. But the problems in you are still there.

### 3. Seven Elements of Commitment in a Local Church

#### 1) Committed to the Assembly of the Saints

The Word of God teaches us to meet together.

##### Heb 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

If you are working for a company, you will go to the office and attend your business. If you don't do that, you cannot be the worker of the company. If you are a student of a school, you will go to the school and sit down at your class room and take your lessons. If you don't do that, you cannot be the student of the school. If you are taking a part of a church, you will join the meetings and fellowship, and be involved in activities and ministries of the church. If you don't do that, you cannot be a part of the church.

#### 2) Devoted to Fellowship

The Word of God teaches us to build up relationship.

##### 1 John 1:3

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

To attend a meeting and sit down in the meeting, and to join a church and have sincere fellowship with others are not the same, they are two different things. It is possible for you to attend Sunday services every week, without being connected to anyone, just come and go.

For example, a movie theater. People come there at the same time, and go into the same room. They sit down side by side, looking at the same thing, listening to the same music and thinking about the same story. They laugh together and cry together. Although they spend one and half or two hours together, they never know each other. Even if they often come to the same theater for many years, they still never know each other.

The church is not a movie theater. We devote to fellowship there.

Here I'd like to talk about Communion or the Lord's Supper.

"The token of bread and wine at the Lord's Supper ... are a solemn pledge of God's mercy and forgiveness offered to the sinner on the grounds of Christ's death. The believer is encouraged to 'relive' [or experience] the personal application of the cross: Christ has died for him, and has suffered for his sins, that he might live. The personal receiving of the bread and wine emphasizes this truth."<sup>1</sup>

So, taking part of Communion is a personal action based on each of our own belief. And, it is a communal experience.

Communion, eating the same bread and taking the cup together, shows our unity. We are called for "enjoying the fellowship of God's family assembled together for the meal. ... It [the Lord's Supper] should be a love-feast, when we experience the love of God binding together in Christ. It is very much a family meal."<sup>2</sup>

It's you who make decision to be connected with this community of believers, a *koinonia* or *communio*. When you take Communion, you are showing that you are a part of Jesus' family, and that you would keep the unity.

"In this fellowship [the Lord's Supper] they draw strength for their service in the world. Because this meal is a meal of recollection and thanksgiving, the Church is essentially a community which remembers and thanks. And because this meal is a meal of covenant and fellowship, the Church is essentially a community, which loves without ceasing. And because finally this meal is an

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<sup>1</sup> David Watson, *I Believe in The Church*, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1978, p.239

<sup>2</sup> David Watson, *I Believe in The Church*, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1978, p.240

anticipation of the eschatological meal, the Church is essentially a community which looks to the future with confidence." <sup>3</sup>

Who may take Communion? Those who believe Jesus' death and resurrection, and receive him as Savior and the Lord, the Creator and Almighty, and being added to a church, which is usually demonstrated by taking water baptism.

What about children? This is my personal opinion. They are supposed to be part in this "family-meal-fellowship" under their parent's instruction. Some may just be together, observing what parents do and learning what it means. Some may take part together with their parents. In any case, they understand that they are parts of this community. They learn who Jesus is for them personally as well as for this community. Practically we don't take much time to explain the meaning of Communion each time. I'd like to encourage parents to teach about Communion to their children at home in many different occasions.

### 3) Doers of the Word and Not Hearers Only

And even though people are involved in the church actively and have fellowship with others, if they just listen to the messages and teachings, and not put them into practice, they cannot be healthy Christians, for God placed pastors there to equip His people and grow them into maturity. (Eph 4:11-15)

#### James 1:22

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

To listen and understand the Word and to practice it are two different things. Those who just listen to the Word but don't put it into practice are deceiving themselves. I hope you don't want to deceive yourself.

People who commit in the church, they will do what they heard and learned there.

### 4) Committed to a Life of Servant-hood

#### Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Küng, introduced by David Watson, *I Believe in The Church*, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1978, p.244

The characteristic of the life of Jesus is servant-hood. Although he was the Lord, he knelt down and washed his disciple's dirty feet. He set up the model for his followers. (John 13:15)

### 1 Peter 4:10

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

The church is the place where we serve for each other.

It is wonderful that our church welcomes people warmly and serves people kindly. But it is a wrong attitude if you always expect to be a receiver and others to be servers. It is wrong expectation that others should take care of you to make you feel satisfied always.

