

13. The Book of Acts—2:42

(7/29/26)

We are currently in the third major section of chapter 2 which runs from verses 42-47, a section we're calling—**“The Practice of the Early Church”**:

Acts 2:42 (NKJV)

⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

This section gives us the *'blueprint'* or pattern for church life—and I believe the main reason the early church was so strong and effective was because it kept the main thing the main thing!

They didn't allow themselves to get distracted from the basics and lose their focus as to what Jesus called them to be and do.

“And they continued steadfastly...in the breaking of bread.”

“The breaking of bread” is an expression used in the NT that can refer to a formal Communion service (partaking of the bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus' death on the cross)—or to simply sharing a meal with someone or with multiple people in a home or in a church (potluck)—the context would indicate which one is in view.

Here it obviously refers to the Lord's Supper, since it would be kind of unnecessary to say that they **“continued steadfastly eating their meals.”**

We learn from Acts 20:7 that the practice of the early church was to have a *'love feast'* on the first day of the week (Sunday = Saturday night) where at one point they would celebrate the Lord's Supper (Communion) as an expression of God's love for them and their love for each other.

So here in Acts 2:42 the “**breaking of bread**” refers to celebrating *Communion* with one another.

To properly look at this subject, I’ll have you turn to 1Corinthians 11.

As we said last time—most conservative scholars agree that 1Corinthians probably was written *before* any of the gospels.

If that’s true, Paul’s account here is the first biblical record of the institution of the Lord’s Supper and includes direct quotes from Jesus.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (NKJV)

²³ For 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 took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” ²⁵ 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.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.

Paul wasn’t there in the upper room, of course, the night Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper—so how did he know what went on?

He tells us in verse 23 that he received this information directly from the Lord through revelation.

In connection with ‘**the cup**’, He said that it was “**the new covenant in His blood.**”

This refers to the covenant that God promised to the nation of Israel in Jeremiah 31:31–33:

Jeremiah 31:31–33 (NKJV)

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³ But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...” [Comment]

The **new covenant** was ratified by the **blood** of Christ, and that is why He speaks of **the cup** as being **“the new covenant in His blood”**—the blood of His cross.

Now the instituting of Communion seems pretty straight forward—just as God had given the people of God under the Old Covenant a meal to remember how that, through the blood of the lamb, He had delivered them out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery.

He now gives the people of God under the New Covenant a meal to remember how that, through the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, He had delivered them out of the bondage of sin and death.

Simple, straightforward, clear and non-controversial—right? → Wrong!

One author said—

*“There have never been any words spoken by Jesus that have been fought over more fiercely by the followers of Christ than the words He spoke at the Last Supper when He took the bread and said, ‘**This is my body**’ and the wine and said, ‘**This is my blood**’”*

What was Jesus really saying?

These words have given rise to four main interpretations:

1. Transubstantiation

This is the view of Roman Catholic Church.

Roman Catholics take literally the phrases “*This is my body*” and “*This is my blood.*”

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that during the Mass the elements (bread and wine) are literally and miraculously transformed into the substance of Christ’s body and blood so that they are no longer bread and wine (though they still appear to be).

This process is referred to as **transubstantiation** meaning “*change of substance.*”

After the bread and wine are converted into the actual body and blood of Christ at each celebration of the Mass—they are then offered to God as a new sacrifice of Christ.

This means, in Roman Catholic theology, the priests literally handle Christ’s body and that the mass is a constant reenactment of Christ’s sacrifice.

(Catholics deny this by saying it is simply a ‘*bloodless representation*’ but the Roman Catholic Mass ends with “*Let us pray that our sacrifice is acceptable...*”)

Christ cannot be sacrificed again and again for sins since the Bible clearly teaches—

Hebrews 10:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ ...we have been sanctified [saved, justified] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 9:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many...

John 19:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

This ‘*transformed*’ bread (wafer) is then placed on display in a little standing chamber/vessel/holder called a *monstrance* to then be worshipped as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

In Roman Catholic theology, the Eucharist, which means “*thanksgiving*”, (also called Holy Communion) is efficacious—meaning it has the power to produce a desired effect.

