

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Getting the fundamentals right The Breaking of Bread

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version (ESV) of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Our series 'Getting the fundamentals right' is based on Acts 2:42 (ESV):

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

So we immediately see that the Breaking of Bread was one of the main activities of the early church in Jerusalem after Pentecost. In fact it was a daily occurrence as verses 43-47 record:

“And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

First century Christians continued these church practices described in v.42 and breaking bread each Lord's day [Sunday] soon became an established church practice. Luke wrote in Acts 20:6-7:

“We came to [our travelling companions] at Troas, where we stayed for seven days. On the first day of the week...when we...gathered together [with the local church] to break bread.”

In one form or another, this good tradition has been followed by Christians throughout the centuries to the present day.

Christian fellowship and 'The Breaking of Bread'

As we learnt in last week's talk, it's essential that any local church should have Christian fellowship together. Christian fellowship is participating in what Acts 2:42 describes as “the apostles' fellowship,” which is expanded upon in 1 John 1:1-3:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may

have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

It's the essence of real Christianity!

Biblical church life

From Acts 2:42, we can conclude that biblical church life consists of at least three main meetings:

1. One meeting in which 'The Apostles' Doctrine' is taught by a Bible teacher, who ministers the word of God.
2. A second meeting for 'The Breaking of Bread.'
3. And a third meeting, 'The Prayers.'

These meetings are like a tripod, which is a firm, stable structure and able to hold the church fellowship together. The apostles' teaching instructs us what Christian fellowship is all about and regulates or provides the 'rules' so to speak for church fellowship. The breaking of bread is central to church life and is the most important practical expression of Christian fellowship. The prayers sustain the fellowship in all the activities of the local church, it's the church's powerhouse. So

What exactly is The Breaking of Bread?

I'm very familiar with the expression 'The Breaking of Bread' for it's what we call our Sunday morning service in the group of Christian churches that I'm associated with. It's the church meeting we hold every Lord's day [Sunday] to remember the Lord Jesus Christ in His death by breaking bread and drinking from the cup. To "break bread" describes the main activity of the service and to us it's an obvious Scriptural name to use.

But there are other names used by different Christian denominations and other types of churches for 'The Breaking of Bread' service. Let's look at some of these.

The Lord's Supper

Another Scriptural name for it is 'The Lord's Supper', which is found in 1 Cor. 11:17-22, where the apostle Paul is rebuking the Corinthian church for their wrong behaviour at this service:

“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.”

The name 'The Lord's Supper' draws our attention to the reality of His Presence at the service by His Spirit. That means He's the Host and that we're privileged to be His invited guests at His Table!

Holy Communion

Some churches call 'The Breaking of Bread' service 'Holy Communion', a name which is deduced from 1 Cor. 10:16 (NKJV):

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”

The name ‘Holy Communion’ shows that believers have fellowship with Him and with each other – all jointly participate. But it’s holy because it speaks of sacred subjects.

The Eucharist

Other churches call it ‘The Eucharist’, an Anglicised version of the Greek word meaning “giving of thanks” in 1 Cor.14.16 (NKJV):

“Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?”

‘The Eucharist’ highlights the response of Christians to their Lord and that they praise Him for dying for us at ‘The Breaking of Bread’ service.

What happens at ‘The Breaking of Bread’ service?

I’d like to answer the question: What happens at ‘The Breaking of Bread’ service? by reading Luke’s account of what is commonly called ‘The Last Supper’, but more properly should be called ‘The Last Passover Supper’, which the Lord celebrated with His disciples and at which He instituted a new Supper for Christian believers:

“Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.” They said to him, “Where will you have us prepare it?” He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.” And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”” (Luke 22:7-20, ESV).

The apostle’s doctrine regarding ‘The Breaking of Bread’

Further instructions on what to do at, that’s how to observe, the Lord’s Supper were given by the apostle Paul, who stated that He’d received them directly from the Lord Jesus in the glory:

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup,

after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world" (1 Cor. 11:23-32).

Overview of 'The Breaking of Bread' service

Believers gather together unto the Lord's Name (Matt. 18:20) "as a church" (v.18) for fellowship together in 'The Lord's Supper' at 'The Lord's Table.' They must discern the Lord's body and the Lord's blood by breaking bread and drinking from the cup of poured out wine. In doing so they show that they understand the meaning of the symbols. A formal prayer of thanksgiving for each symbol is offered to the Lord by one of the brothers in the local church. 'The Breaking of Bread' should be held regularly, ideally at least weekly on the Lord's day [Sunday], wherever that is practically possible. Thereby, the Lord's death is proclaimed by His people in each generation until He comes again for us at 'The Rapture.'

