

# FELLOWSHIP AT THE TABLE



**Celebrating The Lord's Supper  
During The Love Feast**

**DICKSON**

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# Fellowship At The Table

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## Preface

It was not in God's original plan to have a temple built. The original plan was that the tabernacle continue in use with Israel throughout their history. In fact, in order that the Israelites reconstruct the tabernacle after years of wear, or possible destruction through fire, God inspired Moses to write a blueprint for reconstruction. As the Israelites preserved the law of Moses, they also preserved the blueprint in order to continually rebuilt the tabernacle until the coming of the Messiah.

But things changed in Israel, things of which God was not unaware. Ten northern tribes of Israel eventually went into apostasy, leaving only Judah and Benjamin faithful in Judea. This changed everything. Israel no longer needed a transportable tent to move among the tribal territories of Israel. Their center of ceremonies could be stationary. And thus, along came David with an idea that God accommodated. Though the temple was not in God's original plan, times changed through apostasy. The building of the temple was granted. It became a part of the religiosity of Israel, even to the point that the temple was later used metaphorically by the Holy Spirit to refer to the temple of God, the church.

It is good to refer to this illustration when we consider the subject of this book. As we delve into the behavior of the early disciples in reference to the love feast/Lord's Supper celebration, it would be good to remind ourselves that God is still patient with our imperfections. If we were strict legalists, we would have to condemn David for coming up with and carrying out through Solomon the building of the temple. But God was patient then, and He continues to be patient with us today.

In the study that follows, the reader will discover many things that are not common among us today. If we were strict legalists, we could condemn ourselves in such a study, for we would not be behaving as the early Christians. If their behavior in reference to this subject establishes law, then we are in trouble. The strict legalist will have problems in this study. He will discover that his legal system of hermeneutics will lead him to be disobedient. If the example of the early Christians establishes law outside command, then this study will produce some anxiety in reference to how we behave today in reference to the Lord's Supper.

As we lead you through this study, therefore, we would ask that you continually remind yourself that the temple was not in God's origi-

nal plan for Israel. All the “boring” instructions in the law of Moses concerning the rebuilding of the tabernacle certainly caused some turmoil in the minds of the legalistic religionists of Israel. This book may cause the same in the minds of those who discover that they too are not conforming to some beliefs and behavioral principles in reference to the Lord’s Supper. It may be that we have left out something that is vital to Christian fellowship. Or, it may be that the purpose of something that was to be a reminder of our sanctification has changed into something by which we would sanctify ourselves. Whatever your situation, we would encourage you to continually remind yourself of the mobile tabernacle of Israel that was changed to a stationary temple.

We offer the preceding historical illustration for a specific reason. As the reader journeys through this book, he or she may discover some things that are quite different from the behavior of the modern church. In writing this book, and to the best of our ability, we did not allow the beliefs and behavior that are commonly practiced in the religious world today to influence our journey back to the church two thousand years ago. It is not our concern to validate any modern-day church ritual outside the authority of the Scriptures. If such a “ritual” is validated by the authority of the Scriptures, then it is not a ritual. It is gospel behavior that is directed by God through the Scriptures.

Therefore, if the reader is offended by what we have discovered through our investigation of the behavior of the early disciples, then be assured that that is not our concern in reference to our obedience to the word of God. We seek first to understand the will of God for our own lives. We pray that the same is the desire of the reader. In our quest to understand, we seek to investigate the response of the early disciples as to how they responded to the gospel. The reader has the privilege of making changes in his or her behavior where he or she sees that something is a matter of opinion, or where there is a contradiction or neglect of the word of God. It is only our concern that to the best of our ability we will seek to know the way it was then, not now.

The reader has the freedom to determine the manner by which he or she will respond to the gospel. So if one would build a temple, then he or she has that freedom. However, in reference to the subject of this book, that which we have either constructed or neglected may not have been in the original plan of God.

## Prologue

*“The cup of blessing that we bless,  
is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ?  
The bread that we break,  
is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ?”*  
(1 Corinthians 10:16,17)

A principal function of the body of Christ that manifests the loving relationships that the members have with one another, takes place when the members of the body of Christ come together for the love feast/Lord’s Supper celebration. All the connectivity, celebration, fellowship, participation, mutual affection and love of the body are reflected in the gathering of the saints for the occasion of the Lord’s meal. It is at this time when the family of God proclaims to the world that every family member has submitted to the one King who is the center of reference to his or her life. The Lord’s Supper that is celebrated during a meal is the living memorial of the gospel.

The purpose for the Supper event is so evident in Scripture that there was no need to give any legal commandments concerning the frequency of the Supper. The only command came from Jesus who said, “This do in remembrance of Me.” Therefore, the family of God should remember Jesus on a regular basis in order to remind Him of His covenant promise to come again for His people.

The Supper was never intended to be a legal ceremony of church rituals. Jesus knew that if people responded legally in their consideration for one another and of Him, love would soon give way to ritual behavior. When ritual-oriented people come to the Supper, the Supper simply becomes a heartless legal ceremony.

But the love feast/Supper event is to be anything but a ceremonial performance of law. When those of the world look on, disciples of Jesus should be seen as a loving family in reunion in order to proclaim who they are and that Jesus is their reigning King. The Supper should in every way reflect the nature and behavior of the *ekklesia* (church) of Christ.

If by chance an unbeliever should show up at the love feast/Supper of the *ekklesia*, he should be able to witness the affectionate nature of the body of Christ, and thus, fall down before the Lord. The reflection of love that is manifested during the love feast and Supper should be so strong that those of the world who are searching for a family will be drawn by the atmosphere that surrounds the disciples of Christ as they come together to remember Jesus through the bread and wine. The Supper, therefore, is not only an opportunity for the members of the body to renew their connectivity with one another and Jesus, it is also an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to every unbeliever who might show up at the assembly.

## INTRODUCTION

**The Lord's Supper reflects the love that gospel-obedient disciples, as the body of Christ, have for one another.** And since it does, we can better understand the stern rebuke by which Paul reproached the Corinthians for their corruption of the love feast and Supper. Their problem was not in violating some legal ceremonial codes of the love feast and Supper. It was in the fact that they brought the unloving attitudes and behavior of the pagan temple feasts into the love feast of the family of God. And by doing such they were manifesting to the unbelievers that there was no difference between the pagan feasts at the temple and the Lord's feast and Supper of gospel-obedient Christians on the first day of the week.

Paul's condemning judgment of the Corinthians was justified because they were in their attitudes and behavior denying before the world the very nature of the love that should bring all disciples together in assembly. The *ekklesia* of Christ was to be known for the members' love for one another (See Jn 13:34,35). Unfortunately, the Corinthians were reflecting in their feasts everything but a loving spirit when they came together.

Sometimes in our own attitudes and behavior today we are not too distant from Corinth. As members of the *ekklesia* of Christ we have often embarrassed ourselves because of our disputes over circumstances surrounding the Supper. Our squabbles have often overshadowed the very purpose and meaning of the Supper. We sometimes become so involved in insignificant discussions that our attention is drawn away from what we should be remembering when we fulfill Jesus' instructions of what the Supper should mean in our lives.

When the Supper digresses into being only a legal ceremonial identity of who we are as the gospel-obedient family of God, then our observance of the Supper becomes a ritual that must be carried out on Sunday morning in order that we feel a sense of self-sanctification. Instead of remembering the blood of Jesus by which we are sanctified, we have often moved in our thinking to believe that our performance of keeping the Lord's Supper ritual has somehow sanctified us before God.

We then go on our way after the “closing prayer” with the feeling that we have justified ourselves before God.

Ritualistic performances always become a part of our religious traditions, and subsequently, our religious heritage. Our traditional rituals then digress to points over which we often dispute with those with whom we disagree in reference to conflicting traditions. The Lord’s Supper that was instituted to remind us of our gospel unity that we have in Christ often becomes a traditional ceremony of division among us that must be legally kept in order to prove our existence as the people of God. It is at this stage of digression that we lose our focus on the purpose of the Supper. We find ourselves disputing over ritualistic performances, while at the same time we forget the meaning of the rituals that have now become a part of our traditions.

It is axiomatic that the more traditional our rituals become, the more we forget the meaning of the rituals of our traditions. When the observance of the Lord’s Supper becomes a ritual that is simply a tradition of our identity, then we fall into a struggle of reminding ourselves how to perform the ritual correctly. We obsess over how the traditional observance of the ritual is maintained, instead of on that which the ritual is to remind us. The gospel focus of the ritual is long gone by the time the ritual has become a tradition of heritage identity.

When we consider the ceremonial observance of the Supper over which we often dispute about our ritualistic performances, we often manifest a divisive spirit about which we are sure God is “scratching” His head. When we even mention the phrase “Lord’s Supper,” there are a host of traditional performance rituals that flash in our minds. Each church group has a customary way by which they partake of the Supper. Too often, however, each unique system of observance has become a legality, and subsequently, the “law” for the “correct” manner to partake of the Supper.

The significance of the Supper is revealed by how often we partake of the Supper. There are the “no Supper” people whose assemblies are often limited to singing and preaching, with no observance of the Supper at all. Then there are the Christmas/Easter observers who partake of the Supper only during these two holidays each year. Then

there are the “chip and sip” folks who weekly perform a ceremony of passing around pieces of bread and sips of the fruit of the vine as starters before a feast that often never happens. And finally, there are the love feast/Supper people who enjoy a full meal in fellowshiping with one another, during or after which they remember for themselves and remind the Lord to come again for them.

