



# THE LORD'S SUPPER

## A Reflection of the Body of Christ

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Roger E. Dickson

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# The Lord's Supper

## The Reflection Of The Body Of Christ

*“The cup of blessing that we bless,  
is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ?  
The bread that we break,  
is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ?”*

(1 Corinthians 10:16,17)

Of all the behavioral actions of the body of Christ that manifests the loving fellowship of the body, it is when the members of the body come together for the love feast and Lord's Supper celebration on Sunday. All the connectivity, celebration, fellowship, participation, mutual affection and love of the body are reflected in the gathering of the saints for the occasion of the Lord's meal. It is at this time when the family of God proclaims to the world that every family member has submitted to the one King who is the center of reference to his or her life. This purpose for the Supper event is so evident in Scripture that there was no need to give any legal commandments concerning the frequency of the Supper, just that the family of God do such on a regular basis in remembrance of Jesus and to remind Him of His covenant promise to come again for them. The Supper was never intended to be a legal ceremony. Jesus knew that if people responded legally in their consideration for one another, the love would soon grow cold. When cold hearts come to the Supper, it simply becomes a heartless ceremony among the believers. But the love feast/Supper event is to be anything but a ceremonial performance of law. When those of the world look on, disciples of Jesus should be seen as a loving family in assembly to celebrate their King. The Supper should in every way reflect the nature and behavior of the ekklesia of Christ. If by chance an unbeliever should show up at the love feast and Supper of the ekklesia, he should be able to witness the affectionate nature of the body of Christ, and thus, fall down before the Lord. The reflection of love that is manifested during the love feast and Supper should be so strong that those of the world who are searching for a family should be drawn by the atmosphere that surrounds the disciples of Christ as they come together for the bread and wine. The Supper, therefore, is not only an opportunity for the members of the body to renew their connectivity with one another, it is also an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to every unbeliever who might be present.

## INTRODUCTION

**The body of Christ reflects Jesus in the love feast and Supper.** And since this is true, we can better understand the stern rebuke by which Paul reproached the Corinthians for their corruption of the love feast and Supper. Their problem was not in violating some legal ceremonial codes of the love feast and Supper. It was in their bringing of the behavior of the pagan temple feasts into the love feast of the family of God. And by doing such they were manifesting to the unbelievers that there was no difference between the pagan feasts and the Lord's feast. Paul's condemning judgment of them was justified because they were in their behavior denying before the world the very nature of the church. The ekklesia (church) of Christ was to be known for her love, but they were reflecting everything but a loving spirit when they came together (See Jn 13:34,35).

Sometimes we are not too distant from Corinth. The ekklesia of Christ has often been embarrassed because of the "Supper Wars" that have prevailed too often among the saints. We have become so involved in insignificant skirmishes in these wars that the unbelievers have accused us of denying the unity we so hypocritically proclaim, and thus, some have just decided to stay away. Even some of the believers have been embarrassed to introduce new converts or visitors to our senseless arguments over issues in reference to the Supper.

Skirmishes over the Supper have betrayed the true nature of some, that they have a legalistic spirit that promotes division. We have those who are "upper roomers," that is, they observe the Supper only in an

upper room as Jesus and the disciples when they Supper was first instituted. There are also the skirmishes that surround the cup. There are the "one cuppers," "many cuppers," "bread-then-cuppers," "wine cuppers," "fruit-of-the-vine cuppers," and we are sure, a host of others. Much of the fussing among the disciples often involves some supposed ceremony or circumstance when the Supper was first instituted, or when the Corinthians corrupted the love feast.

When it comes to the ceremonial observance of the Supper, we often manifest a spirit that we are sure God is "scratching" His head over. When we even mention the phrase "Lord's Supper," there are a host of mental pictures that flash in our minds. Each church group has a customary way the Supper is observed, and too often, this unique system of observance has become the ceremony, and subsequently, the "law" for partaking of the Supper.

We might even add that there are "levels" of participation among the members in reference to the Supper. There are the "no Supper" people whose assemblies are often limited to singing and preaching, with no observance of the Supper at all. Then there are the Christmas/Easter observers who partake of the Supper only these two times each year. Then there are the chip and sip folks who weekly perform a ceremony of passing around the bread and fruit of the vine as starters before a feast that does not happen. And finally, there are the love feast/Supper people who enjoy a full meal in eating with one another, during which or after which they remember and remind the Lord by partaking of the Supper. In this book we

desire to move people closer to the last group. It is this group of believers who truly enjoy the communion they have with one another and the Lord during the Sunday event.

There could probably be no more confusion among those who are sincere and want to do what is right, than what now prevails among churches concerning the Lord's Supper. If the Supper reflects the nature of the body of Christ, then we are on a quest through the Scriptures to identify ourselves by understanding the nature of the Supper. This is not difficult. God never required of us that anything essential be so complex to understand. Neither did He enjoin on us any

command that was impossible to obey or contradicted common sense. We must keep in mind, therefore, that the confusion that prevails around the Supper is not God's fault. It is ours. It is imperative, therefore, that we objectively allow the word of God to speak for itself concerning matters of the Supper. We must take every precaution not to read into the text of Scripture any of our traditions in reference to the love feast and Supper. So as objectively as possible we seek to be challenged by the Scriptures concerning this event of the early first century disciples immediately after the beginning of the church.

## Chapter 1

### FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN

We are the creation of a God of love. John reminded us, "*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*" (1 Jn 4:8). We would say, therefore, that anyone who does not come to the table of our Lord in love, does not know the love that should be manifested at the table. The Lord's Supper must reflect the love of God through those who come to the feast of love.

As the reflection of God on earth, Jesus added, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*" (Jn 13:34,35). Any time the disciples do not manifest their love of one another at the Supper event, they identify themselves as not being the church of the God of love. We would assume, therefore, **that we must partake of the Supper in some way that**

**manifests our love for one another.** This is why ceremonial observances of the Supper are so inadequate and hollow in reflecting the God of love through a Savior who gave a new commandment that we be identified by our love for one another. Conscriptio to legal performances manifests no love.

Since the occasion of the Supper is the opportunity to manifest to the world the true ekklesia of Christ, then we should seek to reach into the Scriptures in order to discover what the Holy Spirit said in reference to the love feast and Supper. This brings us to two introductory scriptures that explain the nature of the fellowship that the early Christians had with one another. The Holy Spirit inspired these teachings to be written in the context of false disciples. When studying these passages, we must keep in mind that **they were written by the Holy Spirit about thirty-five years after the estab-**

**ishment of the church.** This is significant. It is significant because the tradition of the love feast continued for this number of years after the initial days when the ekklesia of Christ was first established in Acts 2.

In the Acts 2 account of the first practices of the early church, it was stated, “*And they continued steadfastly ... in the breaking of bread. And continuing daily with one accord ... breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart ...*” (At 2:42,46). What the first disciples began as the “breaking of bread,” the latter disciples were continuing thirty-five years later when the books of 2 Peter and Jude were written.

#### A. The feast:

Peter wrote around A.D. 65, just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In the context of immoral people and false teachers who arose among the disciples at this time, he wrote, “*They are stains and blemishes, carousing themselves with their own deceptions, while they feast with you*” (2 Pt 2:13).

Peter mentions the feast of the disciples in passing. It had become an opportunity for the unrighteous to maintain fellowship with the early church, and thus, influence the disciples. But these apostates were “brute beasts” who “speak evil of things that they do not understand” (2 Pt 2:12). They were thus “stains” and “blemishes” in the disciples’ fellowship meal. They were such when the disciples sought to manifest the love of God that should prevail at a time when the members came together in communion with one another over a meal.

The disciples’ breaking of bread from

house to house had continued to A. D. 65, though the environment of the feast of Peter’s readers had been spoiled by unrighteous apostates who had “*eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls*” (2 Pt 2:14). These apostates had taken the occasion of the feast of the disciples as an opportunity to exercise their ungodliness among the disciples. Though this corruption of the feast was certainly not prevalent among all the disciples of the early church, at least it was among those to whom Peter wrote. What is important to notice is that the love feast of the disciples was so common in the early church, that it continued regardless of the corruption in behavior and thinking of some who had crept in among the disciples to whom Peter wrote.

#### B. The love feast:

Jude also wrote his epistle in a time of apostasy among the disciples to whom he addressed the message of Jude 12. He wrote at the same time Peter wrote 2 Peter, around A.D. 65. Jude added an adjective to the feast. “*These are spots in your love feast when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear*” (Jd 12). It was not only a feast of the disciples where a full meal was eaten on a regular basis, it was a **love** feast. It was the *agape* (love) meal that had been retained by the early disciples since the early days of the establishment of the church in Acts 2.

How else would we define a meal that is purposely eaten by the disciples to express their love for one another? We are servants of the God of love who expressed His love toward all men through Jesus (Jn 3:16). And

as this God unconditionally loved us through Jesus, the new commandment was that we so love one another (Jn 13:34,35). It was by this that the disciples of Jesus signaled to the world that they were the true disciples of Jesus. The agape feast that the disciples had with one another on a regular basis, therefore, was an opportunity for the disciples to reflect the unconditional love of God in their hearts toward one another.

The love feast, therefore, was a sermon of love to the lost. Paul, Peter and Jude dealt harshly with those who tarnished this opportunity for the disciples to preach the gospel of love to an unloving world.

Since the love feast of the disciples was so significant to the behavior of the early church in their relationships with one another, it would be imperative for us to discover the

roots from which the early love feast came. This would take us back to the beginning of feasts that God established among His people when they were given birth as a nation in their deliverance from Egyptian captivity. It is our sincere belief that any study of the Lord's Supper must be in the context of the love feasts of the early church, which feasts had their origins in the Passover feast that God instituted with Israel immediately before their deliverance from Egyptian captivity. The Passover feast was a covenant meal. It was a celebration feast with God who made a covenant with His people at Mount Sinai. Therefore, in order to understand the full significance of the Lord's Supper in reference to our covenant with God today, we must in our study first pass through the covenant feasts in the history of God's people from the beginning of time.

## Chapter 2

### ESTABLISHING AND REMEMBERING COVENANTS

When Jesus instituted His Supper He made a significant statement in reference to the cup, "***For this is My blood of the covenant ...***" (Mt 26:28). Being Gentiles who are millennia removed from the Jews who were in a covenant relationship with God as a nation, we often have a difficult time understanding this statement. We have a difficult time understanding the nature of covenants that God established with His people, as well as the environment that surrounded the remembrances of those covenants. In the context of Jesus' statement, He used a symbol, the fruit of the vine, to create a signal of remembrance of the covenant. His blood was poured out for remission of sins.

In order to continually remember the blood of the covenant, the fruit of the vine was a physical signal to generate remembrance, and subsequently, be a reminder to Jesus of His promise to return for His bride.

Now our challenge is to determine **whose** remembrance is in the context of Jesus' statement. Was the signal of covenants for the sake of the people with whom God had established a covenant, or was it for God to remember that He had established a covenant and made promises to the covenanted people of things He would or would not do? We would answer that the signal or sign of the covenant was for both.

## A. Remembering covenants:

Genesis 9:12-17 is an explanatory passage in reference to the covenants that God establishes with His people. The occasion for the statements of the text is immediately after the flood of Noah's day. As Noah and his family stood captivated by the appearance of a rainbow in the sky that they had never before seen, God said to them:

*“Then God said, ‘This is the **sign of the covenant** that I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for successive generations: I set **My rainbow in the cloud**, and it will be for a sign of a covenant **between Me and the earth**. And it will come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud. **Then I will remember My covenant** that is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh. **And the waters will no more become a flood to destroy all flesh**. And the rainbow will be in the cloud, and I will look on it so that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.’ And God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.’”*

Here are some important things to remember concerning God's rainbow covenant that He established with all humanity:

**1. Signs of the covenant:** God established a signal that there was a covenant between Him, the earth, all animals and all humanity. The rainbow was a signal that God would keep His promise in reference

to the establishment of the covenant.

**2. Promises of the covenant:** The promise that God made to Noah was that He would never again destroy all flesh, man and the earth as He did with the global flood. When people saw the sign, they could be reassured that never again would there be a flood of waters that would destroy all flesh.

**3. Remembrance of the covenant:** In this case, the rainbow was established as a reminder **for God**. He said, *“And it will come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud. **Then I will remember My covenant ....**”* The appearance of the sign of the covenant, the rainbow, was for God to remember. Does God forget? Certainly not! So how would God be reminded with the appearance of a rainbow that He must keep His promise that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood? Actually, the meaning is quite simple. It is as a groom gives a ring to his bride during a marriage ceremony. What the groom is saying in the giving of the ring is that when his wife sees the ring, she must remind him that he made a commitment of love to her, to love and to cherish. It is as a parent giving a small token to a child, telling the child that when the child sees the token (sign) he or she must remind the parent of promises made to the child. It was not that the parent would forget, or that the groom would forget the promises that he made in the marriage covenant. The reminding was for the benefit of the one with whom the covenant and promises were made. **The more I remind God, the more I remember.** Please keep this thought in mind when we come to the regularity by which the early disciples observed the Lord's Supper. Every time the disciples' partake

of the Supper, they remind Jesus of the promises that He made in reference to His establishing a covenant with the participants, that He was coming again for them.

## B. Remembrance enacts action:

When God remembers the promises of His covenants, He takes action. Consider this when it was time to deliver Israel from Egyptian captivity.

*“Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and **God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob**” (Ex 2:23,24).*

Had God forgotten His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Certainly not! The point is that the people wanted God to act on the promises of His covenant that He made to the forefathers that of their seed He would make a great nation. They were not only crying out to God because of the hardships of bondage, but they were crying out for nationhood. They still remembered the promises of God's covenant with Abraham that were made in Genesis 12:1-3. Their cry to God for “remembrance,” therefore, was a cry to be formed into the nation that He first promised to Abraham (See Ex 6:6-8). We must remember this point when we come to our studies of the Lord's Supper, that in partaking of the Supper we make a proclamation. We proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again in order to deliver us unto eternal heaven (1 Co 11:26).

## C. Remembrance enacts renewal:

After the Israelites had been in the land of promise for several centuries, and because of their apostasy from their conditions to keep their covenant with God, they were banned to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Nevertheless, after their repentance in captivity, God promised to remember His covenant with them. *“For thus says the Lord God: ‘I will deal with you as you have done, who despised the oath by breaking the covenant. Nevertheless **I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you**” (Ez 16:59,60).*

It was not that God had forgotten His covenant with Israel. Their repentance in being renewed to obedience enacted the blessings of the covenant that God had promised. Thus, God acted on His promises because they turned again to Him (See Lv 26:40-45; Ps 105:8; 106:45). Their repentance in captivity was their cry out to Him to remember His promise to restore a remnant to the land of promise.

We must keep the preceding thoughts in mind when we come to the statement that Jesus made in reference to the Supper, that it be done as a “remembrance.” The common translation of the statement that He made was, *“Do this in **remembrance of Me**”* (Lk 22:19; 1 Co 11:24). If this were the only rendering of the Greek phrase that Jesus used, there would be little difficulty in understanding what He meant. The challenge comes from the fact that the Greek phrase can be translated two different ways. “Do this in remembrance of Me” is only one

of two possible renderings.

The Supper was instituted as a remembrance. But to whom in Luke 22:19 does the word “remembrance” have reference? The Greek word that is used is *anamnesis*. It is a combination of two Greek words, *an*, meaning “not” and *amnesis*, meaning “forget.” We get the word “amnesia” from *an-amnesis*. Literally in Greek, *anamnesis* would mean “not forget.” The word can be translated with the English word “remembrance,” but it can also be translated “reminder.” If we considered the subject of this chapter in reference to God being “reminded” by the signs of His covenants, then another possible rendering of the Greek phrase would be “Do this as My reminder.” But how would this fit into the meaning that Jesus wanted to convey on the night of His betrayal.

There would be a subtle difference between the definition of the words “remembrance” and “reminder.” We must keep in mind that the rainbow that God gave was both a “remembrance” and a “reminder.” The token of the rainbow looked backward in order that Noah remember, but it also looked forward to be a reminder to God. They were to remember what had happened in the flood in order to remind God what He had promised, that He would never do such again.

