

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truths of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

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Dear Reader

With this issue we will begin a study of *reception* to the breaking of bread. Reception is so simple, but nothing has caused more argument, anger, grief, division, than the question of reception. By *reception*, we mean *who* should be received to break bread in the local assembly. Some solve the problem by opening the breaking of bread to anyone (or almost anyone) who claims to be a Christian, no questions asked, but we will see that God has given *qualifications* as part of the order for His house. We will seek over the next half year or so, the Lord willing, to examine this issue from the standpoint that the Assembly *is* the house of God (1 Tim.3:15) and only the behavior that *He* approves of — that which satisfies the standards of His house — are to be our guide. But first, we need to study the breaking of bread itself: what does it mean in relation to the functioning of the local assembly?

THE BREAKING OF BREAD

Where does the expression *breaking of bread* come from and what does it mean? Two verses will help define it.

- “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).
- “On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7).

We see from these verses that the “breaking of bread” is the expression used for the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor.11:20), the *collective* eating together of the one loaf of bread and the drinking of the one cup of wine. Both the eating of the one loaf of bread and the drinking together of the cup are involved. This “supper” was briefly mentioned by the Lord just before going to the cross in Matthew 26:26-29 and Mark 14:22-25. But in Luke 22:17-20 we see it actually *instituted*. Further details are given by the Lord through special revelation to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.

Please observe in Acts 2:42 how closely related the breaking of bread is associated with the fellowship, the gathering together of the early Church, as well as associated with the apostles’ doctrine or teachings. The JND translation of Acts 2:42 says, “the teaching *and* fellowship of the apostles.” We believe, as studied in earlier Newsletters, that Acts 2:42 defines our assembly fellowship together — the meetings of that fellowship. We can’t have fellowship with the apostles if we substitute ideas of our own for the apostles’ teaching. We should have the same fellowship today with the apostles as did the early believers. Never mind the next person. He may desire some man-made fellowship. You and I are responsible to God to have *our* fellowship — and the breaking of bread is an integral part of it; in fact, the *expression* of it — with the apostles, based on their teaching (doctrine).

Note too that from any indication in Scripture that we can find — and we want Scripture, not any man’s *opinion* about it, no matter how highly he is esteemed — *the breaking of bread is always seen as a continuing act of those who were both in agreement with, and practicing the truths of the apostles’ doctrine*. Certainly, when it comes to *assembly practice*, the apostolic doctrines of the truth of the Assembly would be *especially* in mind, but no teachings are excluded. Breaking bread is *never* seen as the act of one who is not in agreement with the truth and practice of the Assembly, and in fact is practicing in his “church-gathering” something quite contrary, but decides he wants to break bread on an occasion out of convenience, with ones who are seeking to practice the apostles’ doctrine. His desire to break bread is not because he is exercised about the *position* of the local assembly and wants to *pursue* it with them (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim.2:22), but it’s just a convenient location for that day. The two

practices we are emphasizing in these last two paragraphs are *agreement* with the apostles, and *continuing steadfastly* together, for the breaking of bread is *always* a collective act, never the act of an individual.

The *order* of any list in Scripture is important. First comes the apostles' doctrine in Acts 2:42. Everything else hinges on that. "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). We are to break bread with those who seek out and obey the apostles' doctrine and desire the apostles' fellowship. In the early Church that was every Christian. Sadly, today, it seems that it is very few Christians.

How Often Should One Break Bread?

In the earliest history of the Church the breaking of bread may have been a daily occurrence (Acts 2:46) in the believers' freshness of first love. Those early believers were not given the details as to what they collectively comprised, but they *felt* the oneness even if they didn't know why. But the practice or pattern that was soon given by divine inspiration was that "on the first day of the week, we being assembled to break bread ..." (Acts 20:7).

This verse indicates by apostolic example that the divinely approved *timing* for the breaking of bread is the first day of every week — each Sunday. Those who break bread less often must not understand the privilege they have in this remembrance. When we break bread together we fulfill our Lord's request to remember Him. We please Him. Further, we, by this act, keep His Person and work before our minds and hearts during the busy week.