It is this last group of believers who truly enjoy the communion they have with one another and the Lord during the Sunday Supper event. It is this group that needs no command as to when they would enjoy the love feast/Supper event. They need no command because they are gospel-driven people who seek at every opportunity to remember the One who revealed the gospel of grace.

If the Supper reflects the gospel-obedient nature of the body of Christ—and it does—then we are on a quest through the Scriptures to identify ourselves as God’s people by understanding the gospel nature of the Supper. This is not difficult.

God never required of us anything that was essential to be difficult to understand. Neither did He enjoin on us any command that was impossible to obey, or simply went against common sense. We must keep in mind, therefore, that the confusion that often surrounds the Supper is not God’s fault.

It is ours. It is imperative, therefore, that we objectively allow the word of God to speak for itself concerning matters of the Supper. We must take every precaution not to read into the text of Scripture on this subject any of our “Supper traditions” in reference to what we discover in the text of Scripture.

We seek to step outside our “Supper traditions” for a moment in order to delve into the historical behavior of the early disciples when they remembered the One who revealed the message of the gospel of God’s grace. In order to do this, we must first understand the historical background upon which Jesus instituted the Supper. And then we must sit with the disciples in a small candle-lite upper room two thousand years ago when the Lord took bread and raised a cup, and said, “This do in remembrance of Me.”

## Chapter 1

### FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN

We are the creation of a God of love. John reminded us, “*He who does not love does not know God, for **God is love***” (1 Jn 4:8). We would say, therefore, that anyone who does not come to the table of our Lord with a loving spirit, does not know the love that was revealed through the gospel that we remember at the table. The Lord’s Supper must reflect the love of God through those who come to the feast of love. It was because of the love of God for the world that the gospel was revealed through the Son of God (Jn 3:16). Loving hearts, therefore, come before the Lord at the table to remember the love that was poured out from the heart of God.

As the reflection of the heart of God on earth, Jesus added,

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*** (Jn 13:34,35).

Anytime the disciples manifest their love for one another at the Supper celebration, they identify themselves as the church of the God of love. We would assume, therefore, **that we must partake of the Supper in some way that manifests our love for one another**. This is why ritualistic observances of the Supper are so inadequate and shallow in reflecting the heart of God’s love through His Son. It was the Son who gave a new commandment that we be identified by our love for one another. Obedience to legal performances of the Supper manifest little love. Therefore, when we come to the table of the Son, our love for one another must be reflected in our joint participation as the body of Christ.

Since the occasion of the Supper is the opportunity to manifest to the world the church of Christ, then we should seek to reach into the Scriptures in order to discover what the Holy Spirit said in reference to the love feast and Supper. This brings us to introductory statements in the Scriptures that explain the relationships the early Christians had

with one another. The Holy Spirit even inspired relational teachings to be written in the context of the presence of false teachers who endangered the disciples' relationships with one another.

When studying the following statements of both Peter and Jude, we must keep in mind that **their statements were written by the Holy Spirit about thirty-five years after the establishment of the church.** This time of writing is significant. It is significant because the tradition of the love feast continued for at least this number of years after the initial days when the *ekklesia* of Christ was first established in Acts 2.

In the Acts 2 account of the function of the early church, it was stated,

*And they continued steadfastly ... in the breaking of bread. And continuing daily with one accord ... breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart ... (At 2:42,46).*

What the first disciples began as the “breaking of bread,” the second generation disciples were continuing over three decades later when the books of 2 Peter and Jude were written.

### A. The feast:

Peter wrote around A.D. 65, just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In the context of immoral people and false teachers who arose among the disciples at that time, he wrote, “*They are stains and blemishes, carousing themselves with their own deceptions, while they feast with you*” (2 Pt 2:13).

Peter mentioned the feast of the disciples in passing. It had unfortunately become an opportunity for the unrighteous to maintain fellowship with the early church, and thus, influence the disciples contrary to gospel living. But these apostates were “brute beasts” who “*speak evil of things that they do not understand*” (2 Pt 2:12). They were thus “stains” and “blemishes” in the disciples' fellowship meal. They were such when the disciples sought to manifest the love of God that should prevail during an event when the members came together to commune with one another over a meal.

The disciples' breaking of bread from house to house continued to A. D. 65. Unfortunately, the environment of the feast of Peter's readers had been spoiled by unrighteous apostates who had "*eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls*" (2 Pt 2:14). These apostates had taken the occasion of the feast of the disciples as an opportunity to exercise their ungodly influence among the disciples (See Rv 2:14,20,21).

Though this corruption of the feast was certainly not prevalent among all the disciples of the early church, at least it was among those to whom Peter wrote. What is important to notice is that the love feast of the disciples was so common among the early churches that it continued regardless of the corruption in attitudes and behavior of some who had crept in among the disciples to whom Peter wrote.

## **B. The love feast:**

Jude also wrote his epistle in a time of apostasy among the disciples to whom he addressed the message of Jude 12. He also wrote around the same time Peter wrote 2 Peter in A.D. 65. Jude added an adjective to the feast of the disciples: "*These are spots in your love feast when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear*" (Jd 12). This "love feast" was not only a feast of the disciples where a full meal was eaten on a regular basis, it was a **love** feast. It was the *agape* (love) meal that had been retained by the early disciples since the early days of the establishment of the church in Acts 2. And since the writing of both 2 Peter and Jude was in the middle 60s, we would correctly assume that there were many second generation Christians among Peter and Jude's readership. The eating of a love meal among the disciples had become an established tradition by the time these two books were written.

How else would we refer to a meal that is purposely eaten by the disciples to express their love for one another? We are servants of the God of love who expressed His love toward all men through Jesus (Jn 3:16). As God unconditionally loved us through Jesus, the new commandment was that we so love one another (Jn 13:34,35). It was by

this that the disciples of Jesus signaled to the world that they were the true disciples of Jesus. The *agape* (love) feast that the disciples had with one another on a regular basis, therefore, was an opportunity for the disciples to reflect the unconditional love of God in their hearts toward one another. It is for this reason that the “feast” was a full meal, rather than a ceremonial observance, or ritualistic “partaking” of bread and the fruit of the vine.

The love feast was a sermon of love to the lost. Paul, Peter and Jude dealt harshly with those who tarnished this opportunity for the disciples to preach the gospel of love to an unloving world. Since the love feast of the disciples was so significant to the behavior of the early church in the members’ relationships with one another, it would be imperative for us to discover the roots from which the early love feast came. This would take us back to the beginning of feasts that God established among His people when they were given birth as a nation in their deliverance from Egyptian captivity.

Any study of the Lord’s Supper must be in the context of the love feasts of the early church, which feasts had their origins in the Passover feast that God instituted with Israel immediately before the nation’s deliverance from Egyptian captivity. **The Passover feast was a covenant meal.** It was a celebration feast with God who made a covenant with His people at Mount Sinai. Therefore, in order to understand the full significance of the Lord’s Supper in reference to our covenant with God today, we must in our study of the Lord’s Supper first pass through the covenant feasts in the history of God’s people from the beginning of time.

## Chapter 2

# MEMORIAL COVENANTS

When Jesus instituted His Supper He made a significant statement in reference to the contents of the cup, “***For this is My blood of the covenant.***” (Mt 26:28). Being Gentiles who are millennia removed from the Jews who were in a fifteen-hundred-year national covenant relationship with God, we as Christians must understand that we are

now the nation of God who is in a special eternal covenant relationship with God (See 1 Pt 2:9). We often do not fully appreciate the nature of Old Testament covenants that God established with His people throughout their history, as well as the blessings that surrounded those covenants. In order to fully appreciate the covenant that we now have with God, it would be good to review the nature of and celebration that surrounded the establishment of Old Testament covenants.

In the context of Jesus' covenant statement, He used a symbol—the fruit of the vine—as a signal of remembrance of His covenant that He would establish with His disciples. His blood would be poured out in order to cleanse the sins of those with whom He would bring into a covenant relationship. In order to continually remember the blood of the covenant, the fruit of the vine was a physical signal to generate remembrance, and subsequently, be a reminder to Jesus of His promise to return for His covenanted people.

In reference to our covenant relationship with God through the gospel of Jesus, our challenge is to determine **whose** remembrance is in the context of Jesus' statement when He said, "This do in remembrance of Me." Was the signal of God's covenant for the sake of the people with whom He would establish a covenant? Or, was it for God to remember that He had established a covenant and made promises to the covenanted people of things He would or would not do? We would answer that the signal, or sign of the covenant, was for both, though we often forget that the sign of covenants were also to remind God.

## A. Remembering covenants:

Genesis 9:12-17 is a commentary passage in reference to the covenants that God established with His people. The occasion for the statements of the text was immediately after the flood of Noah's day. As Noah and his family stood captivated by the appearance of a rainbow in the sky that they had never before seen, God said to them:

*Then God said, "This is the **sign of the covenant** that I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for successive genera-*

tions: *I set **My rainbow in the cloud**, and it will be for a **sign** of a covenant **between Me and the earth**. And it will come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud. **Then I will remember My covenant** that is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh. **And the waters will no more become a flood to destroy all flesh**. And the rainbow will be in the cloud, and I will look on it so that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” And God said to Noah, “**This is the sign of the covenant that I have established** between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”*

When we read this passage carefully, we notice that there are some important truths revealed in the promises that God made to all humanity:

**1. Signs of the covenant:** God established a signal that there was a covenant between Him, the earth, all animals and all humanity. The rainbow was a signal that God would keep His promise in reference to the continuation of the covenant.

