

## Fellowship, Have, Share, Participate

The following article deals with words which have to do with having, sharing and participation and **fellowship**. The two key words that are examined together with their associated ideas are *echō* (have), and *koinōnia* (communion, **fellowship**).

**ἔχω** G2400 (*echō*), have; **μετέχω** G3576 (*metechō*), share, participate in; **μετοχή** G3580 (*metochē*), sharing, participation; **μέτοχος** G3581 (*metochos*), partaking, sharing, participating, a partner, companion.

**CL** *echō* means to have or hold in wide range of senses: possess, keep, have, hold; aor. acquire, take into possession; intrans. keep, hold oneself. Thus the connection between the subject and object of *echō* can denote a similar wide range of personal, material and metaphorical meanings. Sometimes the subject and object can exchange places. In Gk. one may say “he has a sickness” or “a sickness has him.” Moreover, the word can denote entry into any one of these conditions: to attain to, get hold of, come by.

*metechō* means to share or participate. Its object is always in the gen. The noun *metochē* means sharing, participation, and the adj. *metochos* likewise means sharing.

**NT** The distribution of *echō* in the NT varies considerably in different writings. But it has the same broad range of meaning as in secular Gk. and the LXX. The following aspects are theologically significant.

**1** *echō* is used as an expression for possession and relationship. The phrase *daimonion echein* (to have a demon) which occurs in secular Gk. also occurs in the Synoptics (**Matt. 11:18; Lk. 5:33**). But the demon is only mentioned in the context of Jesus’ lordship over it. For that reason the reproach that he had Beelzebul (**Satan**), i.e. that he was possessed by him, is absurd and blasphemous (**Mk. 3:22, 30**; cf. **Jn. 7:20; 8:48; 10:20 f.**). It may be compared with the expression *akatharton pneuma echein*, to have an unclean spirit (**Mk. 7:25; Lk. 4:33**; and often; cf. **13:11**).

The NT has also such statements as to have children, sons, brothers, a wife etc. *echō* is used absolutely for sexual intercourse (**Matt. 14:4**). The prayer of Esther mentioned above corresponds to the words of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda: “I have no man to put me into the pool” (**Jn. 5:7**). Similarly Paul: “I have no one like him” (**Phil. 2:20**; cf. **1:7**).

Having is used in a theologically significant way in those passages in which relationship with God is involved. The Jews claimed to have God as their father (**Jn. 8:41**). “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven” (**Col. 4:1**). This relationship between God and man is further defined by Christ. Believers have him as their advocate with the Father (**1 Jn. 2:1**) and as high priest (**Heb. 4:14; 8:1; 10:21**). He who despises him already has a judge (**Jn. 12:48**).

2 As in the OT, this having **fellowship** with God is characterized, not by man's striving, but by God's promises and gift. This was also the ground of salvation in the OT. To have salvation is to have it through Jesus Christ. "He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life" (Jn. 5:24). This thought is stressed by Heb., Paul and especially Jn.

Jn. does this in his own special way. "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life" (1 Jn. 5:12). "Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 Jn. 1:9). A man can know of God, talk about him, and even claim to have him, like the false teachers, and still not have him. Here *echō* is the expression for genuine **fellowship** with God and true **faith** in its fullest and deepest sense. To "have **fellowship**" with one another and with Christ (1 Jn. 1:6 f.) is to "know" him (1 Jn. 2:3) and to "abide" in him (v. 6). These polemically intended words all refer to the same thing which is most tersely expressed by *echō*. The same applies to those passages which speak of having eternal **life** (Jn. 3:15 f., 36), **peace** (16:33), and the **light** (8:12; 12:35 f.).

John's opponents see this **fellowship** with God as a mystical mastering of God. For John it is possible only through the Son of God who has become flesh. It comes though the witness of the Holy Spirit whom Christians have (1 Jn. 2:20, 27; 5:10). Those who do not have the witness of the Father and his word living in them do not know God and have no life (Jn. 5:38 ff.). But those who stand in a personal relationship to the historical Jesus through the Spirit have the Father and life (1 Jn. 1:1-3; 4:13 ff.). To this also belong confession (1 Jn. 4:2, 15; 2 Jn. 1:7), abiding in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 1:9), and keeping his word and commandments (1 Jn. 2:3 ff.).