The same was true of God’s covenant with Abraham concerning the future nationhood of Israel. Circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant (Gn 17:9-14). When the Jews circumcised their male children, they remembered Abraham’s covenant with God, but they also were reminding God to remember that He had promised that He would make of Abraham a great nation and

preserve the nation until the coming of the final Blessing (Gn 12:1-3).

The Supper for the Christian, therefore, is both a remembrance and a reminder. It is our remembrance of the cross, but it is also our reminder to God of His promises that He made to us in reference to the future.

The obedient disciple is baptized into a covenant relationship with God in order to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:4,5). However, his newness of life is more than a new life in this world. Emphasis in baptism is also on eternal life to come in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that He will come again and receive us unto Himself. Our Supper (communion) with the Lord is a reminder to Jesus that He come again for us.

If we would be literal in translation of Luke 22:19, therefore, we would translate the Greek phrase, “Do this to My reminder.” The Greek word *emos* (My) in the phrase is **possessive**. The meaning would be that the “reminder” belongs to Jesus, not us. The more common Greek word for “my” is *mou*. But this word is not used in this statement. The Greek word *emos* was used in Greek for emphasis. If the word *mou* was used, we might understand that Jesus wanted His disciples to observe the Supper in order that they remember. But the use of the word *emos* indicates that the Supper was observed in order to be a reminder to Jesus that He fulfill His promises of the covenant, which promises were yet in the future because of what He would have done in the past. The word *emos* always refers to possession, and thus the “reminder” was in reference to Jesus, not the disciples. When the disciples partake of the bread, therefore, they are reminding Jesus of His promises that came with their covenant relationship with Him.

**Thus the disciples' observance of the Supper is an enacted prayer that Jesus remember His covenant and the covenant promises in reference to the future.**

#### **D. Remembrance stirs hope:**

We eat of the Supper looking forward, which emphasis is revealed by Luke more than the other writers. Luke recorded Jesus' statement, "*I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God*" (Lk 22:16). "*I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes*" (Lk 22:18).

As in the Jews' eating of the Passover

meal in order to look back to their former captivity in Egypt and forward to God's promises concerning the future, Christians look back in order to look forward. In the Passover the Jews looked back in order to remember their bondage in Egypt. They looked back in order to appreciate their nationhood in the land of promise. Christians look back to their bondage in sin in order to look forward to the Paradise of God that is yet to come. **When Christians eat the bread, they remind Jesus that what He started at the cross is not yet completed.** There is yet another banquet meal, during which we will sit down and eat with the Lord in the heavenly kingdom of God (Rv 19:7-9).

### **Chapter 3**

## **THE PASSOVER FOUNDATION**

The Passover feast of the Jews was the foundation upon which the Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus. The actual Passover meal lasted several hours and was the occasion where the Jewish family focused on Israel's deliverance from Egypt, as well as God's promises concerning the Messiah in the future. It was during such a meal with His disciples when Jesus took the bread and cup and established a memorial meal that would last until He comes again (Mt 26:26).

Many circumstances and events that surrounded the typical Passover meal of the Jews was continued by the early Christians in their love feast/Lord's Supper event. This would have been especially true of the early Jewish Christians. When interpreting what was going on when Jesus instituted the Sup-

per on the night of His betrayal, therefore, we must understand the occasion of the Jewish Passover feast as the background of the love feast/Supper of the early church. The significance of the elements of the Supper, as well as understanding what Jesus said during the Supper, depends a great deal on our understanding of Jewish thinking concerning symbols and events that surrounded the Passover meal. Therefore, in order to increase our appreciation for the Supper, we must go back two thousand years to a time when Jesus gathered several Jews around a Passover meal in order to guide their minds into the future.

We must not assume, however, that the love feast/Lord's Supper of Christians is a copy of the Passover meal. We must simply seek to understand what Jesus said to

the Jewish disciples at the time by understanding their thinking in reference to the context of the Passover meal.

### A. The Passover meal and the future:

The Jewish Passover was instituted the night before Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage. The significance of the observance of the Passover that would spill over into the love feast of the early Christians is embedded in God's instructions to Israel on the eve of their flight to freedom.

The text that defines the meaning of the Passover for Israel is Exodus 12. In this text are some very important instructions by God in reference to Israel's observance of the Passover that would continue throughout the history of Israel:

**1. One lamb per house:** *“Each man will take a lamb for himself, according to the house of his fathers, a lamb for each house”* (Ex 12:3). The Passover was a house event. It was not an assembled event of a great number of people. Israelites were to stay at home, eating the lamb as a family. The reason it was a house meal symbolized the very purpose for which it was instituted in Egypt. *“It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses”* (Ex 12:27). The Passover was a home feast because God passed over each Jewish house and did not bring death to the firstborn of that house.

Furthermore, *“It will be eaten in one house. You will not carry any of the meat outside the house”* (Ex 12:46). The instructions that surrounded the eating of the of-

fering included the fact that the meal was to be eaten in the homes of the people. It is interesting to note also that when Israel entered the promised land, God instructed the people not to eat the Passover within the cities that He gave to them of the Canaanites (Dt 16:5). The eating of the Passover meal was to continue in the homes of the rural culture of the Israelites in the land of Palestine.

**2. Invite a neighbor:** *“And if the household is too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the souls”* (Ex 12:4). If a man's family was too small to consume the entire offering, then he could go together with a next door neighbor for the feast in order to make sure that the entire offering was consumed. The Passover was a family offering, but it could be a communal meal with one's neighbor. The reason for this ruling was simply because every household may not have had a lamb or goat to offer, or the livestock they had might not be without blemish, or of the first year.

**3. The best of the flock:** *“Your lamb will be without blemish, a male of the first year”* (Ex 12:5). Only the best would serve. There was to be no cheap and sickly animal offered. Sacrifice was involved, and God wanted only the best. The Passover feast was to be the best offering that could be provided.

In order to be the best animal that had no blemish, the Jewish family had to specifically raise and guard the Passover animal. This meant that the yearling lamb or goat became a special animal, and thus, one that the family would almost consider a pet by the time of the offering. Every year for the Passover meal the family would suffer heart-

ache when they had to kill the “pet” for the offering. Can you imagine how the children of the Jewish family cried when their pet animal was annually killed for the sacrifice of the Passover? Yes, God knew how to prepare the Israelites’ hearts for the final killing of the Passover Lamb who was the Son of God.

**4. United household celebration:** “*And the whole assembly of Israel will kill it [the sheep or goat] in the evening*” (Ex 12:6). As stated before, this was not an “assembly event.” The nation did not gather together in order to observe the Passover meal. However, “the whole assembly” of Israel that was at the time scattered throughout Egypt **observed the feast together at the same time in their homes.** This was in the evening before their departure.

On the night of flight from Egypt, the Israelites ate the Passover in their homes. Though they were in their homes, they were all eating it as the whole nation. “*All the assembly of Israel will keep it*” (Ex 12:47). The observance of the Passover meal, therefore, was not dependent on an assembly. In fact, in the initial institution of the Passover, the instructions were that it must be a home meal. When Jesus instituted His Passover, **it was instituted in a home environment.**

**5. Unleavened bread and bitter herbs:** “*And they will eat it [the meat] with unleavened bread and bitter herbs*” (Ex 12:8). The Passover meal consisted of the meat of the offered lamb or goat, unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Dt 16:3,4). It was not an ordinary meal, but a special covenant meal of a people on their way to nationhood and the establishment of a national covenant relationship with God at Mount Sinai. On the night of their depar-

ture from Egypt, it was a meal that was to be eaten by those in a hurry toward the future, their future deliverance from Egyptian captivity.

**6. A memorial feast to the Lord:** “*So this day will be a memorial to you. And you will keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations*” (Ex 12:14). The Passover feast, therefore, was established as a memorial of their miraculous deliverance from bondage. It was to be a feast that was directed to the Lord. It was a memorial feast that was to be kept throughout the history of Israel, lest they forget their deliverance from bondage by God and the promises of peace in the promised land that God gave to them (Dt 16:3). Once in the land, they looked to the future, to the coming of the Messiah of Israel.

After the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt, they went to Mount Sinai where they ate the Passover meal a second time (Nm 9:1-5). They ate it at a time when they were looking forward to entering the promised land. However, they were overcome with doubt when the spies returned, giving them a report that the inhabitants were strong in the land. Because they did not go up immediately and take the land, God condemned them to wandering in the wilderness. The land promised to them was not made void. Their possession of it was only delayed. Thus throughout the wilderness wanderings Israel still looked to the future, knowing that God would keep His promise that they as a nation would inherit a land.

Once Israel entered Canaan, they still ate the Passover as a remembrance, but also as a reminder to God that there was yet a Deliverer in the future, which Deliverer

would come as Moses came to them in bondage in order to deliver them from Egyptian captivity (See Dt 18:15-19).

## B. The Lord's Supper and the future:

Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Deliverer who came to deliver Israel once again (At 7:34). However, His deliverance for Israel was from the bondage of sin, for which the forgiveness thereof could never be realized by the offering of the blood of animals (Hb 10:1-4).

On the occasion of the Jewish Passover, Jesus took the opportunity to change the meaning of what was commonly eaten at the time, and also, to point the disciples toward the future. *"I have earnestly desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer,"* Jesus said to the disciples. *"For I say to you, I will no longer eat of **it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God**"* (Lk 22:15,16). At the time, the disciples were eating the common Jewish Passover with Jesus, which meal they had previously eaten with Him during His ministry. As was the custom of the Jews, the Passover meal Jesus ate with the disciples was a full meal that had been prepared for the occasion. He made the statement during the meal that He would not **eat** of it again until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

In Luke 22:16 Jesus speaks of His **eating** the Passover meal in the future as He ate it with His disciples immediately before His death. The time when He would actually eat it again would be when it was **fulfilled** in the kingdom of God. Some have erroneously interpreted the phrase "kingdom of God" to refer to the church. But there is a difference between the kingdom and the

church. The kingdom of God is the totality of the heavenly sovereignty of God over all things from heaven, whereas the church is the people of God on earth (Mt 16:18,19). On the occasion of Jesus' eating in the presence of the disciples, we cannot take the liberty to say that He is now figuratively eating on His throne in heaven as the disciples now eat literally on earth. This is not what the passage says. At least, there is no indication in the passage that His literal eating in the upper room in Jerusalem would somehow be spiritualized to mean that He would somehow eat in heaven as they ate of it on earth. And since there is no interpretive license to go from literal to spiritual eating, then we must conclude that there will be a time in the future when Jesus will again literally eat with His disciples, though it will be His banquet feast and not the Jewish Passover (See Rv 19:7-9). It will be the time when the redemption of the cross will have been fulfilled (completed) at the end of time. This will be the time when the saints have been redeemed from this world.

## C. The coming banquet:

Jesus is now reigning as King of kings over all things (1 Tm 6:15; Mt 28:18). He will reign until He comes again, at which time He will return kingdom reign to God in order that God be all in all (1 Co 15:26-28). It is during this interim period of time when the disciples of Jesus eat the celebration feast that Jesus instituted while He was on earth. We eat in order to remember our deliverance from the bondage of sin (1 Pt 1:3-5,23). But we also eat in anticipation of personally eating the Supper with the Lord in eternal glory. This would be the meaning of John's

statements in Revelation 19:7-9. Here is a picture of the future when the bride of Christ—that's us—comes to the marriage feast with the Lamb (Rv 19:7). Because we are the bride of Christ, it was revealed, "*Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper [feast] of the Lamb*" (Rv 19:9). **We might say that the Lord's Supper we now eat is a rehearsal meal in preparation for the marriage feast that we will personally have with Jesus when He comes again.**

The Passover feast of the Jews prepared the minds of the Jews for the Passover Lamb. The Lord's Supper prepares

our minds for the Lamb to come again in order to finalize what He started at the cross. The coming banquet meal in the presence of Jesus will be the fulfillment of the plan of salvation. It will be a time when Jesus once again eats with us in the final celebration after the last enemy, death, is destroyed. **In the Supper we remember our victory, but in the final banquet we will celebrate the fulfillment of God's eternal plan of redemption that was made possible by the cross.** The Supper, therefore, looks back to the cross of deliverance, but also to the future victory over death (See 1 Co 15:54).

## Chapter 4

### COVENANTS AND CELEBRATION

The Passover feast of the Jews was a joyous occasion of celebration. The feast was observed in remembrance of their deliverance from bondage, and in anticipation of making the journey to the promised land. In view of the atmosphere that surrounded the Passover feast, we can understand why Jesus used the Passover as the occasion to institute His feast. Immediately after He instituted the Supper, there would be a brief moment of sadness in the air because of His crucifixion. However, the empty tomb generated in their hearts a tremendous joy and celebration. During the years that followed the gospel event of the death, burial and resurrection, the disciples celebrated the cross and open tomb with joy. The Passover feast, therefore, was the perfect time to institute the Lord's meal, for it was a time of celebration.

When Jesus made the statement dur-

ing the Passover feast, "*This is the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you,*" more went through the minds of the Jewish disciples than what we would normally think. When Jesus used the word "covenant," the Jewish disciples looked back over more than two thousand years of covenants in their heritage, covenants over which celebration took place. Their understanding of covenants was part of the law, and thus, covenants meant more to them than we commonly think in our society today. A brief review of the covenants in the Old Testament reveals some profound truths in reference to how Jesus would have us look at His "new covenant." His reference to the "new covenant" sparked thoughts of celebration and joy in the minds of the disciples. (The following points are abridged from the book, *Authentic Church*, R. Dickson)

### A. Covenant between Isaac and Abimelech:

In Genesis 26:26-31, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, came to Isaac in order to establish a covenant of peace with him. *“Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you”* (Gn 26:28). Abimelech wanted to make the covenant in order *“that you [Isaac] will do us no harm ...”* (Gn 26:29). Once the covenant was established, a covenant meal celebrated the event. Genesis 26:30 states, *“So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.”* The result of the making of the covenant was celebration on the part of both parties. There was celebration because those who joined in the covenant knew that no harm would come between the house of Abimelech and the house of Isaac.

### B. Covenant between Jacob and Laban:

When Jacob secretly left the presence of Laban in order to return to his homeland, Laban pursued after him with the intent of doing Jacob harm (Gn 31:22,23). However, God came to Laban in a dream and warned him concerning his evil intentions against Jacob (Gn 31:24). When Laban finally overtook Jacob, he offered to make a covenant with Jacob in order to establish a peaceful relationship between the two families (Gn 31:44).

The covenant between Jacob and Laban was sworn in the presence of God who was the witness to the covenant (Gn 31:49,50,53). In order to ratify the covenant, a sacrifice was made. Following the sacri-

fice, and as part of the covenant ceremony, a joyous meal of celebration was conducted as both parties ate the sacrificed animal. *“Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain”* (Gn 31:54). The eating of the offering was not a time for solemnity, sadness and guilt. **It was a time of celebration over the fact that a covenant of peace had been made between two parties.** The sacrifice ratified the covenant. The fellowship feast celebrated the covenant.

### C. Covenant between God and Israel:

When Israel came out of Egyptian captivity, God established a covenant relationship with the nation (Ex 19-24). After the conditions and responsibilities for keeping the covenant were stated, Exodus 24:1-11 explains the ratification of the covenant. Israel *“offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord”* (Ex 24:5). *“Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient’”* (Ex 24:7). Following the ratification of the covenant through sacrifices to God and oaths to keep the covenant, **the nation ate and drank** (Ex 24:11). The eating and drinking after the ratification of the covenant was a time of joyous celebration.

The culture of acceptance over a meal was central to the covenant meals of the Old Testament personalities. This culture is even brought out when Moses, Aaron, with all the elders of Israel, came and ate before God. When Israel arrived at the foot of

Mount Sinai after their deliverance from Egypt, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, with the seventy elders, went up Mount Sinai to commune with God. It was there that they **“ate and drank”** in the presence of the Lord (Ex 24:9-11). God did not raise His hand against these men, for the purpose of their eating and drinking in the presence of the Lord was to manifest to all that God received them. He accepted them and all Israel into a covenant relationship with Him.