**2. Promises of the covenant:** The promise that God made to Noah was that He would never again destroy every living creature and man that roamed upon the earth as He did with a global flood. Throughout the rest of history, when people saw the sign of this promise (covenant), they could be reassured that never again would there be a flood of waters that would come upon the face of the earth to destroy all flesh.

**3. Remembrance of the covenant:** In this case, the rainbow was established as a **reminder for God**. God promised humanity, “*And it will come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud. **Then I will remember My covenant.***”

The appearance of the sign of the covenant, the rainbow, was for God to remember. It is not that God forgets. So how would God be reminded with the appearance of a rainbow that He must never forget to keep His promise that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood? Actually, the meaning is quite simple. It is as a groom who

gives a ring to his bride during a marriage ceremony. What the groom is saying in the giving of the ring is that when his wife sees the ring, she must remind him that he made a covenant to love and cherish her. The ring is a signal of the covenant that the groom makes with his bride.

The presence of the rainbow is as a parent who gives a small token to a child, telling the child that when the child sees the token (sign), he or she must remind the parent of promises made to the child. It was not that the parent would forget, or that the groom would forget the promises that he made in the marriage covenant. The reminding was for the benefit of the one with whom the covenant and promises were made. By reminding, we remember.

**The more we remind God, the more we remember.** We must keep this thought in mind when we come to the regularity by which the early disciples observed the Lord's Supper. Every time the disciples' partook of the Supper, they reminded Jesus of the promises that He made in reference to the covenant of life that He had established with them. The Supper is a reminder of Jesus coming again. It is not that Jesus will forget to come again. However, our prayers to remind Him to come keeps His imminent coming fresh in our minds (See 1 Co 16:22; Rv 22:20).

## **B. Remembrance enacts action:**

When God remembers the promises of His covenants, it means that He takes action. Consider this when it was time to deliver Israel from Egyptian captivity.

*“Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. **So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob**” (Ex 2:23,24).*

Had God forgotten His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Certainly not! The point is that the people wanted God to act on the

promises of His covenant that He made to the forefathers that of their seed He would make a great nation. They were not only crying out to God because of the hardships of bondage, they were also crying out for nationhood. They still remembered the promises of God's covenant with Abraham that were made in Genesis 12:1-3. Their cry to God for "remembrance," therefore, was a cry to be formed into the nation that He first promised to Abraham (See Ex 6:6-8).

We must remember this point every time we study the Lord's Supper. In partaking of the Supper we make a proclamation. We proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again in order to deliver us out of the bondage of this world and into the glory of eternal heaven (1 Co 11:26).

### C. Remembrance enacts renewal:

After the Israelites had dwelt in the land of promise for several centuries, and because of their apostasy from their conditions to keep their covenant with God, they were banned to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Nevertheless, after their repentance in captivity, God promised to remember His covenant with them.

*For thus says the Lord God: "I will deal with you as you have done, who despised the oath by breaking the covenant. Nevertheless **I will remember My covenant with you** in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you" (Ez 16:59,60).*

It was not that God had forgotten His covenant with Israel while they were in captivity. Their repentance to renewed obedience enacted the blessings of the covenant that God had promised. Therefore, God acted on His promises because the people turned again to Him (See Lv 26:40-45; Ps 105:8; 106:45). Their repentance in captivity was their cry to Him to remember His promise to restore a remnant to the land of promise.

We must keep the preceding thoughts in mind when we come to the statement that Jesus made in reference to the Supper, that it be kept as a "remembrance." The common translation of the statement that He

made was, “Do this in **remembrance** of Me” (Lk 22:19; 1 Co 11:24). If this were the only rendering of the Greek phrase that Jesus used, then there would be little difficulty in understanding what He meant. The challenge comes from the fact that the Greek phrase can be translated two different ways. “Do this in remembrance of Me” is only one of two possible renderings.

The Supper was instituted as a remembrance. But to whom in Luke 22:19 does the word “remembrance” refer? The Greek word that is used is *anamnesis*. It is a combination of two Greek words, *an*, meaning “not,” and *amnesis*, meaning “forget.” We derive the English word “amnesia” from *anamnesis*.

Literally in Greek, *anamnesis* would mean “not forget.” The word can be translated with the English word “remembrance,” but it can also be translated “reminder.” If we considered the subject of this chapter in reference to God being “reminded” by the signs of His covenants, then another possible rendering of the Greek phrase would be: “Do this as My reminder.” But how would this fit into the meaning that Jesus wanted to convey on the night of His betrayal?

There would be a subtle difference between the definition of the words “remembrance” and “reminder.” We must keep in mind that the rainbow that God gave was both a “remembrance” and a “reminder.” The token of the rainbow looked backward in order that Noah remember, but it also looked forward to be a reminder to God and humanity of something that He would not do. Noah was to remember what had happened in the flood in order to remind God what He had promised that He would never do again through flood waters.

The same was true of God’s covenant with Abraham concerning the future nationhood of Israel. Circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant (Gn 17:9-14). When the Jews circumcised their male children, they remembered Abraham’s covenant with God. However, they also were reminding God to remember that He had promised that He would make of Abraham a great nation, and subsequently preserve this nation until the coming of the final Blessing (Gn 12:1-3).

The Supper for the Christian, therefore, is both a remembrance and a reminder. It is our remembrance of the cross in the past, but it is

also our reminder to God of His promises that He made to us in reference to the future. Jesus promised that He would come again for us.

The obedient disciple has obeyed the gospel in order to come into a covenant relationship with God. In this covenant he walks in newness of life (Rm 6:4,5). However, his newness of life is more than a new life in this world. Emphasis in obedience to the gospel is also on eternal life to come in fulfillment of Jesus' promise that He will come again and receive us unto Himself (See Jn 14:1-3). Our Supper (communion) with the Lord is a reminder to Jesus that He come again to redeem us from this world.

If we would be literal in the translation of Luke 22:19, therefore, we would translate the Greek phrase, "Do this to My reminder." The Greek word *emos* (My) in the phrase is **possessive**. The meaning would be that the "reminder" refers to Jesus, not to us. The more common Greek word for "my" is *mou*. But this word **is not** used in this statement. The Greek word *emos* was used in Greek for emphasis. If the word *mou* was used, then we might understand that Jesus wanted His disciples to observe the Supper only for the purpose that they remember. But the use of the word *emos* indicates that the Supper was observed in order to be a reminder to Jesus that He fulfill His promises of the covenant, which promises were yet in the future because of what He would have done in the past.

The word *emos* always refers to possession, and thus, the "reminder" was in reference to Jesus, not the disciples. When the disciples partake of the bread, therefore, they are reminding Jesus to take possession (ownership) of His promises that are a part of their covenant relationship with Him. **Thus the disciples' observance of the Supper is an enacted prayer that Jesus remember His covenant and His promises in reference to their future.**

#### D. Remembrance stirs hope:

We eat of the Supper looking forward. This emphasis was revealed by Luke more than the other writers who give an account of the Supper. Luke recorded Jesus' statement, "*I will no longer eat of it*

*until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Lk 22:16). “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Lk 22:18).*

As in the Jews’ eating of the Passover meal in order to look back to their former captivity in Egypt, as well as forward to God’s promises concerning the future, Christians look back in order to look forward. In the Passover, the Jews looked back in order to remember their bondage in Egypt. They looked back in order to appreciate the freedom of their nation in the land of promise. Christians look back to their bondage in sin in order to look forward to the Paradise of God that is yet to come. They, too, celebrated their freedom in Christ (Gl 5:1). **When Christians eat the bread, they remind Jesus that what He started at the cross has not yet been completed.** There is yet another banquet meal during which we will sit down and eat with the Lord in the heavenly kingdom of God that is yet to come (Rv 19:7-9).

### Chapter 3

## THE PASSOVER FOUNDATION

The Passover feast of the Jews was the foundation upon which the Lord’s Supper was instituted by Jesus. The actual Passover meal lasted several hours and was the occasion where the Jewish family focused on Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, as well as God’s promises concerning the Messiah in the future of Israel.

It was during such a family meal with His disciples when Jesus took the bread and cup of the common Passover meal and established a memorial meal that would last until He comes again (Mt 26:26). When we consider the occasion of the Passover, and its meaning, we would correctly assume that Jesus simply changed the meaning of the Passover. The bread and wine of the Passover were changed to signify different blessings that would result from the revelation of the gospel, which at the time when Jesus sat with His disciples, had not yet been revealed.

Many circumstances and events that surrounded the typical Jewish Passover meal was continued by the early Christians in their love feast/Lord’s Supper event. This would have been especially true of the

early Jewish Christians. In order to better understand Jesus' institution of the Supper on the night of His betrayal, we must understand the occasion of the Jewish Passover feast.

The significance of the elements of the Supper, as well as what Jesus said during the Supper, depends to a great extent on our understanding of Jewish thinking concerning symbols and events that surrounded the Passover meal. Therefore, in order to increase our appreciation for the Supper, we must go back two thousand years to a time when Jesus gathered several Jews around a Passover meal in order to guide their minds into the future. We must not assume, however, that the love feast/Supper of the early Christians was simply a copy of the Passover meal. We must seek to understand what Jesus said to His Jewish disciples in the context of the Jewish Passover meal.

The Jewish Passover was initially instituted the night before Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage. The significance of the observance of the Passover that would spill over into the love feast/Supper of the early Christians is embedded in God's instructions to Israel on the eve of their flight to freedom.

