

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

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Dear Reader

As brothers and sisters of various ages become exercised to fulfill the Lord's request to remember Him in the breaking of bread, and make that exercise known in the local assembly, what should they be told? This issue is devoted to asking and answering some of the questions that may be asked in relation to this important step in one's life. This issue of the Newsletter could be handed to an enquirer for his or her personal study.

SO YOU WANT TO BREAK BREAD?

Why should I break bread? Because your Lord has requested you to do so (Lk. 22:19-20; 1 Cor.11:23-26).

What does it *physically* mean to break bread? It is to eat of one loaf of bread and drink of the cup of wine with other Christians with whom you are in fellowship, on the first day of the week, when gathered around the Lord Jesus.

Is the breaking of bread called by any other name? Yes. It is the same thing as the Lord's Supper (1 Cor.11:20).

Where does the expression "breaking bread" come from? From Acts 2:42, Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 10:16.

How did the Lord's Supper or Breaking of Bread begin? The Lord instituted it before going to the cross (Lk.22:19-20) and as given by special revelation to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.

Why should the breaking of bread take place on the first day of the week? The pattern was established by apostolic example in Acts 20:7, where we see the early Christians assembling on the first day of the week, Christ's resurrection-day, the unique day for Christians. See also John 20:19-20 and 1 Corinthians 16:2.

Why did you say that one is gathered around the Lord Jesus when breaking bread? First, breaking bread is not an act of an individual, but a *collective* remembrance of the Lord (Acts 20:7, etc.). Secondly, we remember *Him* when breaking bread (1 Cor.11:24-26): *He* bore our sins (1 Pet.2:24) in His body, which was given for the Christian company (Lk.22:19-20). Thirdly, we have the wonderful promise of *His presence in our midst* when (and only when) gathered to *His name* (Mt.18:20). Note the very accurate J.N.Darby translation of this verse.

What does it mean to gather to the Lord's name? It means to gather, not to the name of a religious leader or doctrine of Scripture or method of church-government, but simply to the name and Person of the Lord Jesus — the only gathering-Center common to every believer.

You have indicated what it physically means to break bread. What is the spiritual meaning? It has several meanings as shown in the ticks below.

- It is a recalling to mind, a *recollection*, of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus in relation to His death on the cross (1 Cor.11:24-25). In that way He is kept before our minds week after week, and during the week.
- It is a showing forth, a *proclamation*, of the Lord's death *till He comes* to take us to be with Himself (1 Cor.11:26).
- It is a very deep expression of *fellowship* or *communion* together (1 Cor.10:16) and thus intimately connected with fellowship in the local assembly.
- It shows in the one loaf the oneness of the body of Christ, the one true Church, even if many people won't follow God's order for Church-fellowship (1 Cor.10:17; 12:12-27).

Please explain more about the connection between breaking bread and fellowship in the local assembly? Breaking bread is not an isolated act of an individual. In Acts 20:7, the *disciples* gathered together to break bread. The Lord and His disciples broke bread together (Mt.26:26-29). The instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 were written to the *Corinthian*

assembly and not to an individual. In Acts 2:42 we have “fellowship” with those with whom we are in agreement (Amos 3:3) in the apostles’ doctrine, and we break bread with those with whom we are in fellowship. The breaking of bread thus is the *outward sign* that denotes *fellowship* in the local assembly. In 1 Corinthians 5 we see a sinning Christian put out from participation in the local assembly. He lost that fellowship together.

What is the primary requirement to be able to Scripturally break bread? The primary requirement is to be a divinely-placed member of the body of Christ: to be saved (Acts 2:47) — to be one who has taken Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior and Lord (Rom.10:9-10).

Is it important where I break bread as long as it is with other Christians? Yes, we believe it is *very* important for the reasons given in the following tics. One should break bread:

- where the Christians are seeking to follow the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42) — the whole truth of God’s Word including the truths and practices concerning God’s true Church, the body of Christ.
- where the gathering is to the name of the Lord Jesus and not to some human name that divides Christians.
- where the only ground of gathering found in Scripture is maintained: the ground of the one body of Christ (Eph.4:4, etc.). Anything narrower is divisive; anything broader would let in unsaved people (2 Cor.6:14-18).
- where believers “pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace *with those* who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim.2:22).
- where the believers learn “how to conduct themselves in the house of God, the Church of the living God” (1 Tim.3:15), and then act accordingly.

Why is breaking bread where Christians seek to maintain the truth of the Church so important? Because the Church is God’s central plan for this dispensation (Eph.3:3-11). People are saved to be part of His Church. Christ loves the Church and gave Himself for it. He in the future will present it to Himself (Eph.5:25-27). The Church is His bride and wife for eternity (Eph.5:22-32; Rev.19:7-9; 21:9), the “fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph.1:23). He has called us unto the fellowship of His Son (1 Cor.1:9).

What is the “pure heart” in the verse you quoted from 2 Timothy? Pureheartedness is the moral condition of those practicing righteousness, faith, love, peace in their personal and assembly lives. Their *intent* is to be clean and pure. Such own the *Lordship* of Christ. They “call on the *Lord*,” recognizing His authority over their lives.