The Doctrine of the Breaking of Bread, the Lord's Supper, in 1 Corinthians 10

We will briefly study the verses in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 that pertain to our subject. We will begin with 1 Corinthians 10:16. "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a *sharing* in the body of Christ?" (NASB). For *sharing*, the NKJV and the JND use *communion*.

Another word would be *fellowship*. All these are translations of the Greek word *koinonia* which means "having in common, a *participation* in, fellowship." Its closely allied word *koinonos* means "partners, partaker," and is used in 1 Corinthians 10:18, 20.

So we see that the breaking of bread is an expression of *fellowship* or *communion* — words that mean *having things in common*. Those disciples, as walking together on the basis of the apostles' doctrine, shared together *in common* this remembrance of the Lord Jesus in relation to His death: it was the expression of the "apostles' fellowship" as defined by the Lord. To many, if they share in common our great salvation, that is enough. But we have seen that the "sharing" must include the apostles' doctrine. Again, the "sharing" is not the sharing of individuals: it is intimately connected with local assembly functioning as seen by the fact that the instructions of 1 Corinthians 10-11 are given to the *local assembly* at Corinth and to all other assemblies (1 Cor. 1:1-2). *In fact, the breaking of bread is the outward expression of our fellowship together.*

"For we, though many, are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one bread" (v.17). That loaf of bread on the table, although it speaks of the physical body of the Lord Jesus given for us at the cross (Mt.26:26; 1 Cor.11:24), has a wider application. It speaks of the universal body of Christ. Whether 1% or 99% of believers will gather on God's True Ground, we are to have in mind 100% of God's dear people when we break bread. That one loaf, comprised of millions of tiny bits of flour, has become through the process of the intense heat applied, one loaf. By the Lord's suffering of untold agony as He bore our sins on the cross, and His death (Isa.53; 1 Pet.2:24), we all have been made *one* — one body. Although we are never to be narrow in our *thoughts*, this does not mean that the breaking of bread is open to every member of the body of Christ without consideration of their doctrine, practice, moral condition and associations — all of which we will study later, the Lord willing.

So these three verses show us that the breaking of bread is the most intimate and holy expression of participation in fellowship *together* in the local assembly. The *oneness* of the body of Christ, the Assembly on earth at any one time, is pictured by the one loaf. We do not see here or elsewhere in Scripture the idea of a large number of separate *independent* assemblies forming *the* Assembly. Just as the twelve loafs on the one Table of Showbread in the Tabernacle pictured the oneness of the twelve tribes of Israel, so the *one* loaf of the Lord's supper pictures the *one* body of Christ. When we partake of the one loaf we should never forget this oneness, which truth the

Lord holds very dear, even though Christians have miserably failed in the *outward practice* of this divine reality.

The Doctrine of the Breaking of Bread, the Lord's Supper, in 1 Corinthians 11

The details as to the *practice* of the Lord's Supper were given by divine revelation to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. It says:

"I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the same night in which He was betrayed [delivered up], took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take, eat, This is My body which is broken [given] for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood: this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim [announce] the Lord's death till He comes."

Whereas in Chapter 10 we had the vital but more behind-the-scenes meaning of breaking bread, here in chapter 11 we have the up-front meaning, more in line with what we have in Luke. The breaking of bread is a *remembrance* of the Lord — a "recalling of Me to mind" states a note in the JND Bible. It specially takes in the time and events of "the night in which He was delivered up," and specially His crucifixion when He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet.2:24), and died. The loaf speaks of His body which was willingly and in great love "given" for us. We can't understand how much He suffered in His body to satisfy a holy God as to our sins, but we certainly appreciate it! Every believer can truly say that He bore *my* sins. He satisfied a holy, sin-hating God. He was the *propitiation* (a God-satisfying Substitute) for our sins (1 Jn.2:2).