The text that defines the meaning of the Passover for Israel is **Exodus 12**. In this text are some very important instructions by God in reference to Israel's observance of the Passover that would continue throughout the history of Israel:

### **A. One lamb per house:**

*“Each man will take a lamb for himself, according to the house of his fathers, **a lamb for each house**” (Ex 12:3). **The Passover was a house event.** It was not an assembly activity of a great number of people at one location. **Israelites were to stay at home.** They ate the Passover lamb as a family. The fact that it was a house meal symbolized the very purpose for which it was instituted in Egypt.*

*It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover who **passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses** (Ex 12:27).*

The Passover was a home feast because God passed over each Jewish home and did not bring death to the firstborn of that home.

Furthermore, *“It will be eaten in one house. You will not carry any of the meat outside the house”* (Ex 12:46). The instructions that surrounded the eating of the offering included the fact that the meal was to be eaten in the homes of the people. It is interesting to note also that when Israel entered the promised land, God instructed the people not to eat the Passover within the cities of the Canaanites that He gave to the Levites (Dt 16:5). The eating of the Passover meal was to continue in the homes of the rural culture of the Israelites throughout the land of Palestine.

### **B. Eating with a neighbor:**

*“And if the household is too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the souls”* (Ex 12:4). If a man’s family was too small to consume the entire lamb, then he could join with a next door neighbor for the feast. He could do this in order to make sure that the entire offering was consumed. The Passover was a family meal, but it could be a communal meal with one’s neighbor. The reason for this ruling was simply because every household may not have had a lamb or goat to offer. Or, the livestock they had might not be without blemish, or of the first year.

### **C. The best of the flock:**

*“Your lamb will be without blemish, a male of the first year”* (Ex 12:5). Only the best would serve. There was to be no cheap and sickly animals offered. A sacrifice was needed, but God wanted only the best to be offered. The Passover feast was to be the best offering that could be provided by the family.

In order to be the best animal that had no blemish, the Jewish family had to raise a special Passover animal. They were to guard this special animal until the Passover meal. This meant that the yearling lamb or goat became a special animal, and thus, one that the family

would almost consider a pet by the time of the offering. Every year for the Passover meal, the family would suffer heartache when they had to kill the “pet” for the offering. We can only imagine how the children of the Jewish family cried when their pet animal was annually killed for the sacrifice of the Passover. Regardless of the heartache of the sacrificed lamb, God knew how to prepare the Israelites’ hearts for the final killing of the Passover Lamb who was His only begotten Son. There were not only drops of blood at the foot of the cross, but there were also drops of tears mixed with blood.

#### D. United nation celebration:

*“And the whole assembly of Israel will kill it [the lamb or goat] in the evening”* (Ex 12:6). As stated before, this was not an “assembly event.” The nation did not gather together to one place in order to observe the Passover meal. However, “the whole assembly” of Israel that was at the time scattered throughout Egypt **observed the feast together at the same time in their homes.**

On the night of flight from Egypt, the Israelites ate the Passover in their homes throughout the land. Though they were in their homes, they were all eating it as the whole nation. *“All the assembly of Israel will keep it”* (Ex 12:47). The observance of the Passover meal, therefore, was not to be observed in an assembly. In fact, in the initial institution of the Passover, the instructions were that it must be a home meal. When Jesus changed the meaning of the Passover, **we assume that the Jewish Christians continued with the home environment for the eating of the Lord’s Supper.**

#### E. Unleavened bread and bitter herbs:

*“And they will eat it [the meat] with unleavened bread and bitter herbs”* (Ex 12:8). The Passover meal consisted of the meat of the offered lamb or goat, unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Dt 16:3,4). It was not an ordinary meal, but a special covenant meal with a people who were on their way to nationhood and the establishment of a na-

tional covenant with God at Mount Sinai. On the night of their departure from Egypt, it was a meal that was to be eaten by those in a hurry toward the future, their future deliverance from Egyptian captivity.

## **F. A memorial feast to the Lord:**

*“So this day will be a **memorial** to you. And you will keep it as a **feast to the Lord** throughout your generations”* (Ex 12:14). The Passover feast, therefore, was established as a memorial of their Divine deliverance from bondage. It was to be a feast that was directed to the Lord because of His deliverance of His people.

The Passover was a memorial feast that was to be kept throughout the history of Israel, lest the people forget their deliverance from bondage and the promises of peace in the promised land that God gave to them (Dt 16:3). Once in the land, they looked to the future. They looked to the coming of the Messiah of Israel.

After the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt, they went to Mount Sinai where they ate the Passover meal a second time (Nm 9:1-5). They ate it at a time when they were looking forward to entering the promised land. However, they were overcome with doubt when the spies returned, giving them a report that the inhabitants were strong in the land (Dt 1:19-44). Because they did not go up immediately and take the land, God condemned them to wandering in the wilderness. The land promised to them was not made void. Their possession of it was delayed. Thus throughout the years of wilderness wandering Israel still looked to the future, knowing that God would keep His promise that they as a nation would inherit the land of promise.

Once Israel entered Canaan, they still ate the Passover as a remembrance, but also as a reminder to God that there was yet a Deliverer in the future, which Deliverer would come as Moses came to them in bondage in order to deliver them from Egyptian captivity (See Dt 18:15-19).

## Chapter 4

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Deliverer who came to set Israel free once again from bondage (At 7:34). However, His deliverance for spiritual Israel was from the bondage of sin, for which the forgiveness thereof could never be realized by the offering of the blood of animals (Hb 10:1-4). When Jesus was born into the world, a new Passover lamb arrived who would in His offering be Israel's last Passover lamb.

On the occasion of the Jewish Passover during His earthly ministry, Jesus took the opportunity to change the meaning of what was commonly eaten during the Jewish Passover. He sought also to point the disciples toward the future. *“I have earnestly desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer;”* Jesus said to the disciples. *“For I say to you, I will no longer eat of **it until** it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God”* (Lk 22:15,16).

At the time of His last Passover, the disciples were eating the common Jewish Passover with Jesus, which meal they had previously eaten with Him throughout His ministry. As was the custom of the Jews, the Passover meal Jesus ate with the disciples was a full meal. He made the statement during the meal that He would not **eat** of it again until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God. We are sure He symbolized more in this statement than a simple “chip and sip” ceremony that is common with most religious groups in their observance of the Lord's Supper today.

In Luke 22:16 Jesus spoke of His **eating** the Passover meal in the future as He ate it with His disciples immediately before His death. The time when He would actually eat it again would be when it was **fulfilled** in the kingdom of God. Some have erroneously interpreted the phrase “kingdom of God” to refer exclusively to the church. But there is a difference between the kingdom and the church. The kingdom of God is the totality of the heavenly sovereignty of God over all things, whereas the church is composed of the people of God on earth (Mt 16:18,19). All the church is in the kingdom, but the kingdom is

more than the church. Jesus would eat with the disciples as the church in His kingdom reign over all things.

There may be two different ways we could understand what Jesus meant in Luke 22:15,16.

### **A. The prophetic Passover:**

The Passover of Israel was certainly prophetic. The Passover lamb was prophetic of the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (1 Pt 1:19; Rv 5). The Passover was prophetic in offerings and redemption. In the statement Jesus made in Luke 22:16, He prophesied that He would not eat of the Passover again until it was **fulfilled**. We would assume that the Jewish Passover was first fulfilled in the offering of the Lamb of God. But again, Jesus' "Passover" Supper would also be prophetic.

The love feast/Supper of the early church was the fulfillment about which He had referred at the time He instituted the Supper. If this is the case, then Jesus would now be spiritually eating the "Passover" with His disciples as they come together to also eat and drink. Thus His "Passover" Supper is fulfilled in the love feast/Supper that the disciples celebrate as the church.

In the Jewish covenants of the Old Testament, the two parties ate together in a feast of peace. Jesus is now spiritually eating with His body of disciples in a covenant of peace that was established through a covenant relationship between God and man through the peace offering of Jesus on the cross.

### **B. Heavenly fulfillment:**

In reference to the time when Jesus would eat with His disciples, we cannot say that He is now figuratively eating on His throne in heaven as the disciples now eat literally on earth. At least, there is no indication in the passage that His literal eating in the upper room in Jerusalem on the night of His betrayal would somehow be spiritualized to mean that He would somehow eat in heaven as they ate of it on earth.

And since there is no interpretive license in His statement to go from literal to spiritual eating, then we must conclude that there will be a time yet in the future when Jesus will again literally eat with His disciples, though it will be His banquet feast and not the Jewish Passover (See Rv 19:7-9). It will be the time when the redemption of the cross will have been fulfilled (completed) at the end of time. This will be the time when the saints will have been redeemed from this world.

Jesus is now reigning in heaven as King of kings over all things (Mt 28:18; 1 Tm 6:15). He will reign until He comes again, at which time He will return kingdom reign to God in order that God be all in all (1 Co 15:26-28). It is during this interim period of time—from the ascension to His final coming—when the disciples of Jesus eat the celebration feast that Jesus instituted while He was on earth. We eat in order to remember our deliverance from the bondage of sin (1 Pt 1:3-5,23). But we also eat in anticipation of personally eating the Supper with the Lord in eternal glory when He comes again.