Significantly in Acts 2:42 the concept of eating in fellowship with one another is also brought out in reference to the fellowship of the church. In the Greek text the conjunction “and” is not between “fellowship” and “breaking of bread.” The text literally reads, “... in the teaching of the apostles and in the **fellowship, in the breaking of the bread**, and in the prayers. The fellowship and breaking of bread are together, emphasizing that fellowship is associated with the eating of the meal. The early Christians fellowshiped as they ate the love meal together.

Throughout the history of Israel, there were times for remembrance and renewal of the covenant that God made with Israel. When the temple was built, it was a time of remembrance and revival and recommitment to the will of God (2 Ch 5-7). When the temple was completed, *“the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord”* (2 Ch 7:4). After the sacrifices, Solomon *“sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for the goodness that the Lord had done for David, for Solomon, and for His people Israel”* (2 Ch 7:10).

After the Babylonian captivity, Israel returned and rebuilt the temple which had

been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ez 6:13-22). In the remembrance and renewal of their covenant with the Lord, they offered sacrifices for all Israel (Ez 6:17). Ezra 6:22 states, *“And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made them joyful ....”*

The returnees from Babylon also rebuilt the walls of the city of Jerusalem (Ne 7,8). Once the walls were rebuilt, it was a time for remembrance and revival and celebration by keeping the Feast of Trumpets (See Nm 29:1-6). On the day this feast of renewal was kept, Nehemiah exhorted the people not to mourn or weep, for it was a day of joy and celebration (Ne 8:9). He exhorted them, *“Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength”* (Ne 8:10).

No better words than the preceding words of Nehemiah could be spoken to describe the atmosphere that surrounded the Passover feast. Jesus wanted to establish His Supper in this type of atmosphere, a time of joy and celebration for the covenant of peace that God had established with us through the cross. The covenant feasts of the Old Testament were not conducted in a funeral service atmosphere. Neither was the Passover feast. We would do well to remember this when we consider the atmosphere that should surround the eating of the love feast/Lord's Supper.

The various feasts of the Old Testament law were times of eating. They were times of joy. We have often assumed that they were simply holidays for Israel to enjoy. However, they were designated times

when Israel was to enjoy fellowship meals with one another in a spirit of celebration.

What is significant in reference to the meal that followed the sacrifice that ratified a covenant, was that the meal was eaten in the **presence of the Lord** (Ex 18:12; see Dt 12:7,18; 14:23,26; 15:20). When the Israelites communed with one another in the celebration of the covenant meal, they did so with the knowledge that the Lord was in their presence. And so it is with the eating of the Lord's meal. It is a time to reconnect with God by reconnecting with one another in a fellowship meal.

At the time Jesus instituted His Supper it was certainly a time of apprehension on the part of the disciples. However, this apprehension and fear **did not come until after the Passover feast was eaten**. It was after the feast that Jesus was betrayed, tried and crucified. But during the time of the Passover feast, it was as any other Passover feast of the Jews throughout their history. Jesus wanted us to enjoy His Supper in the same atmosphere of joy and celebration that the Jews had when they ate the Passover in celebration of their deliverance from bondage. How much more should we rejoice and celebrate because we have been delivered from the bondage of sin. The Lord's Supper, therefore, is a time to rejoice in the presence of the Lord.

The celebration that surrounded the making of a covenant should be brought over to the love feast/Supper event in order to establish the atmosphere for the occasion. The Jews celebrated when covenants were

made. The Passover was a celebration. But somehow, the church has turned the celebration of the covenant into a funeral service. We need to take another look at this. Paul said that when a brother dies, we "*do not grieve as others who have no hope*" (1 Th 4:13). In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 he wrote, "*For if we believe that Jesus **died and rose again**, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus*" (1 Th 4:14). We believe in Jesus who died. But we rejoice in the fact that He rose again. The Supper is the occasion to remember this. The early Christians rejoiced over their deliverance from the bondage of sin. They rejoiced even more that Jesus was raised in order to be the firstborn of all those who have died in Christ. When the first disciples were baptized for remission of sins, they were together in fellowship, sharing with one another. They ate their meals together. "*They ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people*" (At 2:45-47). Does this sound like a people who went to a "funeral service" every first day of the week? The early disciples celebrated the work of God in their lives (At 4:23-31). We must not consider our coming together in remorse, but in celebration. When joyful people come together in assembly, what would we expect to happen? Celebration! And all the celebration was made possible by Jesus. It was made possible by His death for our sins, and reaffirmed by His resurrection from the dead. Christians celebrate over life, not death.

## Chapter 5

### THE BREAD OF LIFE

Remember when Jesus said, “*I am the bread of life*” (Jn 6:48)? Have you ever wondered what went through the minds of His Jewish audience when He made this statement? And on the night of the last Passover, “*Jesus took bread and blessed it. And He broke it and gave it to the disciples.*” After doing this He made a profound statement. “*This is My body*” (Mt 26:26). Because we are not of Jewish heritage, we would have a difficult time understanding the symbolism that stood behind the Jewish concept of bread. There was more to what Jesus meant when He took the bread during the final Passover than what we who are two thousand years removed from the culture might think. In order to understand the Jews’ understanding of “bread,” we must go back to Israel’s captivity in Egypt, and then come forward to the incarnation of Jesus. We must then make our way to the night of the final Passover when Jesus lifted up the bread before His disciples and said, “This is My body.”

#### A. Life in Egypt:

Throughout their four hundred years in Egypt, the Jews became Egyptian in respect to many cultural traits, as well as beliefs. One particular belief that they adopted was in reference to the existence of all life in Egypt that was dependent on the Nile River. The Israelites resided in the delta area of the Nile, and thus their dependence on the flow of the Nile waters was especially sig-

nificant for their livestock.

Bread in Egypt was a blessing that sustained human life. The bread was made from the grain that grew along the Nile River. The grain came from the plants that were watered by the Nile. The water of the Nile came from great distances in Upper Egypt, but all Egyptians knew that it came from rainfall. And the rain came from heaven, and thus, the god of the Nile River gave rain for the river, which flowed through Egypt, watering the plants that produced the grain that was made into bread. And thus, **bread meant life**. If the Nile River dried up, then there was no life. In Jewish history, the ministry of Joseph gave birth to the necessity of storing grain in order that life might exist during times of drought.

The bread that meant life came down from the gods in order that the Egyptians live. Now let’s go with Israel into the wilderness and see how the true God of heaven worked with Israel in teaching them to depend on His bread for life.

#### B. Life in the wilderness:

God led Israel into the wilderness of Sinai for more reasons than simply bringing them out of captivity. After all, He could have led them northeast across the Red Sea, straight to Palestine. They would have been at the southern border of Palestine in less than seven days. But for some reason He led them for two months to the Sinai Peninsula, which was a wilderness. Why?

The answer to why He led them south instead of northeast lies in the fact that Israel had to be taught to depend on Him. This was a hard lesson that they had to learn in order to take the land of promise from the Canaanites. Their instruction on how to depend on God began shortly after they crossed the Red Sea. Immediately after their crossing of the Red Sea, it did not take long for them to cry out in complaint to return to Egypt. Their crying out was good in that God allowed them to go to the point of having to depend on Him for survival, for life.

In answer to their complaints, and as the first lesson for their spiritual growth, God gave them bread from heaven. *“And when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, ‘It is manna.’ For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, ‘This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat’”* (Lv 16:15).

Israel was at the point of death from starvation. But God sent down from heaven bread (manna) that they might live. Every morning throughout their wilderness wandering, Israel was reminded that they lived another day because God gave them bread from heaven. At the end of the wilderness wandering, when they came to the east side of the Jordan River to pass into Canaan, the bread from heaven ceased. It was time that they live from the sustenance of their hard work in the land of promise.

Israel, both from their years in Egypt and in the wilderness wandering, never forgot the significance of bread from heaven. To them, bread meant life given from heaven. It was life from God. And when Jesus taught the disciples to pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* they understood that they must daily depend on God for life

(Mt 6:11).

During His ministry, Jesus reminded His Jewish audience, *“Our fathers ate manna in the desert, as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’”* (Jn 6:31). What they understood Him to say was that **God gave them bread from heaven in order that they might live.** Then Jesus said of Himself, *“For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”* (Jn 6:33). And just in case they did not understand, Jesus continued, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger. And He who believes in Me will never thirst”* (Jn 6:35). *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, He will live forever. And the bread that I will give is My flesh that I will give for the life of the world”* (Jn 6:51).

Now when Jesus took the bread during the institution of the Supper and said, *“This is My body,”* there was more to the symbolism of the bread than His physical body. Paul recorded that Jesus said in reference to the bread, *“This is My body which is for you”* (1 Co 11:24). Knowing that bread meant life, the Jewish disciples who were lounging with Jesus on that Passover night would have understood what Jesus meant in reference to the use of bread as a metaphor for life. His body, symbolized by the bread, was His life that He was giving that they might have life.

This clarifies extensively the point Paul was building by the time he came to chapter 12 in 1 Corinthians. *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”* (1 Co 12:13). In the John 6 context of Jesus' revelation to His Jewish audience, He said it this way, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, ex-*

*cept you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life. And I will raise Him up in the last day”* (Jn 6:53,54). **There is life only in the body of Christ.** And since one is baptized into the body for the remission of sins in order to be raised to walk in newness of life, then one cannot have life unless he is baptized into the living body of Jesus (See At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6). When Christians eat of the bread of life at the Supper, they are remembering the life that they have because they have been baptized into the body. They eat the bread to be reminded

that they have eternal life in Christ (1 Jn 5:11).

There is life in the Bread of Life that came down out of heaven. When we partake the bread at the Supper, therefore, we are remembering that the Bread of Life came down out of heaven into an incarnation body that was eventually given as an atoning sacrifice in order that we might have eternal life. The Supper, therefore, is a covenant meal of all those who have been baptized into the body of Christ, and thus, have eternal life because of the cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

## Chapter 6

### FEAST OR FAMINE

The phrase “breaking bread” was a common reference in the first century to refer to sitting down and eating a full meal. This definition is understood from Luke’s use of the phrase when writing to Theophilus, a Gentile, in the documents of Luke and Acts.

We must keep in mind that breaking bread was a reference to a meal in the culture in which Theophilus lived. Thus Luke makes no unique definition of the phrase in his writings, assuming that Theophilus understood that breaking bread in the culture in which he lived referred to a full meal. If Luke, the Gentile writer, had some other definition in mind as he used the phrase throughout the books of Luke and Acts, then we would assume that he would have defined the phrase for the Gentile reader, Theophilus. But he did not. And thus we must conclude that the phrase would be defined by Theophilus according to its normal usage in

his culture of the day.

With the preceding in mind, we need to follow Luke’s use of the phrase as we study through the documents of Luke and Acts as Luke seeks to explain to Theophilus the cause of Christianity in Luke (Christ), as well as the effect that Christ had on the people of the first century (Acts). We must also keep in mind while seeking to define any words within the context of these two books, **that these were the only books that Theophilus had in order to understand the message that Luke was writing to him.** Therefore, the words that Luke used must be consistently defined within the context of the two books.

When considering the use of the phrase “breaking bread” in a biblical context, we would rightly assume that a full meal is meant. This understanding would be carried over into the love feast/Supper event of

the early disciples. It is significant that reference is never made to the “cup” when the phrase “breaking bread” is used in connection with the love feast of the church. The absence of any reference to the cup would lead us to believe that a full meal is under consideration when the phrase “breaking bread” is used in reference to the church. This understanding is consistent throughout the following contexts in which breaking of bread took place:

### A. Breaking bread with Jesus:

Luke 24:30-35 is Luke's first reference to breaking bread in his twin documents to Theophilus. On this occasion, Luke recorded, “*Now it came to pass as He sat at the table with them, He took **bread** and blessed it and **broke it**, and gave it to them*” (vs 30). The occasion was when Jesus revealed Himself to the two men on the road to Emmaus. Once He came to their house in Emmaus, Jesus ate a meal with them. After eating with Jesus (breaking bread), the two men returned to Jerusalem and explained to the apostles all that had occurred during their encounter with Jesus. Luke concluded the account, “*And they told the things that had happened on the road, and how He was recognized by them **in breaking of the bread***” (vs 35). When Theophilus received this account by Luke, we would conclude that he completely understood that Jesus had some type of meal with these two disciples. He did not have a snack with them after the long journey from Jerusalem. Jesus sat down and enjoyed a meal, during which He revealed to them who He was. There was at least enough bread to eat one's fill after their long journey from

Jerusalem. This would have been the same breaking of bread to which Luke referred Theophilus in Luke 22:19 when Jesus broke bread during the Passover. Though there may not have been a full meal with all the trimmings when Jesus ate with the two men from Emmaus, there was certainly enough bread present to eat and have one's fill.

### B. Breaking bread from house to house.

Acts 2:42-46 is Luke's report to Theophilus concerning the activities of the early days of the church. Keep in mind when reading this context that the documents of Luke and Acts were always combined as one manuscript in the early circulation of the New Testament letters. The letters of Luke and Acts **were not** divided by John as in our Bibles. We would correctly conclude, therefore, that when Theophilus finished reading the account of Luke 24:30-35 that in his continued reading he would conclude that the disciples' eating of a full meal as Jesus did with the two men of Emmaus was in the definition of Luke's reference to breaking bread in the Acts account, specifically Acts 2.

Many Bible interpreters fail to see this consistent understanding of the definition of breaking bread throughout the documents of Luke and Acts. They unfortunately assume that after Theophilus read the material of Luke 24:30-35, Luke supposedly slips in another definition of the phrase “breaking bread” in Acts 2 and Acts 20:7. But if we would be consistent interpreters of the text, we do not have this liberty.

Consider the “full meal” definition of “breaking bread” in the context of Acts 2.

After about three thousand obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost, Luke recorded their activities as new disciples. His first record of their activities was explained in verse 42. *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching, and fellowship in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* If we use Luke 24:30-35 as the “dictionary” to define the phrase “breaking of bread,” then our only conclusion is that the early disciples fellowshiped with one another by eating together from house to house. The eating of a meal together reflected their unity and participation in one another’s lives.

In the same context in Acts 2, Luke continued his explanation of the participatory nature of the early ekklesia when he wrote in verse 46, *“And continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart.”* Luke’s comments in this verse expands the brief statement in verse 42. He mentioned the breaking of bread in verse 42, but here explains where the meals took place. They took place in the homes of the disciples as they celebrated their fellowship over a meal.

It would certainly be a hermeneutical leap to change from one meaning of “breaking of bread” in verse 42 to a different meaning in verse 46. But some interpreters do this. If we simply read the texts of Acts 2:42,46 with Luke 24:30-35 in our minds, however, we, as well as Theophilus, can come to only one conclusion. **That conclusion is that the disciples as a part of their early relationships with one another ate full meals together with one another in their homes.**

Some have unfortunately made a dis-

inction between “**the** breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42, where it supposedly refers exclusively to the Lord’s Supper, while in verse 46 the phrase “breaking bread” without the article “the” refers to the common meal of the disciples. But it is certainly questionable that Luke would put Theophilus in such interpretative confusion by making such a distinction simply by use of the article “the.” This is especially true when Luke again used the phrase “breaking bread” in Acts 20:7, but **without** the article. If “breaking bread” in Act 20:7 referred exclusively to the Lord’s Supper, then Theophilus would surely have been confused.

We would seek to be consistent in understanding that the breaking of bread would have been understood by Theophilus to refer to a meal, as Jesus sat down and ate a meal with the two men of Emmaus. These meals would later be referred to by both Peter and Jude as “love feasts,” which feasts continued throughout the first century. But as the Passover meal, and the love feast meal that was corrupted by the Corinthians, the Lord’s Supper was associated with the love feast of the early disciples. The Lord’s Supper was not the love feast, but the Supper was observed in conjunction with the love feast.

### C. Breaking bread on Sunday:

Since the early disciples continued the tradition of the love feast throughout the first century—Peter and Jude confirm this—then we must look for some indication throughout the history that Luke writes to Theophilus where we might witness the disciples’ coming together for such in the book of Acts. We find such a case in the context of Acts

20. The eating of a meal together was so common throughout the early churches, that Paul assumes that when he came to Troas that there would be a love feast by the disciples taking place in Troas in someone's house.