In the case of the Catholic Mass, it has the power to earn *installments of “grace”* which (along with keeping the other sacraments) accrue and someday will be sufficient for the *purchasing* of salvation for the faithful Catholic who remains in good standing with the church.

In Roman Catholicism salvation becomes *sacramental* (participation in a ritual) as opposed to what the Bible actually says about salvation—that it is a free gift that we receive through our faith in Christ alone. (Eph.2:8-9)

Let me say this, I was raised in the Catholic Church and went to Catholic elementary school.

I made my first holy communion in second grade—but I didn’t receive eternal life until I was 25. (Elaborate)

No ritual, ordinance, ceremony, sacrament or religious work will bring you eternal life—only receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, by faith, will do that.

But when Catholics partake of the Eucharist, they believe they are literally consuming the body of Jesus and that by ingesting the Eucharist (eating the body of Christ) they believe that this brings them everlasting life.

They get this from their interpretation of Jesus’ words in John’s gospel chapter 6—

John 6:53–55 (NKJV)

⁵³ Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.

And so, the RCC takes these words of Jesus literally as referring to His physical body, even though Jesus went on to say—

John 6:63 (NKJV)

⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life.

This conclusively proves that Jesus wasn't speaking *literally* of eating His body and drinking His blood.

2. Consubstantiation

This was Martin Luther's view.

Luther (a Roman Catholic Monk at one time) didn't believe that the substance of the bread and wine were *transformed* into the literal body and blood of Christ for the celebration of Communion—but that the unchanged substance of the bread and wine were *united with* the substance of Christ's body.

This is what was later called "*consubstantiation*" (a term that Luther didn't really care for), namely, that Christ's body and blood come to be present *with* (the word 'con' means with) the bread and wine, which thus become *more* than bread and wine though not actually the literal body and blood of Christ.

Luther knew that the bread remained unchanged during Communion, but he wanted to preserve a literal understanding of Jesus' words: "*This is my body.*"

The Eastern Orthodox churches and some Anglicans agreed with Luther and embraced Consubstantiation—however, the Reformed and Lutheran churches parted over this understanding.

3. The mere remembrance view

This was the position of another Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli.

Zwingli denied that the glorified Christ, now in heaven, is present in any way that the words *bodily, physically, or locally* would fit.

Instead of focusing on the words, “*This is my body*”, Zwingli focused, rather, on the words, “*...do this in remembrance of me*” (1Cor.11:24).

Zwingli believed that the bread and wine were merely *symbols* to be used to remind us (a memorial) of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf.

This is the view that is held today by most Baptists and Evangelicals including Calvary Chapel.

4. The spiritual presence view

This was the view of John Calvin (also a Roman Catholic at one time) and became the theology of Presbyterians, Methodists, and most Episcopalians.

It holds that Jesus is truly present in the communion service, but that He is present *spiritually*, not in a *physical* way.

Calvin held the position that the bread and wine remained unchanged (he agreed with Zwingli that the ‘*is*’ of “*this is my body . . . this is my blood*” means “represents,” not “constitutes”).

But Calvin believed that Christ through the Spirit during Communion grants worshippers’ “*true enjoyment of his personal presence, drawing them into fellowship with himself in heaven (Heb. 12:22-24) in a way that is glorious and very real, though indescribable.*”

So which view is correct?

Let me start off by saying that nothing I tell you is likely to budge churches from positions they have held for centuries—but I'll weigh in anyway even though the phrase '*fools rush in where angels fear to go*' comes to mind!

Let me say that there is no reason to take the words “**This is my body**” as a literal statement.

The Lord's Supper is a holy *remembrance* of Jesus' death on the cross—but is not a *mystical* experience where the bread and wine are *transubstantiated* (turned into the actual body and blood of Christ) as Roman Catholics believe where they are then offered up as a new (and continual) sacrifice to atone for sins.

Furthermore, I and many others don't believe that the bread and wine used in Communion are *consubstantiated* (having the actual body and blood of Christ existing with or alongside them) as many Lutherans believe.

The plain meaning of the words “**This is My body**” and “**This is My blood**” is, “*This bread represents my body,*” as also, “*This wine represents my shed blood.*”

There are many reasons for insisting on this interpretation.

First, the disciples to whom Jesus gave the bread and wine that night in the upper room—were Jews!