Are purehearted Christians perfect? No. All have a measure of failure. If serious failure is continued in, then even the *intent* of pureheartedness is lacking, and *discipline*, even to *excommunication* — putting the sinning one out of the fellowship of the local assembly — is required (1 Cor.5:13). Many other verses explain less severe forms of discipline.

What are some of the *privileges* of breaking bread? It is a privilege to:

- please our Lord by doing what He has asked of us: “Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor.11:24).
- be a part of the outward expression of the body of Christ — the local assembly (1 Cor.12:27).
- share a unique bond of fellowship, including its spiritual and practical help in living the Christian life.
- know that the Holy Spirit is neither grieved nor quenched (Eph.4:30; 1 Thes.5:19) in this aspect of our lives.

What are some of the *responsibilities* I have when I take this step and begin to break bread? All privileges incur responsibilities. In this case, there are responsibilities to your brethren and to the Lord. Some of them are:

- To assemble together: to *be* at the meetings of the local assembly as much as reasonably possible (Heb.10:25). The early Christians “continued steadfastly” in assembling together: so should we!
- To get involved. There are no inactive, useless members (1 Cor.12:1-11; Eph. 4:7-16). The Holy Spirit will provide something for everyone to further His work. There is no retirement either.
- To seek to live a holy life (2 Tim.2:19-21 and the whole flavor of Scripture).
- To be free from unscriptural *associations* of particularly a religious nature (Josh.7; 2 Jn.9-11; 1 Cor.5:6; Gal.5:9)
- To have confessed to God (and to others, if involved) and have forsaken our sins of the past and present (1 Jn.1:9). This should be week by week because of the holiness of the Lord. Otherwise, one could become physically sick or even die (1 Cor.11:27-32). This is serious business with the Lord and we need to remember that “the fear of the

Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov.1:7).

- To take a letter of commendation when visiting another assembly with which we are in fellowship (2 Cor.3:1; Rom.16:1-2), for Christian fellowship is the same in each assembly.
- Give to the Lord’s work of your *substance* (1 Cor.16:1-2, etc.), which involves money, time, energy.

You’ve named some responsibilities: what are the requirements for one really saved to break bread? To be morally pure, sound in doctrine (the major teachings of Scripture), be free from unscriptural associations, and wanting to please the Lord by breaking bread.

Why are associations important? Because there is such a deep association with those with whom we break bread! If a Christian is associating, for example, with a religious group or denomination that teaches or practices error, all who break bread with that Christian become associated with the errors he or she is associated with, in God’s sight. We see in 1 Corinthians 10:18-21 that we are in deep association with the position taken (the altar) by those who break bread with us. See also Leviticus 21:16-24 and Joshua 7. We need reasonable assurance that those with whom we break bread are not associated with unscriptural things.

What do you mean by the term *denomination*? The dictionary defines it as a “religious sect” — a division of people into groups adhering to particular religious ideas. A *sect* is an *opinion*. Denominationalism began in principle in 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 with believers trying to justify their exclusive choice of a favorite person instead of recognizing that all were important. Today, for example, the Baptist denomination puts extra emphasis on baptism; the Lutheran denomination puts extra emphasis on the teachings of Martin Luther; the Church of Christ denomination claims they alone are the true Church of Christ. *Denominationalism* simply is not Scriptural!

Aren’t there some wonderful Christians in those and other denominations? Absolutely, although some denominations or branches, or cults, may have few true Christians. Also, many in the denominations are commendably walking up to the level of their understanding of the Word of God. However, if God has shown us more light in connection with His Church through study of His Word, *we are responsible to act on that light whether others will or not* (Lk.12:48). But we must not be overly critical of our dear brethren elsewhere. It is difficult to give up a Christian position one has been brought up in, specially when people are being saved and helped in the Word.

What are some of the unscriptural practices of the denominations? It is not possible to speak in sweeping terms because there are thousands of different denominations, branches of denominations and independent “groups.” Let’s dismiss the groups we believe teach fundamental error, such as Christian Science, Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witness. We will confine our comments to groups or mainline denominations that usually teach salvation only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of their errors are shown in the following tics. Not all apply to every group.

- Outwardly dividing the body of Christ by human will not subject to God’s Word (1 Cor.1:10,13).
- *Independency*: teaching and practicing *autonomy* of the local church or assembly (1 Cor.1:1-2) which is a denial of the truth that the Church is the One Body of Christ.
- Breaking of bread monthly or less often (Acts 2:46; 20:7; 1 Cor.11:25-26). The early Christians had to be constrained from breaking bread almost constantly: the apostolic practice was once a week.
- Not connecting the breaking of bread with church-fellowship (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor.10:16-18). Many groups allow people to break bread if they claim to be Christians, no other questions asked.
- Lack of assembly discipline: one’s doctrine, practice and associations, unless gross and public, generally are no hindrance to breaking bread. To most, all depends on one’s *personal responsibility or belief* about wanting to break bread, based on a mis-interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:28. This verse has nothing to do with *reception* to break bread, but with the conduct of those *already* in the Corinthian assembly. Consequently, in many groups, one can be associated by breaking bread with every kind of moral and doctrinal evil and with unsaved persons.
- Ignoring God’s role for the sexes in head coverings and women preachers, etc. (1 Cor.11:3-16; 14:34- 35; 1 Tim.2:11-12). These divinely-given roles for men and women have nothing to do with superiority or inferiority, but with creation-order and that men and women represent Christ and His Church, respectively (Eph.5).
- A clergy-laity system which denies in practice the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet.2:5,9; Rev.1:6) and which denies in practice the Holy Spirit in charge to use whomsoever He wills in the ministry and worship of the assembly (1 Cor.12:11, etc.). The system is *Nicolaitanism* (Rev.2:6, 15), the *conquering of the people* (its Greek meaning),