Luke recorded Paul's encounter with the disciples in Troas by writing to Theophilus, "*Now on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to **break bread**, Paul had discussions with them, intending to depart on the next day*" (At 20:7). Now if you were Theophilus, and had only the documents of Luke and Acts in hand, how would you interpret the phrase "break bread" in this statement? If we are to be consistent in our interpretations, then we must conclude that the disciples came together on the first day of the week (Sunday) in order to have a meal together. Paul took the opportunity to fellowship with the disciples as well as have discussions with them.

Because some have difficulty in understanding that the breaking of bread referred to a meal, they have difficulty in understanding what happened on the night of Paul's visit to Troas as recorded in Acts 20. Verse 7 simply states why the disciples came together. They came together to eat a meal in fellowship with one another (See 1 Co 11:33). Before they ate the meal, Paul had discussions with them. They forgot the meal at the time in order to feast on the word of God in discussions with Paul. It was during this lengthy time of discussion that Eutychus fell asleep and subsequently fell out of a third story window. When he was revived, or raised by Paul, they returned to the upper room where the food had already been prepared. Paul ate with them and continued

his discussions with them until sunrise. There is nothing difficult about understanding the context if we do not go through some hermeneutical gymnastic in order to separate the Lord's Supper from the love feast in the context.

(It is interesting that some have used this example of "breaking bread" on the first day of the week as a law, but inconsistently do not use the example of the "upper room" in verse 8 as also a binding law. Such inconsistent hermeneutics reminds us that we are in our legalism always subject to inconsistencies which we seek to ignore.)

#### D. Breaking bread at sea:

Continuing throughout Luke's recorded history of the early church brings us to Acts 27:34-36. The occasion was fourteen days after Paul and many others had fought the winds of a storm at sea. Here again Luke uses the phrase "break bread."

"*Therefore,*" Paul said, "*I urge you to **take some food**, for this is for your health, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish*" (At 27:34). Luke then recorded of the incident, "*And when he had spoken these things, **he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all. And when he had broken it, he began to eat. They were all of good cheer, and they also took some food***" (At 27:35,36). Luke's reference to breaking bread in this context also finds its definition in the occasion. Paul and the other occupants of the ship ate food. They ate in a meal what food they had on board.

The breaking of bread in the first century was the occasion when people ate a

common meal. We can come to no other consistent conclusion based on the use of the phrase by Luke throughout the letters of Luke and Acts. To state otherwise would be reading our own prejudices into the context of the Scriptures.

Did the early church do as Jesus had done when He instituted His Supper during the Passover meal? This seems to be the case. This is clearly brought out in Paul's record of the Corinthian problem in 1 Corinthians 11. The Corinthians came "*together to eat*" a full meal, after which they partook of the bread and wine (1 Co 11:33).

When they came together for their love feast, their warped behavior distorted the very purpose for their coming together as the ekklesia. In the breaking of bread as a full meal, some Corinthians used the occasion for the Supper to manifest anything but a Christ-like spirit. We do not in our interpretation of the phrase "break bread" seek to separate the love feast and the Supper simply because the early church had a love feast on the first day of the week, during which or after which they took the bread and cup of the Lord.

## Chapter 7

### A DISTORED REFLECTION

The early disciples came together on the first day of the week to fellowship with one another in the breaking of bread as a love feast. They celebrated the gospel of Jesus with the bread and fruit of the vine. In view of these participatory events, we need to take another look at the context of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. It is in this context where we discover that some of the Corinthian disciples were reflecting their pagan culture, rather than the nature of the church. Their feast was turned into an occasion that manifested rude behavior and inconsiderate attitudes on the part of some.

#### A. Stay in the historical context:

Many Bible students make an unfortunate interpretive error by lifting the events discussed in 1 Corinthians 11 out of the historical context of the early church. We must keep in mind that this was a predominately

Gentile church that met in the homes of the members that were scattered throughout the city of Corinth. If we bring the discussions of this chapter into the context of the weekly love feast that was observed by the Troas church in Acts 20:7, then we must understand that the Corinthian disciples were coming together in fellowship for the breaking of bread with one another. Whether this was a weekly event, or a periodic event when all the house groups came together, we are not told in the context. We are told that the Corinthians came together on the first day of the week (1 Co 16:2). But we are not told that the meal of 1 Corinthians 11 was a regular gathering of all the house groups. The 1 Corinthians 11 meeting may have been a periodic meeting wherein the division that was going on among the individual house fellowships manifested itself in a general love feast. Whatever the historical situation, we must be careful that we do not read our

modern-day system of assembly into the context. We do know, however, that the Corinthian disciples were continuing the Passover feast tradition with the love feast/Lord's Supper as part of a celebration feast, just as the disciples in Troas.

In the local context of the Corinthian culture, some in the church were still following the temple culture of Corinth. They had made the general love feast an opportunity to manifest their pagan temple culture and arrogant attitudes. The love feast, therefore, became a reflection of their unrighteous attitudes and behavior, rather than a reflection of the united nature of the ekklesia of Christ.

Paul is harsh in this context with the ungodly behavior of some. **The reason for his harshness is in the fact that the Corinthians were attacking the very nature of the ekklesia (church) of Christ.** The church is bound together in love as one as the Father and Son are one (Jn 13:34,35). The Corinthian love feast manifested everything but love and unity.

Paul's rebuke was not that they were violating some ceremonial policies of either the love feast or the Supper. His rebuke was stern because the arrogant and ungodly among them were destroying the communal and participatory nature of how Christians are to fellowship with one another as the ekklesia of Christ. Though he initially addressed them as the "church of God in Corinth" (1 Co 1:2), they would cease to be this church if they continued as the Ephesian church, which after many years of existence lost her first love (Rv 2:1-4). When the love among disciples is lost, as was typical of some in Corinth, then the lampstand of Christ-likeness is lost in a city. The mem-

bers of a loveless church may continue to meet, but because they manifest an ungodly behavior when they surround the love feast of celebration and the Lord's meal, they no longer reflect the church of Christ in the city. Paul saw this coming in Corinth, and thus, in his rebuke he identifies and corrects their behavior. One lesson is strikingly clear from Paul's revelation of this chapter is that **if any church of disciples in any area manifest division in their love feast and the Supper, they are dead as a church of Christ.** Now we might possibly ask, Should we not have a regular love feast/Supper event in order to determine if we are a true church of Christ? Would not a love feast/Supper event present the opportunity to determine if each person has the heart of a true disciple of Jesus?

## B. The Corinthian context:

We must keep in mind that the Corinthian church was young in the faith. It was probably five years or less in existence, and thus, there were many among the disciples who were still behaving as they did in the temple feasts from which they supposedly turned when they obeyed the gospel. In the letter, Paul rebukes some who were still involving themselves in the temple feasts. He wrote, "*But I say that the things that the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. And I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons*" (1 Co 10:20,21). The Christians in Corinth were the temple of God (1 Co 3:16). They had no business yoking in any way with

the temple of idols in the city, especially in participating in the pagan temple feasts (2 Co 6:14-17). The problems addressed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 evidently originated from some who were bringing the atmosphere of the pagan temple feast into the love feast and Lord's Supper of the church.

### C. The context of 1 Corinthians 11:

The love feast/Lord's Supper is to be the reflection of the spiritual nature of the body of Christ. As we focus on this theme, notice how Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 maintains this teaching throughout his discussions of the problems that prevailed around the Corinthians' love feast, which problems were carried over in their attempts to observe the Supper. Their pagan behavior in the feast made it impossible for them to be in a correct state of mind to partake of the Supper in a worthy manner. Thus, the very opposite of what the love feast was to accomplish in reflecting unity and love, was actually reflecting rudeness and division.

**1. Come together for the better (vs 17):** Because some of the Corinthians were ungodly in behavior before they came to the love feast assembly, their ungodliness was reflected in the love feast, and subsequently, made them spiritually unworthy of the Supper. Therefore, they did "*not come together for the better but for the worse.*" They did not come together to better their relationships with their fellow disciples in Christ. Their coming together actually moved them further apart from one another, or at least, the love feast became a "divisive feast."

We discover in this judgment of Paul, however, the purpose for the love feast/

Lord's Supper event. **It is to be an opportunity to bring the members together in unity over a full meal of celebration.** This was as the covenant meals of the Old Testament where the participants of the covenant celebrated their covenant relationship with one another. In this case, the love feast/Lord's Supper was a celebration of the churches covenant with God.

**2. Division reflected in the assembly (vs 18).** Again, before they even arrived at their common assembly, some were saying, "*I am of Paul,*" others, "*I am of Apollos,*" and still others, "*I am of Cephas*" (1 Co 1:12). They divided the church outside the assembly, which division was reflected in the assembly of the love feast.

In considering Paul's statements concerning their abuse of the love feast/Supper occasion, we must always keep in mind that the Corinthians were doing the opposite of that which was to be accomplished. The love feast/Supper, therefore, was to build unity, not division among the disciples. Churches that have love feasts with the Supper, are seeking to encourage unity among the brethren over a covenant meal. There is purpose in the love feast with the Supper, which purpose has unfortunately been abandoned by most churches today because the love feast has been greatly neglected. In some churches, even the Lord's Supper is infrequently observed.

**3. Factions manifested the ungodly (vs 19).** Those who were identified to have a loving heart that sought peace were those who did not manifest a spirit of division in their assembly during the love feast/Supper event. Assemblies often give an opportunity for factious people to be made known to everyone. And thus, another reason that

churches should have a love feast/Supper event on a regular basis. Such an event is an opportunity to promote love and unity. If there are those in the church who are divisive in their spirit, such will be manifested in a love feast/Supper event. What too many churches do is harbor disunity among the disciples by having a simple ceremonial “chip and sip Supper,” after which each member disappears back into his or her own world of being isolated from all other members. The divisive disciples are thus allowed to harbor resentment and division in their hearts for years without being confronted and corrected in the spirit of eating together with the whole church.

**4. *The Supper is not to be eaten with a spirit of division (vs 20).*** Because some had a divisive spirit before their love feast/Supper assembly, meant that they were not coming to the table of the Lord in order to promote the unity that is to be encouraged in eating the Supper. If they did eat at the table, then their hypocrisy would be manifested to all, for all knew who the ungodly were in the church. Their divisive spirit, therefore, meant that the meal they were eating was not the Lord's meal. They had made it their own meal by their divisive spirits.

**5. *Rudeness cannot prevail at the Lord's meal (vs 21).*** The Greek word “supper” here is *deipnon*. It is the word for a full meal. (More later.) Some were bringing their food to the love feast and selfishly eating it by themselves. As a result, there was no food left for the poorer brethren to eat when they arrived. The purpose of the love meal was to give an opportunity for the poorer brethren to at least have this one good meal to eat during the week. Such manifested love on the part of those who could

afford to provide a greater offering of food. But the rude and inconsiderate brethren who brought their own food ate it before the poorer brethren arrived. They brought wine for the greater assembly, but drank it all, and subsequently they became drunken because they drank all the wine that was meant for the entire church. There was at the feast, therefore, the hungry poor and the drunken glutton.

The rude and selfish behavior of some was based on their turning the love feast meal into their **own** meal. They made it a common meal as they would eat at home. The Lord's meal was thus changed to their own meal by the manner in which they marginalized the poor. Instead of recognizing that the love feast/Supper was a covenant meal that all present ate in communion with fellow covenanted people, they were eating as if they were at home during their own meal.

We need to view what was happening in Corinth in reference to Paul's explanation of the unity that should be reflected in the meal. The Corinthians had made the covenant meal of the Lord their “own supper.” But Paul had already explained what eating the “one bread” symbolized. “*The bread that we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? ... we are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread*” (1 Co 10:16,17).

In order to emphasize the unity that the bread symbolizes, some brethren simply use one loaf of bread with the fruit of the vine. The one loaf of bread portrays the one body of all partakers. What we see today, however, is often a small pile of broken cracker crumbs in a plate that symbolizes more a broken and divisive body. Division and indi-

viduality are portrayed more than fellowship and unity. The use of a crumbled cracker does symbolize something, however. It symbolizes the fact that the brethren put so little time in preparation for the Supper that they do not take the time to prepare the bread for the Supper. In the urban context, we simply drive by the food store and conveniently buy crackers for the Supper. Our little consideration and legal ceremonial “act” of the Supper reflects our little consideration for one another. We ceremonially keep the Supper, therefore, not as an opportunity to promote love and unity, but selfishly satisfy our own consciences because we have legally fulfilled some “act of worship.” We are no better than the Corinthians who made the event their “own meal,” for we partake for ourselves in order to satisfy our own consciences. There are few churches who have restored the love feast/Supper in order to encourage the members to come together in order to think about others, especially the poorer brethren. It is the nature of the true church of Christ to put others before one’s self (Ph 2:3). In preparing food for others, the love feast is the ideal opportunity to manifest our concern for others.

**6. Satisfy hunger before you come (vs 22).** The love feast was not a common meal. It was a covenant meal among covenanted people, and thus, it was not to be eaten as a common meal. The disciples’ eating together manifested a common covenant relationship they had with God. If some were not providing the opportunity for everyone to eat of the meal, then they were in their gluttonous behavior manifesting to all their lack of desire to fellowship with the whole church in celebrating our common covenant with God. Some of the Corinthians

were doing everything but reflecting the oneness of the body of Christ in the common salvation that every member has in Christ (Jd 3). Therefore, in order for the glutton to be able to contain himself, he must eat something at home before he arrived at the covenant love feast wherein the Lord’s Supper was observed to remember our covenant with God.

The rude and gluttonous behavior of some brought shame on the ekklesia of God. Instead of reflecting the loving fellowship of the ekklesia, they revealed that there was little difference between the pagan feast at the temple and the love feast of the people of God.

Paul revealed an important point when he questioned that they brought “*shame to those who have nothing.*” One of the reasons for the love feast was to provide an opportunity for the poorer brethren to eat at least one good meal during the week. If the church as a whole did not have a love feast, then they would not be taking care of the poorer brothers and sisters, especially the widows and orphans. If they had the love feast, and yet behaved as they did by eating all the food as if they were in their own homes, then they were shaming the poor. **Paul’s advice is that the ones who have plenty of food should satisfy their hunger at home in order to be able to provide for the poor at the love feast.** His exhortation manifests one of the purposes of the feast. It was an opportunity for the church to accomplish its purpose in providing for the poorer members. Enough food should be brought that leftovers can be taken home by the poor.

**7. The Lord instituted His meal for the purpose of reflecting the unique unity**

*of His body, the ekklesia (vss 23-25).* And by unity, we mean more than doctrinal agreement. The unity that is discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 is behavioral relationship unity. Nothing is said about doctrines. So in verses 23–25 Paul reveals to the Corinthians what the Lord had personally revealed to him in order that the church renew their common salvation in Christ on a regular basis.

**a. Bread (vss 23,24):** Remember the life which the Jews connected with bread? In 1 Corinthians 10:17 Paul said, “*For though we are many, we are **one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.***” There is life in the bread, that is, there is life in the body. Every Christian is a partaker of this life because he has been baptized into the body (1 Co 12:13). What Jesus said in reference to the bread in 1 Corinthians 11:23 was to remind the church that He wanted the members to understand that **His one body was given for them in order that they be one living body.** The Corinthians by their behavior, however, were denying the very thing for which the bread symbolized.

Many today do the same as the Corinthians. There are more controversies over what takes place surrounding the Lord's Supper than any other event in Christianity. Some are no better than the Corinthians, for their behavior betrays their spirit of division that is manifested in their contentious legalism concerning the Supper.

**b. The cup (vs 25):** Only Luke records that Jesus took the cup **before** the bread, and then again **after** the bread (Lk 22:17,19,20). That's right. We have asked people why they partake of the bread be-

fore the fruit of the vine. The reply is usually, “Because this is what Jesus did when He instituted the Supper.” Not so. Read again Luke's account of the Supper (Lk 22:14-20).