Symbols

The Lord Jesus himself instructed the use of a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. He stipulated their symbolic meaning as we have just read in 1 Cor. 11:23-25. These symbols are physical, visible reminders that His death was a sacrifice for our sins. When we break and eat the bread, and then drink from the cup, we affectionately recall in our hearts and minds the Person who gave Himself for us. 'The Breaking of Bread' is something to do, but much more than that, it's Someone to remember.

Christian fellowship: 'The truth of the one Body'

'The Breaking of Bread' is fundamental to Christian fellowship as the following Scriptures show:

"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:14-17).

These verses inform us that by observing 'The Lord's Supper' we express Christian fellowship with everyone in our church and the global church. All share together for we have read in v.15 that by drinking from the Lord's cup we have communion together in His blood; and in v.16 that by eating from the one loaf of bread we show that we belong to each other and the one church, the one body of Christ. His blood is the basis of our fellowship. 1 John 1:7 states that we have fellowship with one another because the blood of God's Son cleanses us from all sin. And by breaking bread together we recognise the oneness of His body, the Church:

"Because we, being many, are one loaf, one body; for we all partake of that one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17, Darby, see also 1 Corinthians 12:12 & 27).

Now I've heard many wrong applications of 'The truth of the one Body', all of which turn the meaning of this truth upside down. But the reality is that Christian fellowship is all-inclusive, every

true Christian believer has the right to participate in 'The Breaking of Bread' service. Paul spelt out this truth in 1 Corinthians 1:2 & 9 (ESV):

“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours. [...] God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

However, Christian fellowship is also totally exclusive to Christian believers! No one else in the world, that is, every unbeliever, has any right to participate in it by taking the bread and the wine in the actual 'Breaking of Bread' service. 1 Cor. 10:14 & 21-22 demand that Christians do not get involved in any non-Christian fellowships because our Lord is a jealous God:

“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?” (vv.21-22).

The Lord's Cup

1 Cor.10:15 presents a further feature of 'The Lord's Supper', the cup of blessing. 'The Lord's Cup' becomes for us a cup of blessing and that means we can, and do, bless God the Father (see Eph. 1:3; 2:13 & 18; 2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3). To bless God is to eulogise Him, to worship Him and worship of the Father is another essential part of 'The Breaking of Bread' service. We thank the Lord Jesus for dying for us when we give thanks for the bread and for the cup. But we also thank, praise, and worship the Father for sending His Son to bring us into relationship with Himself:

“[Jesus] who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the [church] I will sing your praise.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me”” (Heb. 2:11-13).

Jesus said in John17:26:

“[Father] I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

The Lord's Table

1 Cor.10:21 describes the fullest meaning of Christian fellowship, that it's at “the Lord's table.” 'The Lord's Table' denotes the holy place, the spiritual altar in heaven, where Christians worship God (see Heb. 8:1-2; 9:24; 10:19-22 & 13:10). By the way, 'The Lord's Table' must not be confused with the piece of church furniture on which the loaf of bread and the cup of wine are placed at 'The Breaking of Bread' service! 'The Lord's Table' is a spiritual concept and describes a metaphorical table at which He provides all the spiritual blessings – the metaphorical food for Christian believers – in the same way as the Manna and the Rock were spiritual food and drink for Israel (see 1 Cor. 10:3-4).

Israel's altar referred to in 1 Cor.10:18 is called “the LORD's table” in Malachi 1:7 & 12, which for them was the physical altar in their Temple at Jerusalem where they worshipped Jehovah. When the children of Israel ate of the sacrifices they offered to Him, they were thereby connected to the altar and to the holiness of His Name, Jehovah.

However, 1 Cor. 10:16-17 teach that the food, the bread and the wine, are always the most

prominent items on 'The Lord Jesus' Table.' Therefore, it's by eating the broken bread and drinking from 'The Lord's Cup' that we believers most properly express our fellowship with each other, and it connects us all with the sacrifice of Christ and His holy Person. But as we've already noted it also connects us with His holy Father. And 1 Cor. 10:21 also emphasises the exclusive rights of the Lord Jesus over all those who participate in worship at His table.