Furthermore, His blood was shed, His life given up. All depends on the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The future new covenant with Israel depends on the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. All those animal sacrifices in Israel's history only looked forward to the cross. And *our* sins also are fully forgiven based on that same shed blood. We are blessed by the same blessing that Israel will enjoy — the fact that the blood of the Lord Jesus was poured out at Calvary. How much there is to remember of Him and His work! How thankful we should be.

It should be clear to all that the loaf is a *picture* of the Lord's body; the cup of wine, a *picture* of His blood. The Roman Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation* which claims that the bread and wine, at their consecration (when given thanks for), actually become the physical flesh and blood of the Lord, while maintaining the appearance of bread and wine, is absolutely unfounded false doctrine.

The breaking of bread as such doesn't go beyond the remembrance of the Lord in relation to His death. We *now* know Him as a risen and glorified Man in heaven, but we *remember* Him primarily at the cross, in relation to His death. In this remembrance we announce or preach or proclaim the Lord's death *until He comes*. It is a testimony to all who see it. The time is coming when this remembrance will cease because we then will be with Him.

Note also that the breaking of bread is a remembrance of *Him* — of the Lord Jesus. It's *not* a remembrance of the Father or of the Holy Spirit. Certainly not of us! Neither is it a remembrance of His remarkable life or the Rapture or the Millennium or any other *event* in Biblical history or prophecy. It's not a gospel meeting to sneak in the preaching of the gospel, as precious as that is. Nor is it a prayer meeting (we don't ask for our needs); nor is that time when we gather together around Him to remember Him, a time for teaching or general ministry. *Priesthood*, not gift is evident. The hymns sung, our words of praise and worship, the Scriptures read, all should have a very narrow focus of having *Him* before our hearts, as led by the Holy Spirit, in relation to the night in which He was betrayed — those unique few hours from the Garden to the Tomb. We do not wish to limit in any way the Holy Spirit, but the above appears to be the force of Scripture. Please check it out for yourselves.

A Serious Warning (Verses 27 and 29)

Verses 27 and 29 say, "Therefore, whosoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of [in respect to, JND] the body and blood of the Lord For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks *judgment* to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." We saw in the last Newsletter that

abuses at the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian assembly (vv.17-22) led to God's judgment on many of the brethren, including weakness, sickness and even premature death (vv.29-32). The Lord has not laid out all the ways we can eat and drink in an unworthy manner, but verses 20-22, 34-35 indicate that the *Corinthians* were bringing judgment upon themselves by having some kind of a fleshly love-feast prior to the Lord's supper. If I come before the Lord to remember Him with any unconfessed sin, any hatred of any of my brethren in Christ for whom Christ suffered and died because He loved them, any known disobedience to His Word, any wrong attitude, any plans that leave God out of the equation, I'm asking for trouble! *This is very serious!* We probably don't realize how much grief we may have caused ourselves by not heeding this warning! See Luke 12:48.

Approving Oneself and Eating (Verse 28)

1 Corinthians 11:28 (JND) says, "Let a man *prove* [Gk: *dokimazo*, meaning *approval after testing*, as with the testing of metals] himself and thus eat of the bread and drink of the cup." If there is sin in the believer's life, he or she is not to neglect to break bread. *Rather, the believer is to do what is necessary get approved before God and then eat as had been the previous practice.* The word *prove* or *approve* carries us two steps beyond the word *examine* used in the KJV, NKJV and NASB. First, I am to *examine* myself before God by the light of Scripture. Secondly, if I find sin, I am to judge it and correct the situation, and thus be *approved*. *Then I am to eat.* I am not to stay away from breaking bread, but continue to remember the Lord as part of the local assembly, as had been my previous practice! This verse, with what precedes and follows it, leaves little room for long-term grudges or sinful practices.

We see something of this approval process in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. During the whole week, each of us should be in the value of the Passover (v.7) and figuratively should "keep the feast" of unleavened bread (v.8) since any "leaven" will hinder our fellowship with the Lord. In Israel, all leaven, a *picture of sin*, was put out of their houses for seven days (a week) after they ate the Passover (Ex.12:15-20). "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor.5:7). When we come to remember Him, we should come "approved" in light of having eaten the Passover and of a week lived with leaven (sin) judged and put out of our lives. This should be a week-by-week process.