This would be the meaning of John's statement in Revelation 19:7-9. John presents a picture of the future when the bride of Christ—that's us—comes to the marriage feast with the Lamb (Rv 19:7). Because we are the bride of Christ, it was revealed, "*Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper [feast] of the Lamb*" (Rv 19:9). **We might say that the Lord's Supper we now eat is a rehearsal meal in preparation for the marriage feast that we will personally eat with Jesus when He comes again.**

The Passover feast of the Jews prepared the minds of the Jews for the Passover Lamb. The Lord's Supper prepares our minds for the Lamb to come again in order to finalize what He started at the cross. The coming banquet meal in the presence of Jesus will be the finalization of the gospel plan of salvation. It will be a time when Jesus once again eats with us in the final celebration after the last enemy, death, has been destroyed. It will be a celebration feast of all that Jesus accomplished through His gospel journey from heaven on our behalf. **In the present Supper/meal we remember our gospel victory. In the final banquet we will celebrate the fulfillment of God's eternal gospel plan of redemption that was made possible by the cross and resurrection.**

The love feast/Supper, therefore, looks back to the cross of deliverance, but also to the future victory over death (See 1 Co 15:54). The more emphasis we place on the love feast/Lord's Supper, the more we focus on our celebration of the revealed gospel of redemption in the past. In the Supper we eat in expectation of the final feast with Jesus when He comes again to deliver us from this world.

## Chapter 5

### COVENANTS AND CELEBRATIONS

The Passover feast of the Jews was a joyous occasion of celebration. It was observed in remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and in anticipation of making the journey to the promised land. In view of the atmosphere that surrounded the Passover feast, we can understand why God established the Passover in the history of Israel in order to prepare His people for the coming revelation of the gospel.

Immediately after Jesus instituted the Supper during the Jewish Passover, there would be a brief moment of sadness in the air because of His crucifixion. However, the empty tomb generated in their hearts a tremendous moment of celebration. During the years that followed the revelation of the gospel through His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and reign, the disciples celebrated the revealed gospel. The Passover feast, therefore, was the perfect time to institute a celebratory love feast/Supper, for it would be a time of jubilant rejoicing by the disciples.

When Jesus made the statement to His disciples during the Passover feast, "*This is the **new covenant** in My blood that is poured out for you,*" more went through the minds of the Jewish disciples than what we would normally think. We must keep in mind that it was a Jewish Passover during which Jesus made this statement to Jewish people. Therefore, the statement was first understood by those Jewish disciples who were present when Jesus made the statement of a new covenant.

When Jesus used the word "covenant," the Jewish disciples glanced

at one another, and then thought back over more than two thousand years of covenants in their heritage, covenants over which celebration took place. Their understanding of covenants was a part of their heritage as descendants of Abraham. Covenant was a part of the Sinai law, and thus, covenants meant more to them than we commonly think in our society today.

A brief review of the covenants in the Old Testament reveals some profound truths in reference to how we should understand the “new covenant” that God now has with His people. Jesus’ reference to the new covenant sparked thoughts of celebration and joy in the minds of the disciples to whom He made the promise. (The following points are abridged from the book, *Authentic Church*, Roger E. Dickson, Book 24, chapter 5, at [africainternational.org](http://africainternational.org).)

### A. Covenant between Isaac and Abimelech:

In Genesis 26:26-31, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, came to Isaac in order to establish a covenant of peace with him. “*Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you*” (Gn 26:28). Abimelech wanted to make a covenant with Isaac in order “*that you [Isaac] will do us no harm*” (Gn 26:29).

Once the covenant was established, **a covenant meal celebrated the event**. Genesis 26:30 states, “*So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.*” The result of the making of the covenant was celebration on the part of both parties. There was celebration because those who joined in the covenant knew that no harm would come between the house of Abimelech and the house of Isaac. The celebratory feast was a very significant part to bind the covenant. If the two parties could eat together, then they could live in peace with one another.

### B. Covenant between Jacob and Laban:

When Jacob secretly left the presence of Laban in order to return to his homeland, Laban pursued after him with the intent of doing Jacob

harm (Gn 31:22,23). However, on his way, God came to Laban in a dream and warned him concerning his evil intentions against Jacob (Gn 31:24). When Laban finally overtook Jacob, in fear of the Lord, he subsequently offered to make a covenant with Jacob in order to establish a peaceful relationship between the two families (Gn 31:44).

The covenant between Jacob and Laban was validated in the presence of God who was the witness to the covenant (Gn 31:49,50,53). In order to ratify the covenant, a sacrifice was made. Following the sacrifice, and as part of the covenant ceremony, a joyous meal of celebration was conducted as both parties ate the sacrificed animal. *“Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain”* (Gn 31:54).

The eating of the covenant offering was not a time for solemnity, sadness and feelings of guilt. **It was a time of celebration over the fact that a covenant of peace had been made between two parties.** The sacrifice ratified the covenant. The fellowship meal celebrated the covenant. From the time the covenant was made, there was no longer animosity between the two parties. Again, the covenant meal was a central part of the covenant relationship. The meal symbolized the ability of the two parties to eat together in peace.

### C. Covenant between God and Israel:

When Israel came out of Egyptian captivity, God established a covenant of peace with the nation (Ex 19-24). After the conditions and responsibilities for keeping the covenant were established, Exodus 24:1-11 explains the ratification of the covenant. Israel *“offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord”* (Ex 24:5).

*Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient”* (Ex 24:7).

Following the ratification of the covenant through sacrifices to God and oaths on both sides to keep the conditions of the covenant, **the**

**nation ate and drank** (Ex 24:11). The eating and drinking after the ratification of the covenant was a time of joyous celebration. There was peace between Israel and God.

The culture of acceptance over a meal was central to the covenant meals of the Old Testament. This culture of a covenant meal was even brought out when Moses, Aaron, and all the elders of Israel came and ate before God on Mount Sinai. When Israel arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai after their deliverance from Egypt, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, with the seventy elders, went up Mount Sinai to commune with God. It was there that they “**ate and drank**” in the presence of the Lord (Ex 24:9-11).

God did not raise His hand against these men. The purpose for their eating and drinking in the presence of the Lord was to manifest to all that God received them. He accepted them and all Israel into a covenant relationship with Him. The eating of the covenant meal was symbolic of God making peace with the people. The fact that they were able to eat in the presence of God on Mount Sinai was validation that there was peace between God and Israel. If there were no peace, then the elders of Israel would have been obliterated from existence in the presence of God.

It is significant in Acts 2:42 that the concept of eating in fellowship with one another is also brought out in reference to the fellowship of the church. In the Greek text the conjunction “and” is not between “fellowship” and “breaking of bread.” The text literally reads, “... *in the teaching of the apostles and in the **fellowship in the breaking of the bread**, and in the prayers.*” The fellowship and breaking of bread are together, emphasizing that fellowship is associated with the eating of the meal. There is fellowship between men, and there is fellowship with God.

The early Christians fellowshiped as they ate the love meal together with the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper was a covenant meal that reminded them of their peace with God through the gospel of His grace. The gospel had also brought people together into a new covenant relationship that was based on the gospel, and thus the disciples had all things in common. The love feast/Supper occasion was a cov-

enant celebration of peace between God and man, and man and man.

Throughout the history of Israel, there were times for remembrance and renewal of the covenant that God made with Israel. When the temple was built, it was a time of remembrance, revival and recommitment to the covenant that God had made with Israel (2 Ch 5-7). When the temple was completed, “*the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord*” (2 Ch 7:4). After the sacrifices, Solomon “*sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for the goodness that the Lord had done for David, for Solomon, and for His people Israel*” (2 Ch 7:10).

After the Babylonian captivity, Israel returned and rebuilt the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ez 6:13-22). In the remembrance and renewal of their national covenant with the Lord, they offered sacrifices for all Israel (Ez 6:17). Ezra 6:22 states, “*And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made them joyful.*”

The returnees from Babylon also rebuilt the walls of the city of Jerusalem (Ne 7,8). Once the walls were rebuilt, it was a time for remembrance, revival and celebration by keeping the Feast of Trumpets (See Nm 29:1-6). On the day this feast of renewal was kept, Nehemiah exhorted the people not to mourn or weep, for it was a day of joy and celebration (Ne 8:9). He exhorted them,

*Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength* (Ne 8:10).

No better words than the preceding words of Nehemiah could have been spoken to describe the atmosphere that should surround our covenant meals with God. Jesus wanted to establish His Supper that would be surrounded by a time of joy and celebration for the covenant of peace that God had established with His people through the gospel. The covenant feasts of the Old Testament were not conducted with a funeral service atmosphere. Neither was the Passover feast. We would do well to remember this when we consider the atmosphere that should

surround the eating of the love feast/Lord's Supper.

The various feasts of the Old Testament law were times of eating. They were times of joy. They were feasts of celebration. We have often assumed that they were simply holidays for Israel to enjoy. On the contrary, they were designated times when Israel was to enjoy fellowship meals with one another in a spirit of celebration.

What is significant in reference to the meal that followed the sacrifice that ratified a covenant, was that the meal was eaten in the **presence of the Lord** (Ex 18:12; see Dt 12:7,18; 14:23,26; 15:20). When the Israelites communed with one another in the celebration of the covenant meal, they did so with the knowledge that the Lord was in their presence communing with them. And so it is with the eating of the Lord's meal. It is a time to reconnect with God by reconnecting with one another around a fellowship meal.

At the time Jesus instituted His Supper at His last Passover, it was certainly a time of apprehension on the part of the disciples. However, this apprehension and fear **did not come to its climax until after the Passover feast was eaten**. It was after the feast that Jesus was betrayed, tried and crucified. But during the actual time they were eating the Passover meal, it was as any other Passover meal of the Jews throughout their history. Jesus wanted us to enjoy His Supper in the same atmosphere of joy and celebration that the Jews had when they ate the Passover in celebration of their deliverance from bondage. How much more should we rejoice and celebrate because we have been delivered from the bondage of sin? The Lord's Supper, therefore, is a time to rejoice in the presence of the Lord.