Let's imagine you went to a restaurant. You chose a seat and sat down there. You ordered drink and food. If your drink and food didn't come as you had expected, you would call a waiter, and asked him to check the kitchen. You would make a complaint that the music was too loud or the air-conditioners didn't work well. After you enjoyed somehow, you would pay, gave a tip and left there. You never care about washing up the dishes and cleaning up the table. On the way to go home, you scored about their food and service and prices like a critic in the TV show. It's no problem to do so for restaurants. But the church is not a restaurant. It's the place where we serve for each other.

### 5) Financial Support

How much of our income actually belong to us? Some may say 100%. Some may say 90% because we give tithe. But actually, everything belongs to God.

All we have is given by God. As God entrusts us with money, we need to use them wisely for his sake. (1 Cor 10:31) God trusts us money and resources. We use them in stewardship. As a faithful steward we use 100% of our money which God entrusts with us. First we will return to God 10% of them. That is tithe. Then we will use the rest of 90% asking wisdom from God. You surly use them for healthy food and healthy living. You may make saving. You may offer more.

The Bible clearly mentions about tithe. Jesus mentioned about tithe. (Matt 23:23) We don't have to limit our offering to tithe. And it is not only those who are wealthy or who have money more than they need.

### 2 Cor 8:2-5

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Tithe and offering comes from giving ourselves to the Lord. It's the same for everyone, rich and poor. The Word of God encourages us to give tithe and offering in any circumstances, as we demonstrate our trust in God.

Where do we tithe?

Some may say that "I know another church which is facing financial difficulty. So I give them tithe." Some may say that "I don't like the way of using money in my church. So I give tithe to the church which has ministries I like."

The Bible says "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt 6:21) Whatever reason, if you don't tithe at the church, your heart is not at that church. It is healthy if your body, mind and spirit are together. The principle is to tithe at the church where you are involved in practically.

## 6) Biblical Oversight and Accountability

### Eph 4:11-13

<sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The Lord gives pastors for churches. Pastors have roles and responsibilities God entrusts. And God gives them authority to practice those roles and responsibilities. For salvation, there is no one who can mediate for you before God, except Jesus. However, the Lord gives churches pastors to lead them and to raise them. If you don't accept their authority, in essence, you are also denying God's authority. The Bible teaches us to respect their authority. (1 Thess 5:11-12, Heb 13:17)

## 7) Committed to be Bonded Together in Love

### Col 3:12-14

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

My simple translation is "don't gossip."

What is "gossiping" or "backbiting"? Probably you may think "it is to speak something you should not tell others." It is correct, but it is only half of what it means. Actually the other half is more important. That is, "it is to listen to something you should not listen to."

We usually think that because someone speaks, the words of gossiping and backbiting spread out. But if no one listens to them, the words of gossiping and backbiting never spread out. If you listen to gossiping and backbiting, you also take part in gossiping and backbiting.

#### Eph 4:16

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The strength and growth of the church depends on how people are joined and knitted with one another. Gossiping and backbiting break the relationship between people. Here a simple application. Let's think how you can show the love of Christ in the situation. It's simple to think about it, but hard to do it. We definitely need the help of the Holy Spirit.

For closing, I'd like to share what David Watson said.

"In today's world, feeling of loneliness and alienation are everywhere to be found, leaving a flood of depression and despair. What is at the root of this tragic state of affairs? A fundamental cause is that there is little or no sense of 'belonging'." "In contrast, the heart and core of God's message to man through the Scripture is that he desires a people – a community – to share in his life."

The concept of the church "as 'the people of God' – as God's new society, his family, his community – breaks upon many today as the most thrilling 'good news' they could ever hear. And what a transformation it can bring when a person knows that he belongs to God and to his people for ever! In an age of isolation, the joy of really belonging to God and of being a part of his people throughout the world – a belonging which depends not on earning acceptance,

but on receiving freely of God's love – is one of the most relevant features of the Christian message of good news." <sup>4</sup>

Psalm 92:13

Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God.

God never keeps his people away from one another, but he leads them to a local church and plants them there so that "they will flourish in the courts of our God." Being added to the church is God's plan that we can grow and bear fruit there, and we can share sadness and joy there, and we can encourage and strengthen one another there. And it is the powerful witness of God's presence and righteousness, power and love to the world.

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<sup>4</sup> David Watson, *I Believe in The Church*, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1978, pp.74-75