In reference to the cup, both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus said, “*This is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many*” (Mt 26:29; Mk 14:24). But here Paul says that Jesus personally told him, “*This cup is the new covenant **in My blood***” (See also Lk 22:20). “Blood of the covenant” and “covenant in My blood” emphasize two things in reference to blood and covenants. Covenants of the Old Testament were ratified by the offering of blood. Thus the blood of an innocent offering was attached to the ratification of the covenant. The covenant and the blood could not be separated.

In the case of Jesus' new covenant, **remission of sins resulted when one obeyed the conditions that were necessary in order to bring one into a covenant relationship with God.** As Jesus was crucified and died for our sins, so one must crucify himself and die with Christ to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:6). But then we must bury the old dead man of sin in order that he be raised with Christ (Rm 6:4,5). This is what happens when one is baptized for remission of sins (At 2:38; 22:16). There is no magic in the water of baptism. The magic is in the obedience of the one who submits to God's requirements to come into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (See Mt 28:19,20). There is no remission, therefore, outside the new covenant of Jesus because there is no cleansing blood outside Christ. The cleansing blood of Jesus, therefore, is accessed when one obeys the death, burial and resurrection of

Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). The life is for those who have been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Co 12:13).

The blood in reference to the new covenant both ratified the covenant, as well as brought remission of sins to those who came into a covenant relationship with God. When one is baptized, therefore, he receives remission of sins because of the blood of Jesus that ratified the new covenant. If one is not baptized, he has neither remission of sins nor a covenant relationship with God.

**8. *The disciples observed the love feast/Supper often (vs 26):*** Verse 26 begins the words of Paul. In reference to the frequency of the disciples' observance of the Supper, Paul does not give a specific time. But it is **often**. It is "often" because such is only natural for those who are in a covenant relationship with God. There is no command in the New Testament in reference to the frequency for the observance of the Supper. Since the command is not present in the New Testament, we make a deduction from the assembly behavior of the early church. The disciples came together on the first day of the week in order to break bread, that is, to celebrate their salvation in the love feast and Supper (At 20:7). We conclude, therefore, that because the Supper was connected with the breaking of bread, then the early disciples observed the Supper to remind Jesus of the covenant and His coming again. They did this every first day of the week.

Partaking of the bread and cup was, as the Jewish Passover, an enacted message of something of the past and something that was yet to come in the future. The Passover was instituted in order that Israel re-

member her Egyptian bondage of the past, but also to remember the promises of the future. In the Supper, Christians remember their bondage in sin in the past, but also the promises that are connected with the covenant relationship that they now have with Christ. The "proclamation" continues throughout the existence of the church until Jesus comes again. The purpose of the redemption that is remembered in the Supper, therefore, has not yet been completed. The proclamation of the redemption of the cross in the Supper will continue until Jesus comes again to redeem His people from this world.

**9. *Unworthiness in behavior negates the opportunity to partake:*** The phrase "unworthy manner" is an adverb of manner. In other words, it is the manner of behavior and state of mind at the time one partakes of the Supper. It does not, and cannot, refer to our life in general. All have sinned, and thus would be considered unworthy as a demeanor of life. If we do not eat of the Supper because we had some sin in our life during the week, then we must understand that no one could partake of the Supper, for all have sinned (Rm 3:23). The problem would also be that if we believed that a sinless week gave us the right to eat the Supper, then we would sin out of arrogance when we partake, thinking that we had lived sinlessly.

What is meant in this context is the Corinthians' corruption of the love feast event, during which some became drunk. They become inconsiderate and rude in their drunkenness because they ate all the food before the poorer brethren arrived. In other words, they were drunken senseless when they partook of that which was to reflect the oneness of the ekklesia of Christ. They

were “*guilty of the body and the blood*” because they reflected in their behavior the exact opposite nature of the loving unity of the body and the common blood covenant the body had with God. Paul’s severe condemnation of these ungodly brethren was not because they violated some ceremonial procedure that supposedly surrounded the Supper. His focus was directly on the behavior and attitudes of the unrighteous hearts of those who marginalized others in the body.

**10. *The Supper is an opportunity for self-evaluation (vs 28):*** A man should examine his behavior and attitude at the time he joins with his fellow disciples in the Supper. One of the reasons why the early Christians kept the love feast connected with the Supper was that the love feast laid the foundation of behavior and attitude for the eating of the Supper. It is difficult to continue an argument with a brother when you are sitting down at a table of food with him. It is difficult to engage in quarrels when you are full of food. Breaking bread was an occasion that naturally encouraged celebration and joy, as was the occasion of the Passover. The love feast, therefore, was the perfect social stimulus to prepare people’s minds to join together in the one bread and cup. The love feast reflected the unity of the body which was remembered through the Supper. **They could celebrate the unity of the body in the Supper because of the unity by which they ate the love feast.**

**10. *If we do not remember, we judge ourselves (vs 29):*** If one had lost his senses in drunkenness, then certainly he would have no recollection of what he was doing at the time he ate the Supper with his fellow brethren. Through his behavior, therefore, he

judged himself unworthy to partake of the Supper. In his drunkenness he would not be able to discern the brotherhood of the one body of disciples. One becomes drunk because he is thinking of himself. But the Supper was a communal event where everyone was to be thinking about others. We eat and drink to remember one another. Some in Corinth were doing the opposite. They had denied the very purpose for which the Supper was instituted by selfishly eating and drinking before the whole church arrived.

**11. *Our behavior is our judge (vs 30):*** Some have affirmed that Paul’s reference here is to physical matters. This could possibly be the case in reference to God’s **direct** judgment in the early establishment of the church, which judgment was immediately measured out on Ananias and Sapphira (At 5:1-11). But we would affirm that what was happening in Corinth, could also happen today. And since God does not render physical judgment immediately upon ungodly brethren today who defile the Supper, then we would assume that in this context the ungodly had judged themselves spiritually sick, if not spiritually dead. And if spiritually dead, it was time to purge them from the body.

**12. *We judge ourselves (vss 31,32):*** Paul’s point is that if the Corinthians judged their behavior to be unrighteous, and subsequently repented, then they would not be judged by the Lord. When we are judged by the Lord, the Lord disciplines us in life in order that we not be condemned with the world at the end of time. “*For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives*” (Hb 12:6). Therefore, we do not despise the disciplining of the Lord (Hb 12:5). Such discipline

leads the sincere to repentance.

**13. We come together to eat in fellowship (vss 33,34):** Some have erroneously concluded from the statement made in verse 33 that Paul banned brethren from coming together to eat the love feast. But nothing could be further from the truth. Both Peter and Jude mentioned the presence of the love feast of the early Christians many years after Paul wrote the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11. Under no circumstances did any writer of Scripture forbid Christians of coming together to eat a fellowship meal. In fact, **the nature of the true ekklesia assumes that Christians will eat their food together “with gladness and sincerity of heart”** (At 2:46). What Paul does instruct in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 is that they “*wait for one another.*” Waiting for one another symbolizes consideration for one another. It presents the opportunity that everyone have food to eat, especially the poorer brethren. This is the reflection of the true church of Christ. The love feast/Supper is the opportunity of the ekklesia to proclaim before the world the sweet fellowship that they can enjoy in Christ.

Now if one cannot wait at the time of the love feast for everyone to show up, then

he should eat something at home before he comes to the assembly of the saints. He should do this lest on a hungry stomach he cannot control his hunger, and thus manifest an inconsiderate behavior by eating before everyone is present.

When Paul made the statement, “*when you come together to eat,*” we discover the reason for the coming together of the disciples. It was to come together for the love feast/Supper event. The word is “**eat,**” not snack. **They came together for the purpose of eating a meal.** In view of Acts 20:7, these two passages would compliment one another in establishing one purpose for the assembly of the saints. The purpose for the assembly of the disciples on Sunday was to eat together in fellowship with one another. During or after the meal, they partook of the bread and fruit of the vine. But one of their primary purposes for coming together was to eat a meal, and by such to stir up love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:33 was that they must wait for one another before they started eating. In this orderly manner, the poorer brothers and sisters would have the opportunity to eat as much as everyone else.

## Chapter 8

### UNLEAVENED BREAD

Unleavened bread is defined as bread that is void of yeast in the making of the bread. It is the type of bread that is commonly used in the Lord’s Supper in most assemblies. Most arrive at this conclusion simply because the leaven was cast out of the Jewish home for the seven days of the

Passover week (Ex 12:14-20). And since the bread that the disciples were eating during the Passover was unleavened, we copy the example for ourselves in using unleavened bread for the Supper that Jesus instituted.

It is true that the bread that Jesus used

to institute the Supper was unleavened. However, throughout all the biblical accounts of the institution of the Supper, there is no emphasis placed on the bread being unleavened. Therefore, one could not argue the use of unleavened bread on the basis of command. Jesus did not command the use of unleavened bread. We can only deduct from His use of the Passover unleavened bread that was present at the time He instituted the Supper, that it was unleavened, which no doubt it was. However, to affirm that the circumstances surrounding the institution of the Supper are binding law leans toward binding something that was never intended to be bound by Jesus. If we do bind something that was only part of the circumstances surrounding the institution of the Supper, then we will run into a great deal of problems.

If the circumstances surrounding the institution of the Supper become binding, then we have proved too much in reference to how we should partake of the Supper. For instance, when the Jews observed the Passover, they were to have bitter herbs in the presence of the bread (Ex 12:8). Must we also have bitter herbs in the presence of the bread of the Lord's Supper? Also consider the fact that the Supper was instituted by Jesus in an upper room and at night. Are these incidentals during the institution of the Supper to be binding examples? When the Passover meal was first instituted, God instructed the participants to have a staff and be wearing sandals (Ex 12:11). Are we to have a staff in hand and be wearing sandals when we partake of the Supper, simply because that was the circumstances by which the Jews observed the Passover? We would conclude, therefore, that because unleavened bread was incidental in reference to the cir-

cumstances when Jesus instituted the Supper, that such would not be a binding law.

What we should do is consider the use of unleavened bread from the viewpoint of the "body" of Christ. When Jesus said, "this is My body," we would ask to which body was He referring. His physical incarnate body was given on the cross. But the word "body" is also metaphorically used throughout Scripture in reference to the body of believers, the church. The body of believers is one, though there are many members (1 Co 10:16,17). Though each member in the body of believers has various ministries, each is a part of the one body (1 Co 12:12-27). When we come to Paul's account of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, therefore, we must understand that Paul's use of the word "body" does not exclusively refer to the physical body of Jesus.

But if we say that the word "body" in 1 Corinthians 11 refers to the spiritual body of Christ, then we would understand that Jesus was the Lamb of God who offered Himself for the sins of the people. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul explains that Jesus was the Passover lamb. Under Old Testament law, this lamb was to be without blemish (Ex 12:5). Jesus was the Passover lamb who was without sin (Hb 7:26; 9:14). He gave Himself as an offering for His body of disciples.

In the thinking of the Jews, leaven was usually the symbol of evil, though in two parables of Jesus leaven was a symbol for the spreading of the kingdom (See Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20). But generally throughout Scripture, leaven is used as a figure to represent the influence of unrighteousness. In the institution of the Passover, God's command that they cast out the leaven from their

houses would symbolize the clearing of unrighteousness from their hearts in order to accept the command of God to flee Egypt. The clearing of their homes of leavened bread seven days before the Passover meal was symbolic of clearing one's heart of unrighteousness before eating the Passover lamb.

The concept of purging the leavening influence of evil from the body of Christ is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 5:5-8. The Corinthians were to purge out the sinful brother who was maintaining fellowship with them in their love feast. But Paul exhorted the church, "... **purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened**" (1 Co 5:7). In focusing on the hearts of the Corinthians when they came to their love feast, during which they

ate the Supper, he wrote, "*Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*" (1 Co 5:8).

Christians are to live the Christ-centered life of righteousness. They are to continually purge out of their hearts unrighteousness. As the body of Christ, they are to purge out the wicked in order that they be the new lump, unleavened of evil. Unleavened bread, therefore, would symbolize that they as the body of Christ eat "*the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*" (1 Co 5:8). Jesus gave His body in order to cleanse His spiritual body, the church. In partaking of the Supper, we are individually examining ourselves in order to purge unrighteousness from our hearts.

## Chapter 9

### THE LORD'S DEIPNON

Bible scholars do not question the fact that the early church celebrated a love feast when they came together on the first day of the week. Today, having such a feast is not common among churches throughout the world. As the disciples of Jesus, we seek to understand the reason why the early disciples had a regular love feast as the foundation for the Lord's Supper. Was there something in the teachings of Jesus that led them to believe that love feasts, during which the Lord's Supper was observed, were a natural event for which the early church assembled?

We invariably read into the text of the Scriptures our common practices in religious matters. This is especially true in reference

to the definition of words. We often attach our own life experiences to the definition of all words that an author uses to express his point. There is nothing unusual about this. It is simply a human characteristic of interpreting the thoughts of an author by our own beliefs and behavior.

For this reason, we must be on guard about interpreting the Scriptures. We must always be cautious about reading our definitions of words into the words of the inspired writers. If we did read our beliefs and behavior into a text of Scripture, we would judge this to be opinionated and biased interpretation of what the Holy Spirit wrote. It is the task of the objective translator, as well as the reader, therefore, to put

himself in the shoes of the original writer in order to understand what the writer sought to communicate. This principle is the task of the honest biblical interpreter. And it is with this principle that we tackle the definition of a Greek word that was used in reference to the definition of the love feast/Supper event of the early church.

The old English word “supper” finds its original definition in a rural family meal centuries ago that occurred in the evening after everyone of the family came in from the fields. The word was based in a rural, farming culture. The laborers of the field could not enjoy a sumptuous feast in the middle of the day while they were in the heat of their manual labors. The consumption of a great amount of food in the heat of the midday sun, and in the midst of great labor, was not customary in the farming culture from which the word “supper” was given birth. Farmers ate in the middle of the day, but their “fellowship” supper, or full meal was in the evening. The evening supper was the time for family, food and discussion concerning the day’s work.

The evening supper was a time for the family to come together for communication and reunion after a hard day’s work in the fields. Having grown up on a farm, we can personally testify to the importance of family time during the evening supper. This was a time of communication about the events of the farming that had taken place during the day. It was a time for family renewal and the enjoyment of one another before bedtime. The word “supper” finds its definition, therefore, in this very important evening meal event where a family came together to celebrate family and to discuss the work of the farm.

After a hard day of work in the fields, you can only imagine the type of suppers we enjoyed. During the day and in the heat of the work, farmers ate, but not as they ate in the evenings. A snack was often enjoyed during the day, but a full meal with all the trimmings was enjoyed at supper time. There was no snack in the evenings. As farmers who had put in a twelve hour day, we were hungry, and the table was spread with the best that could be eaten by those who had labored strenuously in the field. Supper meant a full meal, the best that could be had on the farm. To farmers, therefore, the word “supper” always meant a full meal from which no one went away hungry.

The translators of our English Bibles did well when they used the word “supper” to translate a Greek word that had a similar setting and meaning in the first century. This is the Greek word *deipnon*. This word refers to a full meal, and was defined after the rural culture of ancient peoples. Food was certainly the primary substance of the definition, but as the English word “supper,” there was more to the definition of the word than food. The *deipnon* was an event. It was an event of fellowship and communication. It was a time of renewal and a conscious remembrance of family. It was a feast around which friends and family came together to renew their common bond. In reference to food, there was no concept of a snack in the definition of the word *deipnon*. The great amount of food that was necessary for a supper took a great deal of time to eat, and thus, the opportunity for great communication. This was the social event of the *deipnon*.

The use of the word *deipnon* in the New Testament verifies this definition, and

thus to a great extent, finds a good definition in the old English word “supper” as it was used in rural English culture. The use of the word in reference to the Lord’s Supper helps us understand what God intended should be accomplished when Christians come together as an assemble of His people. With this in mind, consider the use of the word *deipnon* as it is defined by its use in the New Testament.

### A. Herod’s *deipnon*:

“Finally, an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday made a *supper* [*deipnon*] for his lords, high captains and chief men of Galilee” (Mk 6:21).