The celebration that surrounded the making of a covenant should be brought over into the love feast/Supper occasion in order to establish an atmosphere of celebration. The Jews celebrated when covenants were made. The Passover was a celebration. But somehow, we often turn the celebration of the covenant into a funeral service. We need to take another look at this. Paul said that when a brother dies, we "*do not grieve as others who have no hope*" (1 Th 4:13). In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 he wrote, "*For if we believe that Jesus **died and rose again**, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.*"

We believe in Jesus who died. But we rejoice in the fact that He rose again and is coming for us with the departed saints. The Supper is the occasion to remember and celebrate this fact. The early Christians rejoiced over their deliverance from the bondage of sin. They rejoiced even more that Jesus was raised in order to be the firstborn of all those who have died in Christ.

When the first disciples obeyed the gospel in baptism, they were together in fellowship. They shared with one another. They ate their meals together. *“They ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people”* (At 2:45-47). Does this sound like a people who went to a “funeral service” every first day of the week in order to fellowship at the love feast/Supper?

The early disciples celebrated the work of God in their lives (At 4:23-31). They celebrated their covenant of peace with God. We must not consider our coming together as a time for remorse, but for celebration. When joyful people come together in assembly, we would expect celebration! All the celebration is over the gospel of peace that was revealed through the Son of God.

The grace of God was made possible through Jesus’ death for our sins, and reaffirmed by His resurrection from the dead. And because He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, we have no need for fear and apprehension in this life. Christians celebrate over life, not death. They celebrate their reign in life with Christ who is now reigning over all things (Rm 5:17).

## Chapter 6

### THE BREAD OF LIFE

When Jesus said, *“I am the bread of life”* (Jn 6:48), we wonder what went through the minds of His Jewish audience. On the night of His last Passover, *“Jesus took bread and blessed it. And He broke it and gave it to the disciples.”* After doing this, He made a profound statement: *“This is My body”* (Mt 26:26). Because we are not of Jewish heritage, we often have a difficult time understanding the symbol-

ism that stood behind the Jews' understanding of the bread of the Passover.

There was more to what Jesus said when He took the bread during that final Passover than what we, who are removed two thousand years from the culture of the Jews, would initially understand. In order to understand the Jews' symbolic meaning of "bread," we must go back to Israel's captivity in Egypt, and then come forward to the incarnation of Jesus. We must then make our way to the night of the final Passover when Jesus lifted up the bread before His Jewish disciples and said, "This is My body."

### A. Life in Egypt:

Throughout their four hundred years in Egypt, the Jews became Egyptian in reference to many cultural beliefs. One particular belief that they adopted was in reference to the existence of all life in Egypt depended on the Nile River. The Israelites resided in the delta area of the Nile, and thus their dependence on the flow of the Nile waters was especially significant for themselves and their livestock.

Bread in Egypt was a blessing that sustained human life. The bread was made from the grain that grew along the Nile River. The grain came from the plants that were watered by the Nile. The waters of the Nile came from great distances in Upper Egypt, but all Egyptians knew that it came from rainfall. The rain came down from heaven, and thus, according to Egyptian beliefs the god of the Nile River gave rain for the river, which flowed through Egypt, watering the plants that produced the grain that was made into bread. And thus, **bread meant life**. If the Nile River dried up, then there would be no life in Egypt. In Jewish history, the ministry of Joseph gave birth to the necessity of storing grain in order that life might exist during times of drought (See Gn 41).

According to the beliefs of the Egyptians, the bread that meant life came down from the gods in order that the Egyptians might live. Of course the Israelites knew that only the God of heaven sustained life. Nevertheless, the water that flowed into the Nile Delta preserved their

lives. For this reason, after Israel came out of captivity, God carried on with the necessity of bread for life when Israel went into the wilderness. It was in the wilderness where God worked with Israel by teaching them to depend on His “bread of life” that came down from heaven as a blessing from Him. He was preparing them for the future.

## **B. Life in the wilderness:**

God led Israel into the wilderness of Sinai for more reasons than simply bringing them out of captivity. After all, He could have led them northeast across the Red Sea, straight to Palestine. They would have been at the southern border of Palestine in less than seven walking days. But He led them for two months through the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula until they came to Mount Sinai.

The answer to why God led them south through the wilderness, instead of northeast toward the land of promise, lies in the fact that Israel had to be taught to depend on Him. This was a hard lesson that they had to learn in order to conquer the Canaanites who possessed the promised land.

Their instructions on how to depend on God began shortly after they crossed the Red Sea. Immediately after their crossing of the Red Sea, it did not take long for the people to cry out in complaint to return to Egypt. Their crying out was good in that God had allowed them to go to the point where they had to depend on Him for survival in the wilderness.

In answer to their complaints, and as the first lesson for their spiritual growth, God gave them bread from heaven.

*And when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “It is manna.” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “**This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat**” (Ex 16:15).*

When the bread was finally given from heaven, Israel was at the point of death from starvation. But God sent down from heaven bread (manna) that they might live. Every morning throughout their wilder-

ness wandering, Israel was reminded that they could live another day only because God provided bread for them. At the end of the wilderness wandering, when they came to the east side of the Jordan River to pass into Canaan, the bread from heaven ceased (Ja 5:12). It was then time for them to live from the sustenance of their hard work in the land of promise that God had prepared for them.

Both from their four hundred years in Egypt, and their forty years of wilderness wandering, Israel never forgot the significance of the bread of life from heaven. To them, bread meant life given from heaven. It was life from God. And when Jesus taught the disciples to pray, “*Give us this day our daily bread,*” they understood that they must daily depend on God for life (Mt 6:11).

During His ministry, Jesus reminded His Jewish audience, “*Our fathers ate manna in the desert, as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’*” (Jn 6:31). What they understood Him to say was that **God gave them bread from heaven in order that they might live**. Then Jesus said of Himself, “*For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*” (Jn 6:33). And just in case they did not understand, Jesus continued, “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger. And He who believes in Me will never thirst*” (Jn 6:35).

*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, He will live forever. And the bread that I will give is My flesh that I will give for the life of the world* (Jn 6:51).

When Jesus took the Passover bread during the institution of the Supper and said, “*This is My body,*” there was more to the symbolism of the bread than His physical body. Paul recorded that Jesus said in reference to the bread, “*This is My body which is for you*” (1 Co 11:24). Knowing that bread meant life, the Jewish disciples who were lounging with Jesus on that Passover night would have understood what Jesus meant in reference to the use of bread as a metaphor for life. His body, that was symbolized by the bread, was His life that He was giving that they might have life. Later, they would preach that when one was bap-

tized into the body of Christ, he would live. **Life was in the body of Christ.**

This clarifies the point that Paul was building by the time he came to chapter 12 in 1

s. “*For by one Spirit we were all **baptized into one body**”* (1 Co 12:13). In the John 6 context of Jesus’ revelation to His Jewish audience, He stated the same point in the following words:

*Truly, truly, I say to you, **except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life. And I will raise Him up in the last day*** (Jn 6:53,54).

**There is life only in the body of Christ.** And since one is baptized into the body for the remission of sins in order to be raised to walk in newness of life, then one cannot have life unless he is baptized into the living body of Jesus (See At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6). When Christians eat of the bread of life at the Supper, they are remembering the life that they have in the body of Christ. They eat the bread to remind themselves that they have eternal life in Christ (1 Jn 5:11).

There is life in the Bread of Life that came down out of heaven. When we partake the bread at the Supper, therefore, we are remembering that the Bread of Life came down out of heaven into an incarnational body that was eventually given as an atoning sacrifice in order that we might have eternal life. The Supper, therefore, is a covenant fellowship of all those who have been baptized into the body of Christ, and thus, have eternal life because of the cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

## Chapter 7

### FEAST OR FAMINE

**The phrase “breaking bread” was a common phrase that was used in the first century to refer to friends and family sitting together and eating a full meal in fellowship with one another. This**

definition of the phrase was understood when Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Gentile, in the documents of both Luke and Acts. We must keep this in mind when studying the culture in which Theophilus lived. Luke made no unique definition of the phrase when he wrote to Theophilus. Without any explanation, he assumed that Theophilus understood that breaking bread in the culture in which he lived referred to the eating of a common meal.

If Luke, the Gentile writer, had some other definition in mind when he used the phrase “break bread” throughout the books of Luke and Acts, then we would assume that he would have defined the phrase for the Gentile reader, Theophilus. But he did not. We must conclude, therefore, that the phrase would be defined by Theophilus according to its normal usage in his culture of the day.

With the preceding thought in mind, we need to follow Luke’s use of the phrase as we study through the documents of both Luke and Acts. In these two documents, Luke sought to explain to Theophilus in the document of Luke the cause of Christianity (Christ), as well as the effect that Christ had on the people of the first century (Acts). We must also keep in mind **that the books of Luke and Acts were the only books that Theophilus had in hand in order to understand the message about which Luke wrote.** Therefore, the words that Luke used in both documents must be consistently defined.

When considering the use of the phrase “breaking bread” in a biblical context, we would correctly assume that a full meal was under consideration. This understanding should be carried over into the love feast/Supper event of the early disciples.