1 Corinthians 11:28 continues to be used by many in relation to *reception* in a way never intended by God. An argument for any-Christian reception is wrongly read into it! Many argue from this verse that the only requirement for a believer to break bread is to *personally* believe that I have examined myself before God. *My* spiritual condition, beliefs and practices are no one else's business, certainly not the assembly's business, it is argued! If *I* believe I should break bread, then I should do so, and no one should stop me. Is that a correct argument?

The fact is, there is *not one word* in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 that speaks about *reception*. What we have in verse 28 is the responsibility of each believer who is *already* breaking bread to personally and weekly *approve* himself or herself before partaking of the bread and wine. The chapter was written, not to individuals, but to the Corinthian assembly. The assembly was told what was the personal responsibility of each one in fellowship there, and what might be the consequences if that responsibility was treated in a careless manner. As we have seen, if the person eats the bread and drinks of the cup in an unworthy manner — in the condition of sinning before God — he or she will be guilty of not regarding the holiness of the body and blood of the Lord (v.27).

Therefore we all should clearly understand the proper and very serious meaning of verse 28. We who are *already* breaking bread — and that is the only context of our chapter — need to seriously consider our spiritual condition before the Lord from week to week. So verse 28 has absolutely nothing to do with reception, but has everything to do with a happy and healthy Christian life.

Summary

Some of the background points to remember as we continue with our study of reception are:

- The breaking of bread is an integral part of assembly fellowship
- It is *never* the act of an individual
- It is based on *agreement* as to the apostles' doctrine, including assembly truth

- It is a *continuing* act, week by week, on the first day of the week
- It is the outward expression of our fellowship together
- The one loaf pictures the universal one body of Christ, the Church
- It also pictures the Lord's physical body, given for us at the cross
- The cup of wine pictures the Lord's shed (poured out) blood at Calvary
- The act of breaking bread is a remembrance of the Lord Jesus, not of anyone or anything else
- It is necessary to *approve* oneself before partaking, to escape the judgment of the Lord
- Lack of doing so can result in illness or even death

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* The Greek word *krima* has the thought of "a verdict or sentence pronounced, resulting from an investigation" (Vine).

These are serious thoughts for us all to consider. The Lord's supper is a serious responsibility which we are not to take lightly, but neither are we to shirk from this responsibility.

7 Therefore, the *primary* requirement for fellowship in the local assembly, for reception to the breaking of bread, is to be a divinely placed member of the body of Christ (Acts 2:47). This is the only *membership* recognized for believers in Scripture.

It is a wonderful fellowship* together: "You have been called into the fellowship of His (God's) Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor.1:9). It is a fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ *and it is expressed outwardly by the partaking of the bread and the wine as a member of the body of Christ.*

* Scripture thus speaks of a universal fellowship of all believers. This is seen perfectly practiced in Acts 2:42. "They persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles ..." Today, with Christians so outwardly divided, it is sadly no longer possible to have full practical fellowship with all believers on the basis of this verse. Yet there is that bond of fellowship of 1 Corinthians 1:9 that we must never forget and must practice *as far as righteously possible* because of our common salvation and sonship. However, even though many Christians today refuse to have assembly fellowship together according to divine instructions, those who agree together on the basic teachings of the apostles (including those teachings on the Church) still can walk (have fellowship) together in the breaking of bread, even though it does not involve all believers.

Many of the Scriptures we have looked at are used by Christians to "prove" that every saved person, as a member of the body of Christ, should be received at every local assembly to break bread, just as in the days of the apostolic Assembly. Many gatherings of professing Christians demand nothing more; others don't even demand reasonable proof of salvation, particularly if the person is a member of their denomination.

In what follows we will show that the above is a wrong assumption *for current conditions*. God has given more restrictive requirements in these days of outward disorder as to His Church. These requirements are based on His holiness and righteousness. We must remember that we are *His* guests at *His* supper. We cannot add or subtract from His requirements, but simply obey them when we gather together.