In the Law of God, the Jews had been taught that it was sinful to eat flesh with the blood in it (Deut. 12:23–25)—which is the basis for their kosher diet where animals had to be properly bled when killed before they could be eaten.

If they had taken Jesus' words literally as referring to His *actual* flesh and His *actual* blood—they would have been shocked and horrified by His words!

But instead, there is nothing in the gospel accounts to suggest that they reacted in this way.

The disciples understood that Jesus' words were figurative—just as many of the other things He said were figurative.

Second, the doctrine of the *incarnation* teaches that the Son of God took on Himself a true human body, and it is the nature of physical bodies that they can't be in more than one place or exist in more than one form at the same time.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He was with His disciples in His physical, bodily form.

And if He was present bodily, his body could not have been present in the bread nor his blood in the wine.

Besides Jesus said, "*You will see Me no more until you say, 'blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.'*" (Second Coming)

Third, the statement "**This is my body**" is no different from numerous similar figurative statements that occur throughout the Bible, such as—

- "*The seven good cows are seven years*" (Gen. 41:26);
- "*You are that head of gold*" (Dan. 2:38);
- "*The field is the world*" (Matt. 13:38);
- "*That rock was Christ*" (1 Cor. 10:4);

- “The seven lampstands are the seven churches” (Rev. 1:20);
- “I am the door” (John 10:9);
- “I am the true vine” (John 15:1); and so on.

Clearly, in John 6 a spiritual feeding on Christ from His Word is in view and not a literal eating of His body and a literal drinking of His blood that is in view.

That’s not to say that I think that the Lord takes this meal or supper we call *Communion* lightly—He doesn’t and neither should we.

1 Corinthians 11:27 (NKJV)

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

We have been made worthy through the blood of Christ to come and partake of this commemorative meal—but we must partake in a worthy manner.

What would constitute partaking of Communion in an unworthy way?

- *Treating other believers shamefully or with contempt.* (v.22)
- *Having unconfessed sin in our lives* (bitterness, anger, a heart of unforgiveness etc.)
- *Taking the Lord’s Supper lightly or in a frivolous way* (just going through the motions with the attitude, “Let’s hurry up so I can get out of here”).
- *Coming at it as only a ritual without the reality of truly being born again* (Ps.50:16-23)

One author adds this—

*“To come unworthily to the Lord’s table is to become **guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.** To trample our country’s flag is not to dishonor a piece of cloth but to dishonor the country it represents. To come unworthily to Communion does not simply dishonor the ceremony; it dishonors the One in whose honor it is celebrated. We become **guilty** of dishonoring His body and blood, which represent His total gracious life and work for us, His suffering and death on*

our behalf. We become guilty of mocking and treating with indifference the very person of Jesus Christ (Acts 7:52; Heb. 6:6; 10:29)”.

1 Corinthians 11:28–29 (NKJV)

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 in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.

We should realize that the Lord’s body was given in order that our sins might be put away.

If we go on living in sin, while at the same time partaking of the Lord’s Supper, we are living a lie and risk being severely chastened by the Lord.

Paul in saying this probably had in mind his experience on the Damascus Road—

Acts 9:4–5 (NKJV)

⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.”

The body of Christ is the Church, which consists of individual believers (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

1 Corinthians 11:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

When a Christian doesn’t examine their hearts for areas of sin and goes ahead and partakes of Communion Paul is telling us that they’re inviting the chastening of God upon their life—and that can be severe depending on their sin and their stubbornness in confessing it to God.

In the case of the Corinthian Christians Paul said that many were sick and weak and some had even been taken home by God in death.

So, when we say that we believe Communion is symbolic and not mystical—that doesn't mean we should take it lightly!

1 Corinthians 11:31 (NKJV)

³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

On the other hand, if we exercise this self-judgment, it will not be necessary for God to chasten us.

1 Corinthians 11:31–34 (NKJV)

³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. ³³ Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. ³⁴ But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

In other words, the love feast, linked as it was with the Lord's Supper, was not to be mistaken for a common meal.

“And the rest I will set in order when I come.”

Undoubtedly there were other minor matters which had been mentioned to the apostle in the letter from the Corinthians.

Here he assures them that he will deal with these matters personally when he visits them.