It is significant that reference was never made to the “cup” when the phrase “breaking bread” was used in connection with the love feast. The absence of any reference to the cup would lead us to believe that a common meal was under consideration when the phrase “breaking bread” was used in reference to the love feast, though the early disciples partook of the bread and cup during the feast. This understanding is consistent throughout the following contexts in which the breaking of bread took place:

## A. Breaking bread with Jesus:

Luke 24:30-35 is Luke's use of the phrase "breaking bread" in his twin documents to Theophilus in reference to its common use in the Jewish culture. On this occasion, Luke wrote, "*Now it came to pass as He sat at the table with them, He took **bread** and blessed it and **broke it**, and gave it to them*" (Lk 24:30).

The occasion was when Jesus revealed Himself to the two men with whom He had journeyed on the road to Emmaus. Once He came to their house in Emmaus, Jesus ate a meal with them. After eating with Jesus (breaking bread), the two men then returned to Jerusalem and explained to the apostles all that had occurred during their encounter with Jesus. Luke concluded the account, "*And they told the things that had happened on the road, and how He was recognized by them **in breaking of the bread***" (Lk 24:35). (The Greek phrase in this verse is literally, "*in **the** breaking of the bread.*")

When Theophilus received this document from Luke, we would correctly conclude that he completely understood that Jesus had some type of common meal with these two disciples. He did not have a snack with them after the long journey from Jerusalem. Jesus sat down and enjoyed a full meal, during which He revealed to the two men who He was.

There was at least enough bread on the occasion to eat one's fill after their long journey from Jerusalem. This would have been the same breaking of bread to which Luke previously referred Theophilus in Luke 22:19 when Jesus broke bread during the Passover. Though there may not have been a full meal with all the trimmings when Jesus ate with the two men from Emmaus, there was certainly enough bread present to eat in order to have their fill.

## B. Breaking bread from house to house.

Acts 2:42-46 is Luke's report to Theophilus concerning the activities of the early days of the first Christians. We must keep in mind when reading this context that the documents of Luke and Acts were

always combined as one manuscript in the early circulation of the New Testament letters. The letters of Luke and Acts **were not** divided by John as they are in our Bibles. We would correctly conclude, therefore, that when Theophilus finished reading the account of Luke 24:30-35, and in his continued reading of Acts, he would conclude that the disciples ate a full meal with one another as new Christians in the context of Acts 2. It would have been a meal as Jesus ate with the two men of Emmaus. Luke's reference to the "breaking of bread" as a full meal in Luke 24 would be the commentary of the disciples' eating a full meal in the context of Acts 2.

Some Bible interpreters fail to see this consistent understanding of the definition of breaking bread throughout the documents of Luke and Acts. It is unfortunately assumed that after Theophilus read the material of Luke 24:30-35, Luke supposedly changed to another definition of the phrase "breaking bread" in Acts 2 and Acts 20:7. But if we are to be consistent interpreters of the two documents, we do not have the liberty of doing this.

Consider the "full meal" definition of "breaking bread" in the context of Acts 2. After about three thousand obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost, Luke recorded their activities as new disciples. His first record of their activities was explained in verse 42: "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, and fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*" If we use Luke 24:30-35 as the commentary to define the phrase "breaking of bread" in this text, then our only conclusion is that the early disciples fellowshiped with one another by eating a meal together from house to house. The eating of a meal together reflected their unity and participation in one another's lives.

In the same context in Acts 2, Luke continued his explanation of the participatory nature of the early *ekklesia* when he wrote in verse 46, "*And continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread [eating a meal] from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart.*" Luke's comments in this verse expand the brief statement in verse 42. He mentioned the breaking of bread in verse 42, but in verse 46 explains where the meals took place.

They took place in the homes of the disciples as they celebrated their fellowship over a meal.

It would certainly be inconsistent to change from one meaning of “breaking of bread” in verse 42 to a different meaning in verse 46. But some interpreters do this. If we simply read the texts of Acts 2:42,46 with Luke 24:30-35, as did Theophilus, then we can come to only one conclusion. **That conclusion is that the disciples, as a part of their early relationships with one another, ate full meals together with one another in their homes.**

Some have unfortunately made a distinction between “**the** breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42, where it supposedly refers exclusively to the Lord’s Supper, while in verse 46 the phrase “breaking bread” without the article “the” refers to the common meal of the disciples. But it is certainly questionable that Luke would put Theophilus in such interpretative confusion by making such a distinction simply by using the article “the.” Theophilus could have never understood this difference of meaning, and neither can we.

We would suppose that Theophilus was not that familiar with the Lord’s Supper. This is especially true when Luke again used the phrase “breaking bread” in Acts 20:7, but **without** the article. If “breaking bread” in Act 2:42 referred exclusively to the Lord’s Supper because of the article, then Theophilus would surely have been confused by the time he came to Acts 20:7 where the article is absent.

We would seek to be consistent by understanding that the breaking of bread would have been understood by Theophilus to refer to a meal, as Jesus sat down and ate a meal with the two men of Emmaus. These meals would later be referred to by Jude as “love feasts,” which feasts continued throughout the first century.

The bread and fruit of the vine were a part of the Jewish Passover meal. The early Jewish disciples seem to have continued with this tradition in reference to the love feast. Because the Corinthians had corrupted the love feast, it was not possible for them to eat of the Lord’s Supper that was commonly observed during or after the meal (See 1 Co 11:20,21,29). **The Lord’s Supper, therefore, was associated with the love feast of the early disciples.** The Lord’s Supper was not the

love feast, but the Supper was observed in conjunction with the love feast. When the disciples “broke bread” on the first day of the week, we must assume that they also observed the memorial of the Supper.

### C. Breaking bread on Sunday:

Since the early disciples continued the tradition of the love feast throughout the first century—Peter and Jude confirm this—then we must look for some indication throughout the history of the early disciples about which Luke wrote to Theophilus where we might witness the disciples’ coming together for such a feast. We find such a case in the context of Acts 20. The eating of a meal together was so common throughout the early churches that Paul assumed that when he came to Troas there would be a love feast of the disciples taking place in the city in someone’s house.

Luke recorded Paul’s encounter with the disciples in Troas by writing to Theophilus,

*Now on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to **break bread**, Paul had discussions with them, intending to depart on the next day (At 20:7).*

Now if we were Theophilus, and had only the documents of Luke and Acts in hand, how would we interpret the phrase “break bread” in this statement? If we are to be consistent in our interpretations, then we must conclude that the disciples came together on the first day of the week (Sunday) in order to have a meal together. With this meal, the disciples continued with the practice of partaking of the bread and wine as Jesus did during the Passover meal. Paul took this opportunity to fellowship with the disciples, as well as have discussions with them about matters of teaching.

Because we often have difficulty in understanding that the breaking of bread in the first century referred to a full meal, we have difficulty understanding what happened on the night of Paul’s visit to Troas that is recorded in Acts 20. Verse 7 simply states why the disciples

came together. They came together to eat a meal (break bread) in fellowship with one another (See 1 Co 11:33). It was on this occasion that Paul took the opportunity to have discussions with them. Verse 11 explains that the occasion was for eating a meal, though the eating was initially on Sunday. However, Paul ate again before continuing his journey on Monday morning:

*“When he [Paul] had come up again [after raising Eutychus] and **had broken bread and eaten**, and talked a long while, even until daybreak [on Monday morning], he departed.”*

It was during this lengthy period of discussion that Eutychus had fallen asleep and subsequently fell out of a third story window. When he was raised from the dead by Paul, they returned to the upper room where some food had already been prepared for Paul before he left. Paul initially had eaten with them in their Sunday fellowship meal, and then continued his discussions until the time of his departure on Monday morning when he again ate before the journey.

There is nothing difficult about understanding the context of Acts 20:7-12 if we do not go through some hermeneutical gymnastic in order to separate the Lord’s Supper from the love feast in the context. Also, we must guard against inserting into the historical statements of the text our Lord Supper rituals of today. As in the institution of the Lord’s Supper during the Passover meal, the disciples, as Jesus, simply continued on with the custom of remembering the blood and body when they had their common meal together on Sunday.

It is interesting to note that some have changed this example of “breaking bread” on the first day of the week into a law. However, they do not make the example of the “upper room” in verse 8 to also be a law. Such inconsistent hermeneutics reminds us that we are in our legalism always subject to inconsistencies that we seek to ignore.

Since “breaking of bread” referred to the love feast during which the Supper was observed, then some may be inconsistent in reference to their use of Acts 20:7 to promote the Lord’s Supper to be bound to Sunday only. They assume that the Supper must stay on Sunday, but

the meal must go. The Supper on Sunday is supposedly binding, but the meal can be discarded.

When the examples of the early function of the body of Christ in the first century are made law, then we find ourselves being inconsistent. It is quite difficult to remain consistent in our hermeneutics when we assume that examples must be law. For example, the early disciples sold their possessions and gave the proceeds of the sales to those who were in need. They even sold their houses and lands (See At 2:44,45; 4:32-37). Should we assume that the example of this selling of possessions should be established as a law for Christians to obey today?

If we are justified to change the example of the breaking of bread in conjunction with the Lord's Supper into a law for Sunday observance, then to be consistent, we must do the same with the selling of our possessions. We cannot be consistent if we extract the Supper from the meal, and then assume that the Supper is binding on Sunday without the example of the meal also being binding on Sunday.

#### D. Breaking bread at sea:

Continuing throughout Luke's recorded history of the early church brings us to Acts 27:34-36. The occasion was fourteen days after Paul and many others had fought the winds of a storm at sea. Here again Luke used the phrase "break bread."