which the Lord *hates*. If he hates such a system (not the people), we should also! There is no *pastor* of a local church in Scripture, but rather, many brothers with many gifts for the Holy Spirit to use as He pleases.

- Gathered to another name than simply Christ's name (Mt.18:20). Why isn't His name enough?
- Often attracting a membership by appealing to the *soul* (our natural desires) instead of appealing to the *new nature* and to the Holy Spirit within us. *Now*, we are to worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).
- False doctrines often tolerated, such as the widely taught doctrine that our Lord could have sinned but chose not to. Also, serious moral evil may be tolerated. Many of the false charismatic teachings and practices, attributing unscriptural things to the Holy Spirit, are practiced or tolerated. Often to get bigger crowds there is *accommodation* of a wide spectrum of wrong teachings and practices, and of things that appeal to the old nature.

Why isn't gathering with the local assembly with which you meet, just another denomination, even though it may be more Scriptural in some of its doctrines and practices? When one seeks to teach and practice what the Lord set up through His apostles, that is *not* making a sect or denomination in God's sight. Those who create divisions *contrary* to the doctrine learned from the apostles, were wrong (Rom.16:17). If obeying the Lord's directions for assembly-gathering and practice causes a division among Christians because others won't also do so, that is not the fault of those going on in the Scriptural pathway. They cannot be charged with creating a division. Furthermore, the local assemblies with which we express fellowship refuse any divisive name or title not common to all believers. We are simply Christians, brethren in Christ. We simply gather to Christ's all-sufficient name and desire all other Christians to also gather in like manner to that wonderful name, on true Scriptural ground (1 Cor.1:10).

Are you claiming to be a continuation of the original Church of New Testament times? No. The truth of New Testament church-gathering was lost for 1400 years after the early Church joined with the world at the time of Constantine. Luther, Calvin and others were used of the Lord to rediscover the truth of *salvation by grace* at the end of the dark ages, but the only new thing in church-gathering was the Protestant "state" denominations as opposed to the Roman Catholic denomination. A few went into *dissent*, out of which came the Baptist denomination, etc. The truth and practice of Scriptural Church-gathering was rediscovered less than 200 years ago in a world-wide movement that shook Christianity. We at best are only a weak continuation of that movement of the 19th. century.

What was that movement called? Historians speak of it as the *brethren* movement because those Christians (who came out of many denominations) constantly referred to each other and to other believers as their *brethren* — their brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a term used over 100 times in the New Testament of fellow-members of the body of Christ. Others called it the *Plymouth Brethren* movement since a large publishing house and also a large local assembly was in Plymouth, England. The assemblies gathered to the Lord's name refuse such a denominational expression.

What is the status of that movement today? It continues as a world-wide movement. The local assembly with which we express fellowship is in fellowship with many assemblies, all in fellowship together, around the world. In this way, as God intended at the beginning, they still seek to display what the true Church *should* be on earth, and actually is in God's sight (although outwardly divided). These assemblies hold the same truths, practices and discipline with minor practical variations acceptable in the variety which is the body of Christ. However, the so-called "brethren movement" does not have the impact it once did because Satan has been successful in dividing the movement into three main sections (each with some branches). One section denies in practice the unity of assemblies by insisting on independency of local assemblies; one seeks to closely adhere to Scripture in practice and doctrine; and the other is legal, extreme and often mystical in doctrine and practice. We cannot have fellowship in the breaking of bread with those we believe have left the apostolic fellowship (Acts 2:42), but we love all Christians for whom Christ died.

Why do you break bread where you do? We have seen the principles for breaking bread and assembly fellowship. I am convinced that the assembly where I express fellowship is meeting on Scriptural ground and is attempting to practice Scriptural principles for assembly-gathering. I recognize there is no perfection: not in me or in others, but I am convinced it is where the *Lord* would want me to be. I simply could not be associated with groups that deny in doctrine and practice what I believe to be God's appointed assembly-pathway.

Do you recommend that others, including myself, seek fellowship in the breaking of bread with those local assemblies with which you express fellowship? Yes, because I believe you would be pleasing the Lord in doing so.

However, if you decided simply on my recommendation, you would be sinning! The Bible says that whatever is not of faith [i.e., that you *personally* believe it is what God would have you do] *is sin* (Rom.14:23). You are personally responsible to “prove all things, hold fast the right” (1 Thes.5:21) by searching the Scriptures whether those things told you by other Christians are so (Acts 17:11).

RPD