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Conducted by  
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**“Is Acts 2:42 a pattern for New Testament worship (order of meeting necessarily to be followed), and, does “fellowship” in that verse mean simply giving (in the contribution) ?**

Last month an attempt was made to give an answer to the first question above. This month an answer to the second question will be suggested.

### **“The Fellowship”**

The early disciples continued in various things steadfastly and one such thing was the fellowship. In last month's answer we noticed that, apart from the breaking of the bread, the things in which the early Christians participated were not confined to one

meeting on one day, nor indeed confined to the whole of one day. The apostles' doctrine was continued in steadfastly seven days per week, as were the prayers, as was the "fellowship." I am thereby suggesting that the "fellowship" was not simply the giving of a contribution on the first day of the week—indeed was not simply giving at all, at any time, but meant and means much more than this, as I hope we shall see.

"Fellowship" in the New Testament means communion; joint participation; being joined in partnership, contributing and distributing. The original Greek word is "koinonia" and is usually translated "fellowship," but in 2 Cor. 9:13 is translated "distribution" and in Romans 15:26 "contribution." The same word (koinonia) is also translated "communion" in 1 Cor. 10:16, 2 Cor. 6:14, 2 Cor. 13:14 and "communication" in Philemon verse 6 and "communicate" in Hebrews 13:16. Young's Greek concordance will confirm these statements and also inform us that "communion" means "the act of using a thing in common" and that "distribution" means "a sharing" and a "joint participation."

Fellowship then does not "mean simply giving" (as per the question) but means joint participation in religious privileges and responsibilities, a giving and a receiving, a *contribution and a distribution*, not only of money, but of helps and kindnesses.

To further illustrate the point that "fellowship" is not confined to giving let it be remembered that we have fellowship with God (1 John 1:3); fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9); fellowship with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14) and fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). Surely "fellowship" in these passages does not refer only to giving but has a depth of meaning too that cannot be plumbed at all by man; and the "fellowship" in these quotations is precisely the same "fellowship" as is used in Acts 2:42 in the question.

The fellowship of Acts 2:42 refers to our joint participation with God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and one another in all the blessings, benefits and tribulations of the gospel of Jesus Christ brought about by His atoning death on Calvary's tree—"communion" in the fullest sense and experienced seven days of each week.

### Money and the Church

In any event "the giving" in fellowship is not confined to the first day of the week. 1 Cor. 16:1,2 says "now concerning the collection, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." This was an instruction given to the churches in Galatia and at Corinth in connection with a special collection for the saints at Jerusalem. It is, however, also a convenient time for us to lay by in store as God has prospered us but we are not precluded from providing for the needs of others at other times, materially and spiritually (see Acts 4:34,35). Unfortunately the work of the church cannot be carried out without money (at least some of the work requires money) although today we wonder if money will not have a part in the downfall of the church. It certainly is the cause of some individual members falling away. Financial prosperity brings ease, luxury and affluence—ideal conditions for a drift away from a dependence upon God. It is true of a nation, a person and a church. Israel forgot and forsook God after they had been blessed and prospered by Him. However, money can oil the wheels of progress in the Lord's work as well as the world's commerce, and just as a contribution without distribution avails nothing, so a distribution without a contribution is an impossibility. It is said that the Mormon Church is, per member, one of the richest religious groups financially in the world because they tithe in the Old Testament manner—a moral here, no doubt.

### A Privilege of Christians

Perhaps a final comment on this question of fellowship in Acts 2:42 should concern the fact that it was *those who had obeyed the gospel* (the early *disciples*) who "continued in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Rightly, therefore, "the giving" is confined to those who are members of the Lord's body, those who continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. Some have argued that since fellowship means contribution and distribution and, if the contributing is confined to members of the Lord's body only, *distribution* should also be thus

confined to members of the church, *i.e.* that church funds must only be used for the benefit of church members. Certainly "the fellowship" is limited to the confines of the Lord's body—has Jesus fellowship with the unsaved? "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? . . ." (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

Therefore just as the breaking of the bread is to be participated in only by those obedient to the gospel, so is the fellowship in contribution to be confined in exactly the same way. But is the fellowship in *distribution* restricted to members of the church? It is true that after we have given into the Lord's treasury the money ceases to be ours and has become the Lord's in a rather special way, and we must have a care in what we do with it. It is also true that when brethren are in need we have a duty to alleviate their condition as much as lies within our power, as witness the brethren at Antioch and Corinth (Acts 11:29,30 and 2 Cor. chaps. 8 & 9). At the same time, however, surely Jesus taught us in the parable of the good Samaritan, that we should be a neighbour not only to the man whose house adjoins ours, or whose land meets ours, but to anyone at all who needs us and indeed to our very bitterest enemies. Dorcas was a woman who spent all her time making garments to help the poor—does anything in Acts 9:36-43 lead us to suppose that she confined her distribution of succour to church members? Surely not.

May it be that God shall help us all to do what Paul exhorts us to do in Gal. 6:10 "As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Do good, or distribute, to all men not just church members.

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