

Lesson 6

Devoted to the Breaking of Bread

Acts 2.42c

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Introduction

One of the most fundamental ways to summarize Acts 2-42-47 might be to see the *togetherness* of the early church. In pointing out the church's devotion to apostolic teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer, Luke wants us to see a church that is functioning together in the way God intended. And as we focus in this lesson on the breaking of bread, there is probably no deeper spiritual connection we have with each other than *the breaking of bread*.

The observance of communion that Christians the world over share together is a symbol of our togetherness and fellowship. On the first day of the week every Christian in the world can meet together with other Christians at the foot of the cross as forgiven sons and daughters of God, saved by grace. The common bond that brings us all together is the cross. It brought us peace with God, and peace with one another. The cross has made us one with God, Christ, the Spirit, and each other. Jesus purchased us with His blood, 1 Peter 1.18-19. Every week we get to come together, reorienting our spiritual lives back to the very core of what it means to be a Christian and the significance of the price paid on our behalf.

On the Breaking of Bread

In the New Testament, the reference to *breaking of bread* in its noun form appears only here and in Luke 24.35.²⁸ Depending on the context, the term can refer to communion together or the simple sharing of a common meal. Here, in Acts 2.42, it appears that since the word is listed in the midst of other spiritual activities describing their fellowship together, it would seem that this instance is referring to the church coming together to engage in communion or celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The reference later in the text, Acts 2.46, seems to be in a much broader context and would apply to the sharing of meals together by those inside the early church.

What Communion Together Proclaims

We Personally Celebrate & Proclaim His Death

Our coming together to partake of the Lord's Supper reminds us in a very personal way of the brutal and vicious death of Jesus on the cross. It is a very solemn, serious occasion where we focus our minds on the events of that day. We can recount the agony in the garden, the sham trials put on by the Jews and Romans, the brutal whipping/beating that left Jesus near death, the crown of thorns driven into His head, and the intense agony He felt throughout His body while hanging on the cross. Although no bone

²⁸ As a verb, *breaking of bread*, is found in Luke 22.19; 24.30; Acts 2.46; 20.7, 11; 27.35.

in Jesus' body was broken, His skin and flesh were torn and broken by blows with rods and fists, thorns, nails, and spears. Every Sunday we memorialize this event and focus on it in our minds. By His brokenness we are healed, Isaiah 53.5.

We Celebrate and Proclaim our Unity in Christ

As we observe the New Testament, we find that the Supper was observed congregationally. Luke points out the practice in Acts 20.7 and uses the church at Troas as an example. They *assembled to break bread*. This took place on Sunday (the first day of the week.) While the form is important and should not be ignored, we must draw equal attention to the significance of the event.

The Lord's Supper is an act of sharing. While there is very much an individual component to the supper, it is an action to be done in conjunction with other Christians. In 1 Corinthians 10.16, Paul writes:

The cup of blessing that **we bless**, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that **we break**, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

I bolded the plural elements in Paul's writing on purpose. Note how Paul includes himself in joint participation with the Corinthians, even though he is in another place. The Lord's Supper is much bigger than one assembly. All Christians *everywhere* share the body and blood:

Because there is one bread, **we who are many** are one body, since **all of us share** the one bread.

The sharing Paul mentions takes place regardless of one's geographical location. By partaking of the Lord's Supper each Sunday, all Christians everywhere demonstrate or affirm how they belong to Jesus and to one another. The Supper is a bonding of the relationship with worshippers universally, affirming the complete solidarity of the redeemed with their Redeemer.

Partaking of the Supper together should remind us that we all stand equal before the cross. It is a time when we lay aside our unique backgrounds and differences so that we may unite with each other and Jesus Christ. No one comes to the cross on a better footing than someone else – we're all equal in our need for the grace of God. While partaking, we unite as one, proclaiming our thankfulness for the sacrifice. It is also a time when we pause to recognize what we share together because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. What a beautiful thing this is!

These principles apply not just to the local congregation, but to the universal church. If a person is unable to assemble with the local church, in extenuating circumstances, and chooses to partake in their home, they are still sharing. Everyone is involved with the Supper, with God, and with each other.

We Proclaim Our Continued Dependence on Christ

The Supper is a time for self-examination.

So, then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself, 1 Corinthians 11.27-29.

One can partake *unworthily* in many ways. For example:

- Have I turned the Supper into a mere ritual, neglecting to engage with God with my mind and heart?
- Have I come to the Supper with bitterness and hatred in my heart toward another believer?
- Have I come to the Supper with unrepented sin?

John MacArthur has aptly written:

Before we partake we are to give ourselves a thorough self-examination, looking honestly at our hearts for anything that should not be there and sifting out all evil. Our motives, our attitudes toward the Lord and His Word, toward His people, and toward the Communion service itself should all come under private scrutiny before the Lord. The table thus becomes a special place for the purifying of the church.²⁹

So, when we come to the Supper we are reminded of our sinfulness and great need for the continued deliverance by the Spirit. We should partake with the greatest sense of thankfulness and humility ... in total awe of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and in total love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

There is a very important word found in verse 29. The CSB translates it as “recognizing the body.” Many of the older translations word it as “discerning the body.” It makes no difference; the meaning is still the same. When we “recognize” the body, we are bringing into our mind a clear view of the Savior and His sacrifice. It is human nature to forget. So, in partaking of the Supper, we strive to keep our memory clear, straight, and focused. As we “recognize the body” in worship, we are connected to the past, bringing meaning to the present, and are inspired with hope for the future.

We Proclaim the Lord's Death

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes, 1 Corinthians 11.26

It has been said that the Lord's Supper is a living sermon. In partaking, we announce our participation in the benefits of Jesus' death. In every generation, from the first century until the Lord returns, Christians declare their belief that Jesus died for the remission of their sins. Participation in the Lord's Supper is an affirmation of our belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote *that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*, 1 Corinthians 15.3-4. We tell the world that our faith in the power of Jesus is alive and secure. And we declare our faith in His return. Christians will partake of the Lord's Supper *until He returns*. When we eat the Supper, we look back at the death of Christ on the cross and forward to the time of His return. By partaking and looking forward to His return, we acknowledge the reality of the coming judgment on mankind. Luke recorded, *“Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead,* Acts 17.30-31.

May We Embrace Every Opportunity to Partake

²⁹ MacArthur, John F., Jr. *1 Corinthians*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984, p. 274.

Going back to the first part of Acts 2.42, we find the early church was devoted to the expression the spiritual actions of being faithful to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. They had a steadfast and single-minded focus on Christ and these things were the natural expression of it. Could our devotion to the Supper and these things be compared to them? How strong is our heart connected to God?

Over the past few years, and especially with the aftermath of the pandemic, it seems as if the importance of the weekly assembly has lessened somewhat. While online services and *virtual assemblies* were a justified reaction to the mandates and restrictions, these should never be seen as a permanent replacement or substitute for the actual assembling together in person with brothers and sisters of like precious faith. God designed the church with joint participation in receiving teaching, communing, and prayer in mind. For this to happen, he intends for us to meet every Sunday to be strengthened individually and congregationally. The early church never viewed these meeting times as optional, and neither should we.

The times of worship and public bible study set forth by the leaders of a local congregation should be viewed as priority items on our calendar. In this we should stand head and shoulders above today's cultural norms ... which deemphasize the need for the church and its assemblies. What a great opportunity we have each week to carry out the expectations of the Hebrew writer:

And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching, Hebrews 10.24-25.