In this way John takes up the prophetic, eschatological message of John the Baptist which saw the promised time of salvation break in with Christ. This is a theme which links Jn. with the Synoptics and Paul. Behind it is the thought of late Jewish apocalyptic that the present is void of salvation. For salvation is revealed only to a few gifted visionaries; it is to be expected in its **fullness** only in the future. However, Jn. and the other NT writers reject this idea. For here and now in the present believers have peace with God (Rom. 5:1), redemption through his blood (Eph. 4:7; Col. 1:14), and access to God's gracious purpose in salvation (Eph. 3:12). Now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). Life as full salvation in Christ (Jn. 3:16, 36) is entered into now.

3 This is strongly emphasized by Paul in a different way. To participate in salvation is to be in Jesus Christ through his **Spirit**. It is a spiritual having. "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit of Christ, his *nous* (mind, 1 Cor. 2:16), gives Paul the authority to summon the church to obedience and imitation of Christ (**Might**, art. *ἐξουσία*). To have the Spirit means to be led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14). The believer is no longer his own (1 Cor. 6:19; cf. 3:16). He is Christ's **slave** (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 7:22). This also means that to have the Spirit and to be bound to this Lord is to have this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7) and to bear continually in our bodies the dying of Jesus (2 Cor. 4:10 ff.). Although the Spirit is the pledge and first fruits (**Gift**, art. *ἀρραβών*, Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5), the believer remains on this side

of the barrier of death which Christ has already broken through. But as the pledge of future resurrection glory he gives us the **certainty** (Rom. 8:11) that one day our earthly house will be destroyed (2 Cor. 5:1) and we shall participate in this glory. To have in this age is to have in hope (Rom. 5:2; Phil. 3:8 ff.; cf. TDNT II 824).

Here lies the point of contrast between Paul and the gnostics. The enthusiasts in Corinth claimed that they had already the resurrection glory (1 Cor. 4:8, 10; 15:12). Paul opposed this with the gospel of the cross (1 Cor. 1:17, 23). In opposition to the self-seeking grandeur of “knowledge” which destroys, Paul stressed love which builds up (8:1). Love is also opposed to libertinism (10:23 f.; 13:2). For the sake of the gospel Paul had to bear much suffering and strife. It even meant bearing the dying of Christ in his own body (2 Cor. 4:10). But in this suffering he also received great strengthening and **comfort** (2 Cor. 1:5).

4 This having is to be understood neither as a permanent possession nor as absolution from obedience. This is underlined by the use of *metechō* in Paul and Heb. To share in *dikaïosynē* (righteousness, justification) puts the whole of a man’s life under obligation, and excludes *anomia* (lawlessness, 2 Cor. 6:14). To be in Christ leaves no room for sin. Participation in the Lord’s Supper rules out participation in pagan sacrifices and vice versa (1 Cor. 10:17, 21). *metechō* is used virtually as a synonym for *κοινωνέω*. In Heb. the concern is above all with sharing in the sufferings and **patience** of Christ. The *metochoi Christou* (those who “share in Christ”, Heb. 3:14; cf. 6:4) are thus called to patient endurance in persecution and holding fast to the true **faith**, so that they may not lose their share in future glory. To be *metochoi paidias* (participants in chastisement, 12:8) is in fact a sign of being a true **child**, for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves (12:6; cf. Prov. 3:12).

5 Just as all spiritual having comes under the lordship of the present and coming Lord, so is also the possession of all material goods. “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7). For all earthly goods God has to be asked in the right attitude (Jas. 4:2). Their use has to be seen in the light of eschatology. Paul is one who has nothing and yet possesses all things (2 Cor. 6:10). Therefore, he urged the Corinthians to have as if they did not have (1 Cor. 7:29 ff.). It is not only for the Corinthians to have as if they did not have (1 Cor. 7:29 ff.). It is not simply that for the sake of future glory they are to break loose from all possessions. They are need (Eph. 4:28). Everything that the NT has to say about having and participating is a testimony to the act of God in Jesus Christ with a view to future glory. But participation is now already a fact through the Holy Spirit who establishes us in sonship, obedience, love and hope.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zondervan Reference Software, Version 2.7. Dictionary of New Testament Theology.

**κοινωνία** G3126 **κοινός** G3123 (*koinos*), common, communal; **κοινόω** G3124 (*koinoō*), make common or impure, defile, profane; **κοινωνέω** G3125 (*koinōneō*), share, have a share in, participate in; **κοινωνία** G3126 (*koinōnia*), association, communion, **fellowship**, participation; **κοινωνικός** G3127 (*koinōnikos*), giving, sharing, liberal; **κοινωνός** G3128 (*koinōnos*), companion, partner, sharer; **συγκοινωνός** G5171 (*synkoinōnos*), participant, partner; **συγκοινωνέω** G5170 (*synkoinōneō*), participate in with someone, be connected with, share.

