

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 2 September 2001

No. T0178

Speaker: Mr. Ernie Brown

The Early Church (Acts 2:42): The Breaking of Bread

This is the third of four sessions looking at that grand verse, Acts 2:42. It tells us that the early Christians “continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” So far, we have noticed that there are four major elements in the verse. Their close relation is very clear. The fundamental concept addressed in the verse is fellowship, Christian fellowship. That puts the other elements into proper perspective. It is the Apostles’ doctrine that regulates the fellowship. The breaking of bread is the greatest privilege and sweetest expression of the fellowship. Prayers sustain us in the fellowship, that is, in the good of the fellowship. Today, we turn to the Breaking of Bread.

Many of you will be familiar with the phrase “taking communion”, or similar equivalent terms. The terms fellowship and communion mean the same thing, so the phrase “taking communion” is consistent with my initial suggestion that the breaking of bread involves giving expression to the fellowship to which we Christians have been called. Because we are spending these four sessions thinking about the terms in Acts 2:42, I will use the expression we get there, that is, the Breaking of Bread.

We shall not have time to read all the relevant scriptures, but I shall list them for you to read carefully later. It will do us all good to read them again at the earliest opportunity, as a plumb line against which to assess my comments. Here they are.

- Matthew 26:14-35,
- Mark 14:10-31,
- Luke 22:1-34,
- John 13:1-38,
- Acts 2:37-47,
- Acts 20:7-11,
- 1 Corinthians 10:16-21;
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; and
- 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

Very often, it is helpful to consider a subject by asking simple questions, and then seeing what the Bible says by way of explanation. That’s the approach I intend to take now.

WHY?

In the Gospel records, in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22, we have the clear record of the Lord saying to His disciples, “This do for a remembrance of Me.” We could not have a better reason than that. I well remember a young lady being asked why she wanted to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread. Her reply was very simple and very touching. “I love Him and I know He wants me to.” It is certainly the sweetest privilege and normal response of every committed Christian.

In 1 Corinthians 11:26, we are instructed, “as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew (or announce) the Lord’s death till He come.” It is the Lord’s will that until He comes again, His own should remember Him in the breaking of bread, as a way of giving witness, in the world where He was crucified, to the holy significance of His precious death upon the cross.

WHEN?

The Lord Himself did not stipulate exactly when we should hold the breaking of bread. We do, however, have the record of the good example of the early disciples. We read in Acts 20:7, “They came together on the first day of the week to break bread.” Why would they choose to do it then? Probably because the first day of the week is of such major importance to the Christian. The great day for the Jew was the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, Saturday, as we speak of it. Christianity was new, completely different. How and when did it begin? On the first day of the week, when Jesus our Lord rose again! Christianity began with the personal, actual, bodily resurrection of the

Lord Jesus on the first day of the week. I can understand, then, why the early Christians set the pattern of remembering the Lord in the breaking of bread on the first day of the week, Sunday, as we speak of it. We do well to follow their good example. If, of course, there is any very special reason why the breaking of bread cannot take place on the first day of the week, there is nothing in scripture to forbid it on any other mutually convenient day. But, as a general rule, there is no good reason for departing from the good example of the early Christians.

Another factor is added in 1 Corinthians 11:26, "till He come." It is the Lord's will that we remember Him in the breaking of bread until He comes again to take us to be with Himself, and in view of that coming. On the first day of the week, the Christian recognises that he has no other expectation than that the Lord shall come in the week on which he is then embarking. That is, the present celebration of the Lord's Supper, another name for the event (1 Corinthians 11:20), may well be the last occasion on earth that we can respond to the Lord's request. What a difference it would make to the way in which we remember Him, if we have the real expectation that it might well be the last time we have such an opportunity.

WHAT?

What we have to do is very clear. The accounts in the Gospels, Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22, supplemented by the Apostle Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, make the matter perfectly plain. Take a loaf of bread, give thanks for it and eat it between you. Then, take a drinking vessel, fill it with wine, give thanks and drink it. Let us think a little about it. First of all, scripture emphasises again and again that Christianity is essentially spiritual, not material or sensual. In Christianity, there are only two activities where appeal is made to the natural senses, other than seeing and hearing. One is baptism, not today's subject! The other is the breaking of bread. That is today's subject. Why did the Lord ask us to take bread, and then wine? Certainly, for me, one symbol would have been sufficient to remind me vividly how the Lord loved me so much that He died for me, that my sins might be forgiven, and that I might go at last to heaven. But, no! The Lord's specific request was that we should take two symbols, a loaf of bread, and a cup, or flagon, or glass, of wine, to set out properly what was involved in His death upon the cross.

As to their being material, physical things, I think it is the mercy of the Lord to take account of our tendency to lose concentration and for our minds to wander. If we are ever in danger of letting our minds stray, let us look towards the loaf of bread and the wine, and it will be an aid to our concentration. Furthermore, their being physical things reminds us that, if we were to be brought to God, it was necessary for the Son of God to become a man, a real man, spirit, and soul, and body. That is, it was necessary for Him to enter into a condition in which it was possible for Him to die.

As to there being two symbols, and not only one, it is clear that we are intended to give some time to thinking about Him giving His body as an offering to God for sin. What an enormous burden, sin in all its horrible totality, had to be borne. Who could bear it? Only one! "Who His own self, bear our sins, in His own body, on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). It is necessary also to give some thought to, and think distinctly about, His precious blood being shed. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). We are clearly intended to think separately, and consciously, of the distinction between His body being given, and His blood being shed. The wine, too, so often in scripture a symbol of joy, tells us about the wonderful joy that can be ours, and, indeed God's, now, because His precious blood was shed.