Now you can only imagine what type of *deipnon* this was. The *deipnon* was made for the highest ranking officials of Herod’s reign. But more important, it was Herod’s birthday *deipnon*. Every effort was thus made to make this an event, of which food was the physical adhesive that held the event together. The lords, high captains and chief men did not just come together for food. This was an event of Herod’s birthday, and thus they came together to celebrate and give honor to Herod while eating a sumptuous full meal. There was no snack for food. Such would have been an absolute insult to the participants. Herod would have been insulted, and the officials who attended would have been snubbed. A true *deipnon* (supper) was prepared in order that honor be given to Herod, as well as to those who attended.

The duration of this *deipnon* was not determined by how fast the food could be consumed. As the Jewish Passover meal, it was an event that carried on for hours. The

amount of food, therefore, was determined by the duration of the event. If the affairs of the event carried on past the time when all the food was consumed, then the host would have been embarrassed. Enough food was prepared for the *deipnon* in order to guarantee that the guests could eat during the entire sequence of events that took place during the feast.

And there were certainly a great deal of things that took place during this particular historical event. Though our record of this event in Mark 6 was the occasion for the beheading of John the Baptist, the number of events that took place emphasize a great period of time that transpired during the feast. Dancing by the daughter of Herodias took place. Conversation and a command for the beheading of John took place. The actual beheading of John took place. There was enough time for the head of John to be presented to Herod during the *deipnon*. This *deipnon* went on for hours. It was not a “snack-and-leave” event.

In the event of Herod’s birthday *deipnon*, the Holy Spirit establishes an initial definition for the word as it is used in the New Testament. The *deipnon* as an event where food was the adhesive around which several other events took place. There was celebration, honor given, activities carried out, conversation, and a renewal of Herod’s kingdom position.

Today, our English word “feast” probably better translates the word *deipnon*, though many of our English translations have stayed with the word “supper.” But keep in mind that the New Testament definition of *deipnon* is first determined by the context of the Scriptures in which it was used. It was used in reference to Herod’s birthday

feast, and in a similar manner, it was used in the following events of the New Testament that are mentioned in this chapter. The use of the word in the following events clearly defines the word according to its common use in the first century.

### B. Jesus' *deipnon*:

*“Then He [Jesus] said also to him who invited Him, ‘When you prepare a dinner or supper [deipnon], do not call your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you prepare a feast, call the poor, crippled, lame and blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just”* (Lk 14:12-14).

The social environment of the *deipnon* that Jesus sought to institute among His disciples was different than the previous *deipnon* that was conducted by Herod. Herod's *deipnon* was worldly and exclusive. Where Herod sought to receive honor from his guests, Jesus on the other hand wanted the poor, cripple, lame and blind to be invited. He wanted this supper to be an inclusive occasion, especially for those who were financially and physically disadvantaged. Where Herod sought to be repaid with loyalty from his guests, Jesus taught that we must be loyal to those who cannot repay our good deeds. However, regardless of the difference in the special environment of the two feasts, the event of the word *deipnon* in reference to the meal was the same.

The *deipnon* about which Jesus spoke was to be an event of feasting and fellow-

ship. It was an inclusive *deipnon* where a full meal was served. Now imagine inviting the poor, crippled, lame and blind just for a snack or cup of soup. Was this what Jesus had in mind? The very purpose for which the *deipnon* was to be held would be totally reversed if only a snack was given. Where Jesus wanted us to give honor to the poor, crippled, lame and blind, what message would we be giving to our guests if we served them only a snack? After the snack, we would then go somewhere else and enjoy a full meal by ourselves at the local restaurant. We would send the poor home hungry. There is something about the thought of doing this that is repulsive to the spirit of being Christian.

Jesus' *deipnon* that is defined in the text of Luke 14:12-14 is a *deipnon* where one is to manifest fellowship and communication with no strings attached. In other words, the host, through the *deipnon*, was to show sacrifice without expecting something in return. In order to manifest this sacrifice, a full meal of food had to be prepared. No snack would have ever communicated to the attendees that the host was sincere in his or her efforts to fellowship and communicate with the financially unfortunate and physically disadvantaged.

We must not assume by Jesus' reference to those who were not invited that a *deipnon* could not be held for friends, family and relatives. His point in the context is that we must conduct a *deipnon* experience beyond our friends, family and relatives. Our feasts with friends and family to the exclusion of the financially and physically disadvantaged is the type of feast that Herod conducted. Jesus wanted us to invite everyone. We must understand the historical con-

text in which Jesus' instructions were given. The culture of the rich and famous at the time was defined by Herod's *deipnon*. Only friends and officials were invited to Herod's supper. There were thus too many in the culture of the time who wanted to do as Herod. They practiced exclusive suppers. The *deipnon* among the rich and famous became a meal of exclusion, and not inclusion. Jesus initiated a paradigm shift in reference to having a *deipnon*.

Jesus wanted to reverse the exclusive sentiment in reference to the *deipnon* that would be conducted by His disciples. The *deipnon* of the disciples of Jesus was to be inclusive of all, not only of friends, family and relatives. The poor, cripple, lame and blind were to be included. Culturally speaking, therefore, Jesus added a new definition to the *deipnon* of the times. Everyone was to be invited. There were to be no restrictions. There were to be no restrictions because one was not of the financial status of the host. There were to be no restrictions because one was physically disadvantaged. There were to be no restrictions because one was not of the same social class with one another. The *deipnon* of the disciples of Jesus was to be totally inclusive. We see in Jesus' instructions of Luke 14:12-14 that He was laying the foundation upon which He would eventually establish His *deipnon* that was to be continually practiced by His disciples. **It was a *deipnon* that would reflect the true nature of the body of Christ.**

Unless we relegate Jesus' teaching on this matter to the culture of His immediate ministry, we must read again verse 14 where He stated, "*for you will be repaid at the*

*resurrection of the just.*" The resurrection of the just and unjust will take place in the last day when Jesus comes again (Jn 5:28,29; At 24:15). Thus Jesus expects His disciples to conduct the *deipnon* about which He spoke in Luke 14 until He comes again at the end of time.

Now as a reminder, and because Jesus' instructions concerning His *deipnon* is to be practiced among His disciples until His final coming, we must not forget that this *deipnon* was not a snack for the poor and physically disadvantaged. This was not a "soup kitchen" held on the street corner where attendees were given a cup of soup and sent on their way, which in itself, is a good work. It was a full meal as would be given to one's friends, family and relatives. As one would prepare for friends, family and relatives, he or she should also prepare a *deipnon* (supper) for the poor, crippled, lame and blind. And we must do so until Jesus comes again. This may be a real paradigm shift for some, but it is a shift that we must seriously consider in order to restore the fellowship of the love feast/Lord's Supper event.

Lest we stray from the point, we must not assume that the Lord's Supper is the *deipnon* about which Jesus spoke in the context of Luke 14. All that we want from the event of the Luke 14 *deipnon* is the definition of the word. And the definition of the word *deipnon* as it was used in Luke 14 is that it was a full meal around which communication and fellowship took place. We would conclude, however, that the early Christians defined the love feast event after the teaching that Jesus gave of His *deipnon* that is given in Luke 14.

### C. A *deipnon* for Jesus:

*“Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper [deipnon] and Martha served” (Jn 12:1,2).*

You can imagine the atmosphere of this *deipnon*. It was certainly an occasion of great celebration and joy. It was a supper specifically prepared for the resurrected Lazarus. The occasion was a time of celebration, for it was probably the first meal that Jesus enjoyed with Lazarus, Mary and Martha after Lazarus' resurrection. Can you imagine the excitement that was in the air during the eating of the food? This was a time for the reunion of Lazarus with the family of his two sisters, Mary and Martha. In fact, Mary was so overcome with thanksgiving that she bowed to her knees and anointed the feet of Jesus with a very expensive ointment (Jn 12:3). Though an impromptu action on her part, the anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary manifested that the event was not a snack-and-run event.

Mary did not do what she did at the time of Lazarus' resurrection. She did not do what she did at any time between Lazarus' resurrection and the event of the *deipnon* in the context of John 12. The fact was that the atmosphere of the *deipnon* presented an opportunity for her to manifest her extreme gratitude to Jesus for raising her brother from the dead. From what took place during this *deipnon*, we would assume that a *deipnon* is a time where unusual things can take place as people manifest their extreme gratitude for what Jesus has done in raising all of us from our death in sin. For the Christian, the *deipnon* is a sacred event

of the week. It is a time for expressing gratitude and manifesting celebration that is centered around a full meal.

### D. The last *deipnon* of Jesus:

*“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And during supper [deipnon], the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God, and was going back to God, rose from the supper [deipnon] ...” (Jn 13:1-14).*

The context of this event was the last *deipnon*, the Passover, that Jesus ate with His disciples. This *deipnon* carried on for several hours. During this time Jesus rose and washed the disciples' feet. Sometime during this particular occasion, John, the brother of James, was leaning on the breast of Jesus (Jn 21:20). Also during this *deipnon* Jesus rebuked the disciples concerning their competitive relationship that they had with one another (Lk 22:22-30). There was much eating, much speaking, and a great deal of events that took place. The *deipnon* was the occasion for all this conversation and events to occur. Though the washing of the feet of the disciples, and the institution of the “Lord's Meal” took place on this occasion, it was common for those who ate the Passover to enjoy a great feast. It was not a snack-and-run event.

It was customary that those who ate at the *deipnon* of the Passover, and other

feasts, to recline or lounge on carpets or pillows around the food that was placed on a low lying table before everyone. In this posture they could stay a great deal of time in eating and enjoying one another's company. On this particular occasion, Jesus metaphorically claimed the "table." He claimed the common table that was used for the food. He did so when He said to the disciples that they would eat and drink "*at My table*" (Lk 22:30). Jesus' emphasis was not on the physical wooden table. Neither was His primary focus on the food. However, the food played a significant part in establishing the environment around which the events of this meal took place, and thus, it became the definition of My "table" which He claimed. Therefore, when Jesus said "My table," His emphasis was seated in the events that took place on this occasion. There was much food, much talk, and many events that surrounded "His table" meal with the disciples.

When Luke recorded the statement of Luke 22:30 in his letter to Theophilus over thirty years after this event, "the table of the Lord" was known as a time when the disciples feasted. Theophilus would thus interpret this statement of Luke to refer to a table meal of the disciples of Jesus during which Jesus took a portion of the fruit of the vine and bread in order to establish a memorial of His body and blood. As we read this statement in our Bibles today, we would also interpret "My table" to refer to what took place during this last Passover meal that Jesus had with the disciples. There is no reason why we would change the environment or substances of "the table." It was a table of food then, and now the "Lord's Table" is still a time for feasting, fellowship and remembrance during which a memorial

is made in reference to the body and blood of Jesus.

Our traditional practice has been to make a separation between the *deipnon* that took place on the Passover and the event of Jesus using the fruit of the vine and bread of the *deipnon* to establish a memorial of His body and blood. We thus establish two "tables," one "table" meal in reference to the occasion where the "table" of the Lord was established, and another "table" of the Lord during which we have an abbreviated *deipnon*. But as we dig deeper into the practice of the New Testament church, it is evident that the early church did not make this separation. They continued with the events of the occasion of the Passover *deipnon*. A full meal was prepared and eaten, during or after which the Lord's Supper was eaten as part of the meal. There was no separation between the events of the two "tables."

### E. The final *deipnon*:

*"Then he said to me, 'Write, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper [deipnon] of the Lamb..."'"* (Rv 19:9).

*"Then I saw an angel standing in the sun. And he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather yourselves together for the great supper [deipnon] of God..."'"* (Rv 19:17)

Described in the preceding two statements of Revelation 19:9 & 17 is the great marriage *deipnon* that is yet to come. This figurative speech was built upon the common marriage meal that was held among men. During such a feast there was great

celebration, great food, great fellowship, and many events that brought rejoicing to the parties who were brought together in marriage. The imagery that we must place on the metaphor, therefore, is what we would experience during a marriage banquet. A metaphor derives its meaning from that which is earthly and literal. What is earthly and literal with the supper (*deipnon*) that is mentioned in these texts of Revelation is a full meal of celebration. The angel in Revelation metaphorically refers to the event of the saints with the Lord to come as the “great *deipnon*.” It will be great because it will be the *deipnon* of God. Can you imagine a snack being offered at a marriage banquet? Now can you imagine that the “great *deipnon*” that God will provide for the faithful will be only a snack?

#### F. The Lord's *deipnon*:

We have studied through the preceding texts of the New Testament where the word *deipnon* is used in order to bring ourselves to this last point. In view of the clear definition of the word *deipnon* that is contextually defined in the New Testament, we do not think much discussion needs to be made as to what reference is made in the context of 1 Corinthians 11. Speaking against the Corinthians' wrong attitudes and behavior with which they conducted the Lord's *deipnon*, Paul wrote, “Therefore, when

*you come together, it is not to eat the Lord's supper* [deipnon]. *For in eating, each one takes before others his own supper* [deipnon]. *And one is hungry and another is drunken ...*” (1 Co 11:20,21). Jesus said, “*This is My body which is for you. This do in remembrance of Me.*’ *After the same manner He took the cup also after supper* [deipnon], *saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood’*” (1 Co 11:23-25).

The Corinthians had messed up a completely good *deipnon* event by their inconsiderate behavior in reference to the poor brethren. In their eating of the Lord's *deipnon*, they had made it their own, behaving in an inconsiderate manner among themselves.

Regardless of the sinful behavior of the rich and arrogant Corinthians in reference to their poorer brethren, what do you believe the Corinthians were doing in reference to this supper that Paul had taught them to do? Was it a snack, or was it a full meal with enough food present that an inconsiderate person could eat as a glutton and drink enough wine with which to become drunk? It is evident from the statements that Paul made in 1 Corinthians 11 that the early church sat at the “Lord's table” during their love feast. There was no separation between the two events, for the love feast laid the spiritual and emotional foundation for eating at the table of the Lord.

## Chapter 10

### FELLOWSHIP IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD

The sources of this chapter are given, not to establish authority, but to present a

consensus of thought among scholars concerning the meal fellowship of the early dis-

ciples in conjunction with the Lord's Supper. The Bible student must not forget that with his translation of the Bible, he can come to an understanding of those Bible subjects that are necessary to obey in order to please God. The Holy Spirit never meant that "Bible scholars" should lead the church in order to give a "scholastic interpretation" of any Bible verse. Neither did He intend that the disciples of Jesus throughout history know either Hebrew or Greek in order to understand the Scriptures. Both Jesus and the writers of the New Testament quoted from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. But neither Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit who inspired the writers of the New Testament, resorted to the "original" Hebrew words and phrases of the Hebrew text in order to give "authority" to what Jesus personally spoke, or what the Holy Spirit inspired them to write. God is pleased that any disciple can use the translation in his hand to come to an understanding of the message and fundamental teachings that are necessary for salvation. **Every teaching that is difficult to understand, or must be understood through a knowledge of either Hebrew or Greek, therefore, cannot be made a requirement for salvation and fellowship of the saints.** This principle must be kept clearly in mind when studying the subject of the Lord's Supper and love (agape) feast.

#### A. *New Bible Commentary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, "The Breaking of Bread":*

"In the early church of the Acts there are scattered references to table-fellowship. *e.g.* Acts 2:42,46 where the phrase is 'breaking of bread'. In Acts 20:7 (but not 27:35, which

describes an ordinary, non-cultic meal) there is a reference to a fellowship meal, using the identical phrase. The fact that no mention of the cup is ever made in Acts leads H. Lietzmann ... to the elaborate thesis that this Jerusalem communion in one kind is the earliest and most original form of the sacrament, .... It was, *ex hypothesi*, a fellowship meal beginning with the familiar Jewish custom of breaking of bread—a continuation, in fact, of the common meals of the Galilean ministry when the Lord fed the crowds and in which the Lord and his disciples formed a *haburah*."

"... the name 'breaking of bread' may be a quasi-technical expression for the whole meal. What is significant about the early form of the Eucharist is the note of *joy* which stems directly, not so much from the Galilean meals as from the post-resurrection appearances, many of which are associated with a meal between the victorious Lord and his own (Lk. 24:30-35,36-48; Jn. 21:9ff.; Acts 1:4 (RV mg.); 10:41; Rev. 3:20)."