The light of life we see Thee now,
Lord Jesus, where Thou art;
Glory and honour crown Thy brow;
Our names are on Thy heart.

The broken loaf, the cup we share,
Thy flesh, Thy blood, express;
Thy body, Lord, discerning there,
Thy precious name we bless.

Our thanks to God, Thy God and ours,
With heart and voice we give,
Thy Father praise with all our powers,
Because through Thee we live.

Called in one body to declare
Our fellowship with Thee,
Lord, Thy rejection we would share
Till we Thy glory see.

(Anon, 481 PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS)

Necessary Preparations that are to be made for 'The Breaking of Bread' service

Let's now consider the necessary preparations that are to be made for 'The Breaking of Bread' service. When the Lord Jesus set up this method of remembering Him, He instructed His disciples to prepare the Passover (Luke 22:7-13). Similarly, proper preparations must be made for 'The Breaking of Bread' service.

The Place

For most churches, the meeting place (usually a church building) is dedicated for the exclusive use of that local church. So the meeting room must be set out. But the loaf of bread and the wine must be purchased, items which are readily-available food in most parts of the world. A deacon will be assigned to do this service. Also a suitable hymn book which contains hymns specifically composed for use at 'The Breaking of Bread' service and hymns of worship to God the Father should be used at the service.

The Primacy of 'The Breaking of Bread'

There's also the more fundamental requirement for 'The Breaking of Bread' to be an integral (advertised) part of the formal services held in the local church. 'The Breaking of Bread' should be the first and primary activity in the weekly cycle of any local church; and, wherever possible, be held (at least) every Lord's day [Sunday]. It should not be relegated to be a minor, or irregular, part of any church's activities!

Individual Preparation

Second, each member of the local church should be both morally fit and spiritually prepared to participate in breaking bread together in church. As we have seen from 1 Cor. 10, believers have moral responsibilities regarding Christian fellowship. Specifically, their lives must not involve any activities or associations which are morally inconsistent with the death of the Lord Jesus. They also must be spiritually prepared so that, when they partake of the bread and wine at 'The

Communion' service, they do so in the manner intended by 1 Cor. 11:27-31. That is, they understand that the bread represents the Lord's body and that the cup represents His blood. There's also the necessary pre-meeting matter of self-examination.

Furthermore, every brother in the local church should be spiritually exercised to be ready to verbally contribute at 'The Lord's Supper' as led by the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. 14:26 indicates these contributions would consist of prayers of thanksgiving/praise/worship; hymns to be sung by the congregation; and readings from Scripture, with suitable devotional comments. But, primarily, everybody (both brother and sister) should have the desire of heart to respond to the Lord's request to remember Him in His death and to function as priests, who offer up spiritual worship to God (see 1 Peter 2:5). And from John 12:1-3, where at Bethany they made Jesus a supper, Mary's actions would teach us that it's the sisters in the church who, although verbally silent (except when singing with the congregation), set the spiritual tone of the meeting. If we are prepared in these ways, then 'The Breaking of Bread' services will be ongoing experiences of true Christian fellowship with each other. But these will also be occasions of true worship of the Lord Jesus; and through Him true worship of His Father by the Spirit.

We must continue steadfastly in 'The Breaking of Bread'

I finish with a story about what it means in difficult and dangerous circumstances to persevere and be constantly diligent in 'The Breaking of Bread' service. During the seventeenth century, Scottish Covenanters met secretly in Glen Trool in Southwest Scotland to observe 'The Lord's Supper.' At the agreed time on Lord's days, they emerged from the surrounding forests and quietly queued to break bread. There was no hymn singing. As soon as anyone had partaken of the bread and the wine, he/she left the gathering and disappeared again into the trees. The pursuing British government forces made it too dangerous for them to do anything else. Without any of the elaborations that we have in our services, 'The Breaking of Bread' was celebrated in all its simplicity just as the Lord Jesus had instructed His disciples in the Gospels (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20) and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. These Covenanters were obedient to the Lord's request to remember Him in His death; and they valued those precious moments. Do you and I?

Do you and I, do our local churches give such pre-eminence to 'The Breaking of Bread' service?

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on 'The Breaking of Bread', Talk T1426 in the series 'Getting the fundamentals right'.

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