HOW?

This is easily answered. Thankfully, and in a spirit of self-judgment. Easily said, but requires a word of explanation. The overriding need for thankfulness is beyond question. The Lord Jesus, the night on which He was betrayed, took bread, and gave thanks and said, "This do in remembrance of Me." Similarly, He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "So do ye."

The other matter is not quite so easy. We read in 1 Corinthians 11:28, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat." Notice, the scripture does not say, "Let a man examine himself, and if he is pleased with the result of the self-examination, then, and only then, and on that basis, let him eat the bread, and drink the wine." Not at all! Rather the reverse! We examine ourselves. We realise we could never ever be good enough in our own right to qualify to remember the Lord on the basis of our own achievements.

It is only because Christ Himself has taken our place in death, the death of the cross that we can respond to His own request to remember Him, call Him to mind, in this graphic, wonderful way. This does not mean, it cannot mean, that we remember the Lord in a casual, off-hand way. We cannot ignore the need for clean living to back up our profession of Christ as Saviour and Lord. Not at all! Nor does it mean that we can afford to feel uncomfortable at the breaking of bread because of unsettled matters that disturb our communion with the Lord and our fellowship with our fellow-Christians. We must keep short accounts with the Lord, and our fellow believers. If we are aware of anything that disturbs the enjoyment of our relationship with either the Lord, or one another, we must not wait until the first day of the week to get the matter settled before the Lord. Sort it out as soon as you are aware of it.

WHO, or WITH WHOM?

Potentially, all believers on the Lord Jesus Christ! What do I mean by that? 1 Corinthians is the epistle that speaks of the Breaking of Bread in a particular way. How does that Epistle begin? It refers to “them that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

2 Timothy likewise talks about “them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). The Lord died for every one who trusts in Him. It is His desire that every one of us remembers Him, and the death that He died, in the way that He has ordained. I repeat, it is not a matter of our worthiness, or any level of proficiency on our part. It never could be. It is all about His worthiness, His glory, His desire, the value to God of His sacrifice, the effect of what He has done, the wonderful blessing that has accrued because of His work.

One more thing. Throughout the Bible, worship arises to God as the result of the satisfactory completion of a sacrifice that is acceptable to God. When we gather together to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread, it is spiritually normal for worship to arise as a result of the consideration of the acceptability to God of the sacrificial death of Christ upon the cross of Calvary. Worship arose to God in the days of types and figures and shadows. How much more, now that type and figure have given way to reality, and shadow has given way to substance. Again I say! It is spiritually normal for the remembrance of the Lord in the breaking of bread to result in what the Lord Himself spoke of as true worship, worship of the Father, worship in spirit and in truth.

Having considered the main features of the breaking of bread, I must, of necessity, draw attention to things that are **IMPEDIMENTS to the enjoyment of breaking bread together.**

Fundamentally, we are thinking here about things that are clearly dishonouring to the Lord. Holding, or tolerating, evil doctrine, bad teaching, must be top of the list. Practising, or tolerating, evil practice, bad behaviour, comes close to it. Pride, a feeling of “We are the people”, thinking that we can look down on other Christians, is another feature which would preclude full enjoyment of the sweetness of fellowship in the remembrance of the Lord.

Negative thinking, being more concerned with what we don't do, or won't do, than being actively involved in the work of the Lord, also inhibits the enjoyment of the remembrance of the Lord, and hinders the flow of worship suitable to the occasion. Lastly, lack of personal preparation! How I spend my time on the seventh day of the week, indeed, how I spend my time during the rest of the week as a whole, very much affects how I respond to the Lord's request to remember Him on the first day of the week.

ONE OR TWO VERY PRACTICAL MATTERS!

Resuming from where I just left off, how do I spend Saturday night? Indeed, all the week? On the first day of the week, what time do I get up? What time do I leave home to attend the breaking of bread? What time do I arrive at the location where the Lord will be remembered? How can I rightly discern the Lord's voice asking me to remember Him if I have rushed there with my mind full of other things?

Fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, give the women folk a chance! Take your share of domestic responsibility, so that the Christian sisters might be reasonably composed when they arrive at the venue. Mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, give the men folk a chance. Do what you can to help them arrive early enough for you all to compose yourselves in good time. Remember also that the spiritual mood and tone of any Christian gathering is largely dependent on the spirituality of the Christian women there.

Once you have arrived at the venue, what do you think about while you are sitting there? If you find concentration difficult, look at the bread and the wine upon the table. You sisters, you godly women, let me repeat. You set the spiritual tone. The clear teaching of scripture is that when a mixed company of Christians come together, it is the role of the Christian men present to give voice to what is in the hearts of all who are there, as led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, largely speaking, you sisters set the spiritual tone. Please don't sit there thinking critically about the brothers. Don't even pray for them. Fix your soul upon the Lord. Think about Him, His love, His death, the glory of His resurrection. The brothers express what you are thinking. You are not there merely to make the numbers up and look after the children. Your spiritual contribution is essential. You Christian men, brothers in the Lord, suffer a word in season. Young men, join in, spontaneously, simply, reverently, briefly, using your own words. You older men, lead by example.

FINAL THOUGHT

It is not really honest to enjoy the privileges of Christian fellowship without accepting also the responsibilities of fellowship. Pull your weight. Show your loyalty. Work hard. The tone of ALL the activities, not only the breaking of bread, will be all the sweeter for your positive, spiritual contribution. As the Lord Himself said, "Ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." Amen.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.