#### B. *New Bible Commentary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, "Love Feast":*

"St. Paul's account [in 1 Cor. 11:17-34] of the administration of the Eucharist [Lord's supper] shows it set in the context of a fellowship supper. His farewell discourse at Troas which continued till midnight was delivered at a fellowship meal on the first day of the week which included the Eucharist (Acts 20:7ff)."

"Although the common custom of fellowship meals among the Jews may have been sufficient ground for the primitive Agape

[feast], some would trace the practice to the actual circumstances of the Last Supper. The sacrament was instituted at a Passover meal. Some scholars contend for another type of fellowship meal customary in the *qiddush* and *haburah* gatherings. The early disciples probably reproduced the setting of the first Eucharist, preceding it with such a fellowship meal. The separation of the meal or Agape from the Eucharist lies outside the times of the NT.”

**C. John Mark Hicks, *Come to the Table* (Fairmount, CA: Leafwood Pub., 2003), p. 80:**

“Jesus instituted a supper where his people might remember him. His model for this supper was the sacrificial meals of the Hebrew Bible. In particular, he instituted his own supper in the context of a Passover meal. Jesus instituted a meal, not just bread and wine. The meal (in Luke, cup-bread-supper-cup) fulfills the Passover in the kingdom of God and anticipates the full messianic banquet in the new heaven and new earth. If the Old Testament festivals involved a full meal (like the Passover) and the future messianic banquet involves a full meal, the new covenant meal, the Lord's supper, also involves a full meal.”

**D. F. F. Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1951:**

“‘The breaking of bread’ referred to in Acts 2:42,26 may describe a common meal which included both the Agape [feast] and Eucharist [Lord's supper].”

**E. Tyndale New Testament Commen-**

***taries*, Canon Leon Morris, *I Corinthians*, (1976: Inter-varsity Press, p. 158):**

1 Corinthians 11:21 “reveals that at Corinth the Holy Communion was not simply a token meal as with us, but an actual meal. Moreover it seems clear that it was a meal to which each of the participants brought food.”

**F. *The New Lion Encyclopedia*, John Drane:**

“The early church observed the Lord's supper as an exclusive community meal.”

**G. *The Dictionary of the Bible*, J.G. Simpson, James Hastings, ed. “Eucharist” (1909: T & T Clark, Edinburg), p. 244:**

“The name Lord's supper, though legitimately derived from 1 Cor 11 vs 20, is not there applied to the sacrament itself, but to the Love Feast or Agape, a meal commemorating the Last Supper, and not yet separated from the Eucharist when St. Paul wrote.”

**H. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Bread” (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), p. 543:**

“The idea of hospitality developed into the ancient Christian custom of connecting the *agape* [feast] (Jude 12; cf. 1 Cor. 11:21) with the Lord's supper. Community by partaking of the same bread is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:17. But the first idea in the Lord's Supper is still another symbolism: the con-

ception of the bread of life, the spiritual food given to mankind when Christ surrendered Himself unto death in order that His followers might find life eternal. This institution of holy communion (Mt. 26:26), has been expanded largely in Jn. 6:32-58, words spoken when 'the Passover ... was at hand' (Jn 6:4), and when Christ had shown Himself the divine host by the multiplying of bread. So the symbolism of bread in Israel's religion and the symbolism of bread in the common life of the eastern countries were joined to the central theme of the Lord's Supper: the sacrifice of Christ as the life-bread for His people."

**I. I. Howard Marshal, *Christian Beliefs: An Introductory Study Guide* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p. 80:**

"This simple rite [the Lord's supper] was observed by His disciples, at first as part of a communal meal, Sunday by Sunday."

**J. *Christian History*, John Dooch, ed. (Nashville, TN: Methodist Publishing House), Issue 37, p. 3:**

"In the first century, the Lord's Supper included not only the bread and the cup but an entire meal."

**K. In A.D. 112, Pliny wrote to Caesar Trajan of the Roman Empire concerning one of the Sunday habits of Christians.**

"It was their [Christians'] habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing .... After this was done, their custom was to depart and meet again to take food, but ordi-

nary and harmless food."

It goes without question that the early disciples had a weekly celebration feast, during which they observed the Lord's meal. At the end of the first century, Ignatius, whom tradition says was a disciple of John, wrote, "And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day **as a festival**, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all the days" (*Epistle to the Magnesians*, Ch. IX). This seems to indicate the events of the first day of the week assembly of Christians throughout the first century. Other than the records of this occasion we find in the New Testament, there is also the testimony of the *Didache* (or, "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"). The *Didache* was written around the end of the first century. In the teaching of this document, the love feast and Lord's Supper were still celebrated as one feast. When Ignatius was martyred around A.D. 115, he too mentions in his writings that the love feast and Supper were still celebrated as one feast. But by the late second century and early third century there was discussion concerning the separation of these two feasts. By the middle of the third century and first of the fourth century, the separation was complete. During the fourth century the love feast was actually forbidden in the assembly.

There have been several suggestions concerning why this happened. Some have suggested that when pagan practices in reference to the assembly made their way into the early church, the celebration of the love feast had to go. The primary reason, however, was the change from small home meetings to large assemblies. When the early

church turned from assemblies that were primarily home based to larger meetings in public places, it was difficult to continue the love feast, and thus, the love feast gave way to the observance of the Lord's Supper that was customized to a ceremonial snack in order to accommodate larger gatherings of people.

By the middle and end of the fourth century, the love feast lost out as a part of the assembly of the disciples on the first day of the week. When church buildings that were first introduced by Constantine, emperor of Rome, became the common place of assembly, the love feasts were banned from the buildings. In fact, at the Council of Laodicea in 363 the love feast was forbidden in the church buildings. Though this banning was the ruling of an apostate church, the tradition of the abbreviated "chip and sip" supper has continued to this day in the assemblies of most churches.

No Bible historian denies the fact that the Lord's Supper was observed by the early Christians in their homes and during a full meal. The environment surrounding the Supper was a full meal of fellowship among the disciples who met regularly on the first day of the week. However, things have unfortunately changed. When the love feast began to disappear from the Sunday fellowship of the saints, the terms "breaking bread" and "Lord's Supper" were used less frequently during the second century and the following centuries.

One of the first terms to be used to replace this terminology was the word "Eucharist." This is a Greek term that means "giving thanks." It should be noted that this term is nowhere used in Scripture to refer to the Lord's Supper. The common use of

the term in reference to the Supper reflected the change many began to make in their understanding of the Supper. Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200) was one of the first historical writers to use the term "Eucharist" in reference to the Supper. What was a memorial remembrance, or reminder, in reference to Christ became a "sacrament" where the sinner offered himself in order to attain the grace of God. This Roman Catholic view of the Eucharist spread to other religious groups, and thus, the Supper ceased being a communal meal of Christians. It became a somber ritual that was performed by a priestly class who sought to maintain the allegiance of a constituency of believers who came for forgiveness of sins before the priest in their attendance to the offering of the Eucharist. The priestly class of administrators of the sacrament, therefore, became the official officers before whom the people had to appear in order to have the sacrament administered to them.

We must never forget that in the early church the love feast/Lord's Supper was an occasion of celebration when the disciples came together to remember and remind the Lord. But when the church went into apostasy, all this changed. When the apostasy came, so also did the change in reference to the Supper. The love feast was abandoned and the Supper became a sacrament of sacrifice for the sins of those who submitted to the control of the priests.

The change of the Supper from an occasion of remembrance and reminder to a sacramental offering eventually gave rise in the fourth century to the doctrine of transubstantiation. This was the belief that the bread changed into the literal body of Jesus and the wine into His blood. Thus when

adherents were administered the bread they were given the literal offering of Jesus' body. When the priest drank of the wine, he was drinking of the blood of remission for the people. The result was that the people came to the sacrament with fear, hoping for the forgiveness of their sins.

This belief concerning the Lord's Supper has prevailed for centuries. Even many of the Protestant churches that sprang out of protest against the Catholic Church in the middle ages carried with them the belief that the Supper event itself was an "offering" for the sins of the people. Today, many Protestant churches carry on with a ceremonial "chip and sip" ritual that is referred to as "Holy Communion." It is observed in the atmosphere of something similar to a funeral service wherein the pastor exhorts the prospective partakers to examine themselves to determine if they are "worthy" in character to be able to partake of the Supper. As the priests of the Catholic Church, the pastors of Protestant churches have become the administrators of the "sacrament," and the people continue to be subjected to the pastors' control, thinking that they have no offering for sin if they do not partake of the symbolic cracker and sip of grape juice, or wine.

Gone is the celebration of the love

feast. Gone is the communal meal wherein sisters cooked and brought their offerings for the people, especially the poor. Gone is the joyous occasion when brothers and sisters, who had been ravaged by the world for a week, came together in a participatory environment of people who loved Jesus and wanted to tell their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ how the Spirit had worked in their lives to keep them from Satan throughout the week. We have sacrificed all this for the sake of a ceremonial ritual wherein some take pride in how many people they can serve in the shortest amount of time on Sunday morning.

Because the Supper has been separated from the environment of the love meal, it has often turned into a cold ritual similar to the rituals of pagan religions. It has become a religious rite that is centralized in special meetings designated for its purpose. Whether priests or pastors, official administrators have subjected the people to a morbid ceremony wherein they make the offering for the people. If we compared the typical modern-day medieval performance of the Supper with the celebration of the love feast/Lord's meal that was characteristic of the early church, we would have to cry out that something has gone terribly wrong.

## Chapter 11

### FRUIT OF THE VINE

In Matthew 26:30 Jesus said, "*I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My father's kingdom*" (See also Mk 14:24; Lk 22:11). The phrase "fruit of the

vine" (Gr., *genemata tou ampelou*) is used only by Matthew, Mark and Luke in their record of the words of Jesus at the time Jesus instituted the Supper. It is a phrase that was used by the translators of the Septuagint in

Isaiah 32:12. It is also a phrase that is used for wine at the Passover meal of the Jews (*M. Berakoth* 6:1).

Both Luke and Paul in their accounts of the Supper use the word “cup” as a metonymy to refer to the contents of the cup (Lk 22:17,20; 1 Co 10:16; 11:25,26). A metonymy is the use of the name of one thing in order to refer to something else. In the context of Jesus’ use of the word “cup,” He was using the word “cup” to refer to the contents of the cup. His emphasis, therefore, was on the fruit of the vine, not the physical cup.

Because the word “cup” was used as a metonymy by Jesus to refer to the contents of the cup, we must not confuse ourselves in thinking that there is some significance of the container itself. The cup was only incidental in making it possible for the participants to drink the contents. There is no legal command by Jesus in the institution of the Supper to focus on incidentals that were present at the Passover meal. Even the contents of the cup were incidental in the sense that there was wine in the cup. He thus took the opportunity to place great spiritual significance on the wine.

Some have wondered concerning the contents of the cup, whether it was actual wine or grape juice. It goes without question that the content of the cup was wine. If you set grape juice out for any long period of time, it naturally ferments into wine. If we would make an argument that the content of the cup must be wine, then we have proposed a very questionable argument. That is, if we have only grape juice present, must we wait until it ferments into wine before it is “scriptural”? And as previously stated, must we also bind on ourselves to the many

other incidentals that were also present when Jesus instituted the Supper? **We must keep in mind that if we bind one incidental circumstance in reference to the Passover meal when Jesus instituted His supper, then we must consistently bind all incidentals.**

The history of the phrase “fruit of the vine” began with William Tyndale’s English translation of the Greek text. He translated *genematos tou ampelou* with the English phrase “fruits of the vine tree.” When the Geneva Bible was translated, the translators rendered the phrase “fruit of the vine.” This rendering subsequently became the common translation of the phrase in most English versions.

The word for wine also has an interesting use in the Bible. It is used both figuratively and literally. It comes from the word *ampelos* (vine). It is used in James 3:12, “Can ... **a vine produce figs?**” In Revelation there was the call to gather the grapes from the vine, for they were ripe (Rv 14:18,19). In Revelation, as well as Matthew 7:16, *ampelos* is used to refer to the product of the vine, that is, the grapes. Thus *ampelos* is used literally to refer to the vine that produces the grapes. But it can also be used as a metonymy to refer to the product of the vine.

The use of the phrase “fruit of the vine” does not in and of itself define either grape juice or wine. But in reference to the spring of the year when Jesus instituted the Supper, which was long past the grape harvest, we would certainly conclude that it was wine that was present at the Passover feast when He ate and drank with the disciples.

During the time of a Jewish Passover, rabbinical tradition was that each participant

of the Passover was furnished at least four cups of wine. We would certainly disagree with some artist's conceptions that there was only one cup present at the table when Jesus instituted the fruit of the vine as a memorial of the blood of the covenant. There were several cups present, and there was a great deal of wine. Arguments that surround the use of only one cup to serve the fruit of the vine, therefore, are superfluous.

Arguments that result in unrealistic conclusions can never be correct. Suppose we use only one cup in a large assembly in order to observe the Lord's Supper. Now in a small house assembly there would be no problem. However, suppose we have a gen-

eral meeting of all the saints in an area, for example, as the meeting that took place in Corinth. Suppose there are 1,000 Christians present and everyone wants to observe the Supper together. If we were allowed to use only one cup during the meeting, we would run into some problems with time. If we used only one cup to serve the fruit of the vine to 1,000 people, taking about eight seconds for each individual to partake, including time to refill the cup, consider how long it would take to serve everyone. The total time for everyone to drink from the one cup would be a little over 133 hours or over five and a half 24-hour days. That which makes no sense cannot be binding as law.

## Chapter 12

### CHEATING OURSELVES

Was it wrong to abolish the love feast as a part of the Sunday assembly of the saints? Unless one can find a command in the New Testament that instructs the saints to have a love feast every Sunday, the answer to the question is "No." The early love feast/Lord's Supper was carried over into the early church from the Passover meal. For almost three centuries Christians enjoyed their Sunday assemblies as an opportunity for celebration. It was a joyous occasion and an opportunity to enjoy one another's fellowship over a meal.

The Lord Supper was a joyous meal that was combined with the love feast. There was a great deal of food present. In fact, there was enough wine available during the occasion where some of the Corinthians became drunk. The picture we see of the feast in 1 Corinthians 11 was certainly different than

the typical Sunday assembly that is witnessed today in the typical church.

Since there are no commandments in reference to the frequency of the love feast, or Supper, then we would conclude that the further we move away from the example of the early church, the more we deprive ourselves of the blessings they received from the event of the love feast/Supper. Since most churches have removed the love feast from their regular Sunday assembly, then they have deprived themselves of the weekly loving fellowship that naturally prevails during a fellowship meal. God made us creatures who love to rejoice over a good meal. But if a good meal has not been prepared on a regular basis for all the saints, then we cheat ourselves by not being able to enjoy food together as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not that we violate a command-

ment. We simply cheat ourselves as the ekklesia of Christ by not presenting the opportunity for the saints to enjoy the loving fellowship of a love feast.

When most churches gather there is the ceremonial “chip and sip” for the Lord's Supper. It is quick and simple, and can easily be carried out to serve a great number of people. The elements have almost become a symbol to symbolize the symbols. Jesus meant for the **eating** and **drinking** of the bread and fruit of the vine to symbolize His body and blood. But we now symbolize with a small piece of cracker and sip of juice the **eating** and **drinking**. Do we violate some command by this typical serving of a symbolic snack for the Supper? Again, unless we can find a command that is violated, then certainly such a system or means by which the Supper is observed is not wrong. The point is not that something is violated, but opportunities that are lost. The spirit of eating and drinking together as the family of God is lost in our efforts to hurry on with the rest of our lives.

The typical “fast food Supper” that is observed by most churches today reflects the nature of the industrial/business urban culture in which many Christians live. We simply do not want to take the time to enjoy a meal together on Sunday. Some churches take pride in the fact that they can serve the Lord's Supper to a great number of people in a short period of time on Sunday morning. Again, such is a reflection of the nature of the fellowship of the church that we have created after our own desires, or busy schedules. We thus cheat ourselves. We deprive ourselves of loving fellowship with those with whom we have a common salvation.