**CL 1** *koinos* is found from Mycenaean Gk. onwards. When applied to things, it means common, mutual, public. Hence, *to koinon* means the community, common property, in the plur. public affairs, the state. When applied to people, *koinos* means related, a partner, impartial. The corresponding vb. *koinoō* means to have a share in, unite, communicate, and also to profane. *koinōneō* means to possess together, have a share, join oneself to; *koinōnia* communion, participation, intercourse. As an adj., *koinōnos* means common; as a noun, companion, partner.

In the Gk. and Hel. world *koinōnia* was a term which meant the evident, unbroken **fellowship** between the gods and men. Even Philo spoke of “the sublime **fellowship** [of Moses] with the father and creator of the universe” (*Vit. Mos.*, 1, 158). But the word was not used in the LXX to denote the relationship between God and man.

**NT** *koinōnia* is absent from the synoptics and Jn. But it occurs 13 times in Paul and is a typical Pauline term. The same is true of the vb. *koinōneō*. The use of *koinos* and *koinōnia* in **Acts 2** and in general in Lk.’s picture of the primitive church requires special attention. Elsewhere, *koinos* (**Matt. 15:11, 18; Mk. 7:15; Acts 10:14**) and the vb. *koinoō* (**Mk. 7:18; Acts 10:15; 21:28**) mean respectively unclean and to defile. *koinōnos* (**Lk. 5:10; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phlm. 17**) means partner, companion, sharer. In most cases, however, it is to be translated as an adj., sharing, participating in, or by a verbal phrase. *koinōnikos* occurs only in **1 Tim. 6:18**, where it means liberal. *synkoinōnos* (participant, partner) and *synkoinōneō* (participate in with someone, be connected with, share) occur only in Paul and **Rev. 1:9; 18:4**.

**1 Acts 4:32 ff.** gives a picture of the communal sharing of goods which was practised for a time in the early church. This “religious communism of love” (Troeltsch) in the primitive church was the expression of an enthusiastic love. But it presupposed the continuance of private earning and the voluntary character of sacrifice and giving to the needy. There is no hint of either communal production or communal consumption. It was not organized, and is not to be seen in economic categories. It rose out of the untrammelled freedom from care that Jesus preached and from his lofty scorn of goods (**Matt. 6:25-34**). It is to be seen as the continuance of the common life that Jesus led with his disciples (**Lk. 8:1-3; Jn. 12:4 ff.; 13:29**). The idea of equality is completely lacking. The extraordinary action of Barnabas (**Acts 4:36**) and that of Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:1-11**) were singled out for mention. But this does not mean that the community of possessions was general. This would not have been possible for the great majority of church members. Mention of the house of Mary (**Acts 12:12**) indicates that private

ownership continued. Lk.'s general account of the Jerusalem church reflects the attitude of love which was intensified by an acute expectation of the end.

The *koinōnia* in Acts 2:42 can be taken in an absolute sense as an essential part of the life of worship: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). There were thus four main aspects of this way of life (cf. B. Reicke, *Glauben und Leben der Urgemeinde*, 1957, 56). In this case, *koinōnia* could be translated "communion" or "liturgical fellowship in worship." But *koinōnia* expresses something new and independent. It denotes the unanimity and unity brought about by the Spirit. The individual was completely upheld by the community. The Hellenist Luke clearly had in mind the Pythagoreans and the Essenes. The educated reader would have got the impression that here the Greek ideal of society had been realized.

The early church doubtless had financial cares. The fishermen and peasants that had migrated from Galilee would find earning a living difficult in the capital city. Moreover, the economic state of Palestine deteriorated through famine and continued unrest. The impoverishment of the early church was not a consequence of the sharing of possessions. The collections that Paul brought to Jerusalem were a tangible expression of fellowship in the churches. The collection has a religious overtone in 2 Cor. 9:13: "by the generosity of the fellowship (*koinōnias*, RSV "contribution") for them and for all others." For it arises out of the one gospel that unites Jew and Gentile, and belongs to the same spiritual and material giving and taking of which Paul speaks in Rom. 15:26. There was real need in Jerusalem. The poor among the saints at Jerusalem were in the majority. The stream of "spiritual gifts" which flowed from Jerusalem was answered by a counter-stream of "earthly gifts."