It would do us well to read again the

spirit of the early church that is recorded by Luke in Acts 2:41-47. If we can capture the spirit of celebration of the early disciples, we can understand why the Sunday love feast was such an opportunity for rejoicing among the early disciples. The spirit of the ekklesia was reflected in their Sunday meal with the Lord. Have we cheated ourselves by seeking to minimize “church” to the point that we cannot spend hours with one another around a meal?

Now we have different scenarios around the world in reference to our present observance of the Supper. There are the “full meal” brethren where the Supper is observed either during or after a meal. This would be the better way to reflect the participatory fellowship of the church. Then there are the “chip and sip” brethren who eat and run because of a lack of time. But then there are the “no element” situations where there is neither fruit of the vine nor bread, nor both, available. What should brethren who are in such situations do in reference to partaking at the table of the Lord? This is not an uncommon occurrence throughout the world, especially in the desert regions of the world, or during times of famine. Thousands of brethren go for months without any fruit of the vine, or even bread. Should such brethren in their assembly simply forsake the opportunity to remember the significance for which the fruit of the vine and bread were used to call us to remembrance, or to remind Jesus that He must not delay His coming? It may be for this reason that Paul, in reference to the Supper, said, “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup ...*” (1 Co 11:26). For many brethren throughout the world, “often” is very infrequent because they have no fruit of the

vine or bread, or both. What they do during their time together, is take time to remember, though they do not have elements to eat and drink. We see nothing wrong with this simply because in the institution of the Supper, Jesus wanted us to focus on the spiri-

tual aspects of the bread and wine, not on the elements themselves. If there is no bread and wine available, we can still take time to focus on the spiritual significance of the body and blood.

## Chapter 13

### THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

In the New Testament there is no command concerning the time when Christians should assemble on a regular basis. We have only the example of the early Christians as to when they assemble. They met both daily and every first day of the week (At 2:42; 20:7; 1 Co 16:1,2). We can understand why they met daily if the opportunity was available for them to gather either in small groups or as the entire number of disciples in a particular area. But their meeting on the first day of the week was unique as a group of religious people in the first century. We assume that they made the decision to meet on Sunday simply because **Sunday was a day for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus** (Mk 16:1,2). The foundational purpose of their assembly was joy and celebration, which joy and celebration carried over into the love feast/Supper atmosphere of their Sunday assembly. If their emphasis was primarily on the death of Jesus, then we would expect them to have met regularly on Friday, the day Jesus was crucified for our sins. But they met on Sunday, the day Jesus was raised from the dead. Sunday, therefore, was a day of joy and celebration. It became their special “Lord’s Day” meeting when they came together to celebrate, not mourn (See Rv 1:10).

We also assume, in discussing the subject of this chapter, that everyone understands that there was no special Sunday holiday in the Roman culture of the first century. Christian slaves, and employed people, had to work all day Sunday, just like any other work day of the week. For this reason, the Lord’s Supper was truly a “supper,” a meal that was eaten in the evening when everyone came from their work.

In reference to the observance of the Supper, Jesus said that His disciples should do this in reference to the body and blood. Therefore, the question arises concerning how often we should “do” the Supper.

We would first consider Acts 2:42 in reference to the disciples continuation of certain practices immediately after the baptism of about 3,000 people, and thus, the beginning of the church. “*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching, and fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*” They continued in the breaking of bread, though in this context of Acts 2 we are told only that they continued daily in their evangelistic outreach in the temple courtyard. The breaking bread was from house to house. When we refer to Paul’s statement concerning the frequency of the early disciples’ observance of the

Supper, we discover again that there was no specific time. He simply stated, “*For as often as you eat the bread and drink this cup ...*” (1 Co 11:26).

“Continuing steadfastly” and “often” do not give a specific time when the early disciples partook of the Supper. In fact, there is **no command** in the New Testament concerning when the early Christians should partake of the Supper. Since we have concluded that “breaking bread” referred to the eating of a full love feast meal, and that the Supper was a part of the love feast, then we could conclude that the disciples partook of the Supper when they came together. Now we have to discover when they came together for the breaking of bread, which time is not stated in the house to house meetings of Acts 2.

### A. Textual evidence for Sunday:

The disciples did come together for the love feast, during which they partook of the Supper (1 Co 11:21). In the Corinthian context, they came together on the first day of the week (Sunday) (1 Co 16:1,2). The Christians in Troas also came together on the first day of the week. In the Acts 20:7 statement concerning their coming together, it was specifically for the purpose of breaking bread.

The Acts 20:7 statement by Luke was that the disciples in Troas “*were gathered together.*” The verb here is the passive voice. The indication is, therefore, that their coming together was a mutual decision on the part of the whole church. The majority, at least, had made a decision, possibly on the advice of Paul to meet on Sunday. The phrase in the verse “*to break bread*” is an

infinitive. The phrase could be rendered “for the breaking of bread.” In other words, the primary purpose for their coming together was the celebration of the love feast/Supper event.

The frequency of the disciples’ coming together is historically stated in Acts 20:7, and factually stated in 1 Corinthians 16:2. Since the Troas and Corinthian Christians came together on Sunday for the love feast, we would not be presumptuous to conclude that it was their common practice to come together on the first day of the week in order to partake of the Supper during their love feast.

We should also consider the Acts 2:46 historical account in reference to the daily breaking of bread by the early Christians. “*And continuing **daily** with one accord in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house**, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart.*” There would be no question about their evangelistic work in the temple courtyard. This is brought out in Acts 5:42. “*And **daily** in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus **as the Christ.***” Since this daily activity was in reference to preaching Jesus as the Christ, their ministry in the temple was for evangelistic purposes, for the believers already accepted Jesus as the Christ.

The Acts 2:46 reference to daily activity in the temple courtyard was certainly for the purpose of evangelism. But in reference to the fellowship meal from house to house, it is not necessary to conclude that this was a daily assembly of the Christians in their homes. Acts 2:46 is simply stating that the early disciples were evangelistically active on a daily basis in the temple court-

yard, but also daily active in eating their food with one another in their homes. We would suggest, therefore, that in every context where the phrase “breaking bread” is mentioned, we do not have to include that the Lord’s Supper was observed. Because there was thankful breaking of bread on a daily basis in the homes of the early Christians does assume that the Lord’s Supper was eaten on a daily basis. In fact, Luke wanted us to be clear on this because he specifically mentioned “food” in Acts 2:46 when using the phrase “breaking bread,” but not in verse 42.

## B. Historical evidence for Sunday:

We would add the quotations of early church writers as evidence only to point out the fact that the first Christians established a Sunday heritage of observing the Supper. Just a few quotations of the early church writers of the second century confirms that the Christians assembled on Sunday for the love feast and Lord’s Supper.

**1. *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (written around A.D. 120):*** “But every Lord’s Day you do gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure” (Ch. XIV).

**2. *First Apology, Justin Martyr (around A.D. 140):*** “And on that day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits .... Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is

ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks has been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors [helps] the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead” (Ch. LXVII).

**3. *Stromata, Clement of Alexander (around A.D. 194):*** “He in fulfillment of the precept, according to the gospel, keeps the Lord’s Day, when he abandons an evil disposition and assumes that of the Gnostic, glorifying the Lord’s resurrection in himself” (Book VII, Ch. XII).

**4. *On Idolatry, Tertullian (around A.D. 200):*** “To the heathens each festive day occurs but one annually; you have a festive day every eighth day [Sunday]” (Ch. XIV).

A few years ago we came across a group of disciples who were meeting and praising God, thinking they were the only Christians in existence in their area. They were meeting together on the first day of the week and partaking of the Lord’s Sup-

per. They did not know all the arguments in reference to the first day of the week. We asked them why they believed that the eating of the Supper on every first day of the week was important to them. They simply replied, “Well, that is the only natural thing to do.” And it is. Paul wrote, “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? For though we are many, we are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread*” (1 Co 10:16,17). In this revelation of Paul to all of us, the partaking of the bread and cup

is more than a memorial of Jesus' body that was given and the blood of the covenant. 1 Corinthian 10:16,17 is about us and our fellowship with one another as the ekklesia of Christ. It is the natural thing to do. In eating together, we commune with one another. We fellowship. We manifest our oneness by partaking together in assembly. It is only natural that we reflect the one body of Christ when all of us eat and drink together at the table of our Lord. It is not something that has to be commanded. It is something that just happens when the saved realize they have a common salvation in the body of Christ.

## Chapter 14

### A REALITY CHECK IN OUR REAL WORLD

This last chapter is centered around common sense. God did not issue any commands that violate common sense. In all our discussions and disagreements surrounding the Lord's Supper we must always resort to pure common sense. God never intended that because we might come into a situation where we could not keep a point of His law, that we should burden ourselves with guilt. He is the God of understanding, mercy and grace. So when it comes to discussing anything concerning the Lord's Supper, everyone must manifest a spirit of understanding, mercy and grace, just as God extends such toward us.

We need to exercise common sense in following the instructions of Jesus when He said, “This do ....” When He personally revealed to Paul instructions concerning the institution of the Supper, Jesus did not reveal a particular day of the week when the

disciples should observe the Supper. Paul only stated after quoting the Lord's instructions, “... *as often as ...*” (1 Co 11:26). We believe that the Holy Spirit knew that there would be many times when the disciples could not be able to observe the Supper. Consider the time between the Israelites' second observance of the Passover and the third observance. Immediately before they left Egypt they observed the Passover on its initial institution (Ex 12; Nm 33:3). They did not keep it again until they were in the wilderness of Sinai (Nm 9:1-5). When Israel first came into the land of promise, God instructed them to begin keeping the Passover (Dt 16). But this was about thirty-eight years after they left Mount Sinai, the last time they had kept the Passover. It seems, therefore, that they did not keep the Passover throughout their years of wandering in the wilderness.

We are not told why Israel did not keep the Passover during their thirty-eight years in the wilderness. However, the reason is obvious. They did not have livestock. And thus, they had no lambs or goats as offerings for the Passover meal. When we have no “elements” for the Lord’s Supper, then it is impossible to **eat** the bread and **drink** of the fruit of the vine. God never condemned Israel for not keeping the Passover for thirty-eight years, and neither will He condemn those who do not have the elements for keeping the Supper.

Many brethren throughout the world are continually “in the wilderness” when it comes to the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. The greater number of the brethren of the church live in developing countries of the world. They cannot get up on Sunday morning and drive by a food store on their way to the assembly in order purchase bread and wine. Too many of the books and articles that are written on the Lord’s Supper are written by blessed Western brethren who have no struggles with bread and the fruit of the vine for the Supper. They usually have little understanding of the real world in which the brethren of the developing world (Third World) live, and thus, bind guilt on developing world brethren because they cannot comply with some supposed legal requirements for observing the Supper.

We were once in the country of Guyana in South America evangelizing the country shortly after the fall of communism. During the latter years of communist rule, there was no bread in the country for almost eight years. This is a very tropical country, and thus, they could not grow their own grain to make bread. They simply went without bread for those almost eight years.

Now suppose how the brethren there partook of the “bread” during the Supper?

When the early disciples were scattered out of Judea because of the persecution (At 8:4), we are sure they did not go forth with grapes in their pockets or grape vines attached to their belts. There would have been many occasions when they did not observe the Lord’s Supper for extended periods of time. If one assumes that the observance of the Supper validates his Christianity, then he will have difficulty in dealing with this common problem that is so prevalent throughout the developing world today. There are just no grapes, and sometimes no grain to make bread. What would Jesus advise in such situations? Use common sense. He would probably say, “... as often as ....”

We have found that brethren have a great deal of ingenuity in reference to the fruit of the vine in the Supper. We have drunk the juice of boiled raisins, squeezed grapes, diluted wine, undiluted wine, and some liquids about which we asked no questions. Out of necessity, we have eaten about every sort of “bread” there is. Brethren have simply done the best they can in situations where acquiring the elements for the Supper on a weekly basis is a challenge. But in all this, brethren in the developing world, or isolated and depressed circumstances, must not burden themselves with guilt by reading the essays of some First World “scholar” who simply scurries to the nearest food center for the elements of the Supper. Simply resort to common sense, realizing that God is pleased with your efforts to do the best you can. Jesus instituted the Supper on the foundation of knowing every situation in which the church would be throughout the world and throughout history.

Common sense, therefore, must prevail.

Now in reference to the keeping of the Supper, some have cheated themselves by the infrequency by which they keep the Supper. If one has access to the elements for the Supper, it is difficult to understand why some churches have only their “Easter Supper” or “Christmas Supper.” Their infrequent observance of the Supper betrays their misunderstanding of the Supper itself, that it is the center of reference during a covenant meal when the disciples celebrate in fellowship with one another. It is a reflection of our brotherhood as the body of Christ.

There are also those who cheat themselves by a weekly “chip and sip” ritual. Most churches observe the Supper after this manner. It is not something that is wrong. It is only something that deprives us of observing the Supper on the foundation of a unifying fellowship meal. We have found that though some brethren yearn for the foundational love feast, out of convenience, they desire to continue with the brief Supper. This is especially true in urban centers where individual Christians have little time for one another in their busy schedules.

And then there are those brethren who seek to restore the foundational love feast in order to enjoy the spirit of celebration of the Lord's meal. This may not always be possible on a regular basis, but at least it is an effort on the part of some to bring the church together in the spirit of fellowshiping over a full meal. Someone once stated to us that they could not have the full meal because their were too many poor members in the church. We truly do not think this brother understands the nature of the ekklesia of Christ, nor one of the purposes for the love feast. The Corinthians bypassed the pres-

ence of the poor by simply eating all the food and drinking all the wine before the poorer brethren arrived at the general assembly. Would we be this way as the church of Christ by simply not having a love feast at all? Is not one purpose of the fellowship meal to make sure that poorer brothers and sisters, with their children, have at least one good meal a week? What have we become when we forsake the love feast because we have too many poor brethren in the church? If a church forsakes the feast because of the poor, then that is a church that has lost its purpose.

The Lord's Supper is not a ritual to validate who we are. We are not keeping a ceremonial act to identify ourselves as a church. The Lord's meal is a reflection of who we are in our obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. We observe the Supper, therefore, not out of obedience to law, but out of our response to the grace of God that appeared on a cross outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. It is for this reason that there never was any need for a commandment as to when we should keep the Supper. It is a natural response to keep it “as often” as we can. To the first Christians, that was every first day of the week when they came together for the purpose of eating the love feast. We do not see any reason to change this.

When the early disciples came together to eat, they did not come to a funeral service. The love feast was a joyous covenant meal that was different than their common meals they ate daily at home. It was different because it was eaten with covenanted people in order to proclaim Jesus, and in preparation for the final banquet meal that will be eaten when Jesus comes again (Rv 19). And thus we look forward to eating the banquet meal with Jesus upon His return.

## Appendix

In reading the parallel accounts of the different writers, notice the different wording that is used in Jesus' statements in reference to the bread and blood. The differences indicate the different audiences to which each writer wrote his account of what was stated by Jesus. The Holy Spirit inspired the accounts, and thus, gave liberty to each writer as to how Jesus' thoughts were to be conveyed to the readers. There is no contradiction, only the desire of the Spirit to express the same thing in different words.

### Matthew 26:26-29

27 *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it. And He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take eat. This is My body."*

28 *And He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "All of you drink of it."*

29 *"For this is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission of sins."*

30 *"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."*

### Mark 14:22-25

22 *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave to them and said, "Take. This is My body."*

23 *Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them. And they all drank of it.*

24 *Then He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many. Truly I say to you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

### Luke 22:14-20

14 *Then when the hour had come, He sat down, and the apostles with Him.*

15 *And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."*

16 *"For I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."*

17 *Then He took the cup and gave thanks. And He said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves."*

18 *"For I say to you, from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."*

19 *And he took bread and gave thanks. And He broke it and gave to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."*

20 *Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This is the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you."*

### 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

23 *For I have received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread.*

24 *And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body which is for you. This do in remembrance of Me."*

25 *After the same manner He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*

26 *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*

27 *Therefore, whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.*

28 *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

29 *For he who eats and drinks not discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment to himself.*