The example of the early church remained isolated. Copying its example was neither demanded nor acted upon. The integrity of private property was regarded as a matter of course in all the churches. Christianity brought a new outlook, not a new order of society. At the Evangelical Social Conference in 1895 Friedrich Naumann said: "It is not possible to come to a system of economics from the standpoint of religion." On the other hand, Ernst Troeltsch pointed out that there is an independent revolutionary element in Christianity but no will to instigate revolution (*The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, I, 1931, 39-69).

2 In Paul *koinōnia* and the associated words have a central significance. Close analysis of the term shows that Paul never used *koinōnia* in a secular sense but always in a religious one (H. Seesemann, *Der Begriff koinōnia im Neuen Testament*, 1933, 99). It is never equated with *societas*, companionship or community. It is not a parallel to *ekklēsia* and has nothing to do with the local congregation. Nor does it correspond with the Jewish *ḥ<sup>ab</sup>-ūrah* (fellowship, union). It is not, as in the Stoa, a group of individuals united by a common idea. Hence *koinōnia* is to be sharply distinguished from both Gk. ideas and Judaism.

(a) The idea of an earthly society grounded in human nature is foreign to Paul. For him *koinōnia* refers strictly to the relation of faith to Christ: “the fellowship of his Son” (1 Cor. 1:9), “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:13), “fellowship in the gospel” (Phil. 1:5), “fellowship of faith” (Phlm. 6). In each case the object is in the gen. The “right hand of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9) given to Paul and Barnabas by James, Peter and John was not just a handshake over a deal but mutual recognition of being in Christ. Similarly, *koinōnia* in 1 Cor. 10:16 means “participation” in the body and blood of Christ and thus union with the exalted Christ. This fellowship with Christ comes about through the creative intervention of God. It happens through the transformation of man to the very roots of his being. It is birth into a new existence, and can be expressed by the contrast of life and death. This new existence is not a divinization in the sense of mysticism and the mystery religions, but incorporation in Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection and glory. It is not the elimination or fusion of personality but a new relationship based on the forgiveness of sins. Paul expressed this in paradoxes, new expressions that he coined and mixed metaphors which he used to present *koinōnia* and guard against mystical misunderstanding. These include: *syzēn*, to live with (Rom. 6:8; 2 Cor. 7:3); *sympaschein*, to suffer with (Rom. 8:17); *systaurousthai*, to be crucified with (Rom. 6:6); *synegeiresthai*, to be raised with (Col. 2:12; 3:1; Eph. 2:6); *syzoōpoiein*, to make alive with (Col. 2:13; Eph. 2:5); *syndoxazein*, to glorify with (Rom. 8:17); *synklēronomein*, to inherit with (Rom. 8:17); *symbasileuein*, reign with (2 Tim. 2:12). The suffering of the apostle which is a part of the total suffering of Christ (Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24) gives him the prospect of glory (cf. Phil. 3:10 with with Rom. 8:17; 1 Thess. 4:17).

(b) Apart from in Matt. 23:30, where the Pharisees reject the charge that they had a share in the blood of the prophets, and those passages where it means fellow worker or companion, *koinōnos* belongs to this area of Pauline usage. To eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols means to be a sharer in pagan sacrifice and fellowship with demons which excludes one from fellowship in the Lord’s Supper and fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 10:18). 2 Cor. 1:7 and 1 Pet. 5:1 refer to the sharing by the apostle and the church in the suffering and glory of the risen Lord. Anyone who suffers oppression and persecution through following Christ may rest assured that he will like his Lord attain life through temptation and death. In the same connection, Heb. 10:33 speaks of being partners with those who are ill-treated and exhorts its readers to patience. According to 2 Pet. 1:4, believers are made “partakers of the divine nature”, “through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory” (v. 3) and patient endurance. Thus he has already a share in the divine nature which is superior to all mundane existence. The same applies to passages where *synkoinōneō* and *synkoinōnos* occur. Participation in evil is rejected (Eph. 5:11; Rev. 18:4). But one can participate in suffering (Phil. 4:14) and the gospel and its hope (1 Cor. 9:23; Phil. 1:7). According to Rom. 11:17, the Gentiles who are like branches grafted in to the olive tree of Israel now share in its election and promises.

3 *koinōnia* in 1 Jn. 1:3, 6, 7 does not refer to a mystical fusion with Christ and God, but to fellowship in faith. Its basis is in the apostolic preaching of the historical Jesus, walking in the light, and the blood of Jesus which cleanses from all sin. It thus excludes the sectarian pride which denies the incarnation and misrepresents the character of sin.<sup>2</sup>

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