"Therefore," Paul said, "*I urge you to **take some food**, for this is for your health, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish*" (At 27:34). Luke then recorded of the incident,

*And when he had spoken these things, **he took bread** and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all. And **when he had broken it**, he began to eat. They were all of good cheer, **and they also took some food** (At 27:35,36).*

Luke's reference to breaking bread in this context also finds its definition in the occasion. Paul and the other occupants of the ship ate food. They ate in a meal what food they had on board. This is precisely

what Luke expected Theophilus to understand when he came to this historical statement concerning the “breaking of bread.”

The breaking of bread in the first century was the occasion when people ate a common meal. We, as well as Theophilus, can come to no other consistent conclusion that is based on the use of the phrase by Luke throughout the letters of Luke and Acts. To state otherwise would be reading our own prejudices, if not traditions, into the texts of the Scriptures.

It seems that the early disciples did as Jesus had done when He instituted His Supper during the Passover meal. This is clearly brought out in Paul’s record of the Corinthian problem in 1 Corinthians 11. The Corinthians came “*together to eat*” a full meal, after which they partook of the bread and wine (1 Co 11:33). When they came together for their love feast, the unrighteous attitudes of some disrupted the very purpose for their coming together as the *ekklesia*. In the breaking of bread as a full meal, some Corinthians used the occasion to manifest anything but a Christ-like spirit.

We could assume that during the year and a half that Paul was originally with the Gentile Christians of Achaia, he instructed them concerning the love feast/Supper (At 18:11). They would certainly not have known of the celebratory event without his instructions. Therefore, we do not in our interpretation of the phrase “break bread” seek to separate the love feast and the Supper as it was eaten in Acts 20:7. The early church had a love feast on the first day of the week, during which or after they partook of the bread and cup of the Supper. This continued on for at least three centuries after Jesus had instituted the Supper on the night of His sacrificial offering.

This does not mean that the Supper must be observed in connection with a meal as was the practice of many in the early church. It is only our concern to understand how the early Christians responded in their lives to the mandate of Jesus to remember the blood of the covenant and His sacrificed body which resulted in His spiritual body, the church. The early disciples remembered these gospel truths on the first day of the week during a love feast/Supper event in which everyone participated. Since the combination of such was their response to Jesus’

instructions to remember, we must be cautious about turning their example of how they remembered into a law that we must obey according to their example. We must remember that Jesus mandated that we remember Him only with bread and wine, not with the full meal.

We must also be cautious about assuming that their example of response was dictated by the Holy Spirit. If we have no direct statements concerning the details of how they fulfilled the mandate of Jesus to conduct the Supper in remembrance of Jesus, then we do not have the right to assume that the first century disciples' example constitutes divine law. We must keep in mind their example of selling their possessions, lands and houses. But in doing such they did not establish a law for the church to do the same throughout history.

Neither can we assume that the Holy Spirit directed them to sell their possessions in order to establish a law for us to do the same simply because we assume the Holy Spirit so directed them. Examples of obedience of the early Christians are simply examples of how they responded to the gospel in their own lives. If we assume that their response to the gospel has as much authority as the direct commands of the word of God, then we would be left in confusion, or at least not consistent in our application of all the examples of the early disciples.

We must not forget that gospel-motivated people do not need to be instructed to do the commandments (See 1 Tm 1:9). They simply need to be given the commandments. Jesus gave the commandment to remember Him through the bread and cup. Gospel-motivated people simply do what they are instructed, knowing that obedience to the commandments is not a burden (1 Jn 5:3). **There needed to be no commandments on how to do what they had to do.**

## Chapter 8

### EVANGELISTIC FEASTS

The early disciples came together regularly on the first day of the week to fellowship with one another and to partake of the Lord's Supper during or after a love feast. They celebrated the gospel of Jesus with the bread and fruit of the vine. They celebrated one another dur-

ing the love feast. In view of these participatory events, we need to approach the context of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 with the understanding that the love feast was a meal upon which the Supper was based. Seated in the love feast, the Supper of the Lord was observed in order to celebrate the Redeemer of the one redeemed body.

We must insert in this discussion at this point a very important historical factor in reference to the ordinary assemblies of the early church. **The early disciples met in their homes.** This meant that their normal assemblies were usually small. This presented the assembly platform where a regular love feast could be conducted. We must caution ourselves, therefore, about assuming that the early assemblies were large public meetings that are commonly conducted today. For this reason, the biblical historian must take himself or herself out of the large assembly context of the typical assembly today and place themselves in a house somewhere in the province of Achaia. Occasionally, the Achaian disciples evidently came together in a large assembly in the city of Corinth, but this was not their common weekly assembly.

It was in the context of the celebration of the love feast in Corinth where we discover that some of the Corinthian disciples of Achaia were reflecting their divisive and competitive attitudes. There is justification to consider, therefore, that the particular love feast/Supper that Paul addressed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 was an occasional regional assembly during which rude behavior and inconsiderate attitudes were revealed on the part of some of the participants. In fact, when we consider their rebuking by the Holy Spirit through Paul, we can actually better understand the purpose of the love feast and Supper encounter for which both were conducted by the early church.

### **A. The historical setting:**

Many Bible students make an unfortunate interpretive error by lifting the events discussed in 1 Corinthians 11 – 14 out of the historical context of the early church, particularly the church of Achaia. For this reason, we must caution ourselves about reading into the context our own rituals that we traditionally maintain today that surround the love

feast/Supper. It is simply our quest to understand the teaching of the word of God and the examples of how the disciples of the first century responded to the gospel. We must do this with the historical background of the early disciples, and not our own.

Since the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians were **written to Christians throughout the province of Achaia**, we must understand that the assembly for the love feast/Supper about which Paul addressed was probably an occasional provincial assembly of the Achaian church in the city of Corinth (1 Co 16:15; 2 Co 1:1; 9:2; 11:10). If we bring the discussions of this chapter into the context of the weekly love feast that was likewise observed by the Troas church in Acts 20:7, then we must understand that the Achaian disciples were in some way locally and provincially coming together in fellowship to eat the love feast and celebrate the Lord's Supper. But the specific love feast/Supper that gave rise to some unique problems in Corinth was not the weekly event. It seems to be a forced interpretation to assume that the assembly about which Paul addressed was any particular weekly house assembly. He seems to be addressing the dysfunctional behavior of some in an assembly that was much larger than a house assembly.

## B. The regional assembly:

We are not told in the context whether the assembly that was addressed in 1 Corinthians 11 – 14 was a weekly event, or a periodic event when all the house groups of all Achaia came together in one place in Corinth. However, it is more reasonable to believe that this specific disruptive occasion, wherein the competitive behavior concerning languages and prophecy that are discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 – 14 was actually an occasional provincial assembly. This is indicated in the statement of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:18: “*For first of all, **when you** [throughout Achaia] **come together in assembly**, I hear that there are divisions among you.*” Or more specifically, “*Therefore, if the whole assembly gathers **in one place** [in Corinth]” (1 Co 14:23).*

It seems more likely that Paul's reference to the assembly was not

to the small weekly house assemblies, but to something far greater to which everyone in the province was gathered, and during which the problems of 1 Corinthians 11-14 were addressed.

An occasional large provincial meeting was where the “I am of Paul,” “I am of Cephas,” and “I am of Apollos” sectarianism would most likely have been revealed (1 Co 1:12). Such an assembly would present the opportunity for competition to arise between those who were gifted in languages and prophecy (teaching).

It would certainly be unreasonable to conclude that their sectarian behavior that was revealed in a large provincial assembly would be manifested in the weekly house assemblies throughout the province. Claiming allegiance to a specific personality in a group of 25-30 people would seem questionable, especially since each particular “loyalty sect” may have been meeting in a different house. And the use of the gift of languages (tongues) would have been unnecessary if everyone in the weekly house assembly spoke the same language.

People of a common language throughout Achaia would certainly have met in a group that spoke their particular language. But we must not forget that throughout Achaia, everyone spoke Greek. There was no need for the gift of languages in the house assemblies. Only during the Isthmian Games did people come into town who spoke other languages. During an assembly with diverse language groups, there would be the necessity for the use of the gift of languages.

The disruptive behavior that Paul confronts in the context of 1 Corinthians 11-14 seems to fit better in the context of an occasional fellowship assembly of all the Christians in Achaia when they came together in the city of Corinth. It was in such an assembly that favorite personalities divided the one body of Achaia into “loyalty sects.”

### **C. The Isthmian Games assembly:**

If the assembly of 1 Corinthians 11-14 were indeed an occasional meeting of all the disciples in Achaia, then we might wonder from where this tradition originated. Here is a possibility: The Isthmian Games were conducted in the spring every two years in the city of Corinth.

These games originated several centuries before the arrival of Paul on the scene on his second mission journey. Paul wanted to be present in Corinth in the spring of A.D. 51 because he knew that **this was the ideal opportunity to preach the gospel to the world through the athletes who participated in the Games**. Since athletes from throughout the Roman Empire were gathered for these games, Paul wanted to seize the opportunity for world evangelism. It was during this opportunity that Paul used a diversity of languages to communicate the gospel to attending athletes (1 Co 14:18).

In order to support this view, it is interesting to note the “athletic language” that Paul used throughout the Corinthian letters (See 1 Co 9:24-27; 10:1-13; 15:55-57). He knew the athletic culture of the Greeks and others who prepared for the Isthmian Games. Words as “crown,” “race,” “self-discipline,” “boxing” and “victory” were commonly used words in the competition of the Games. Paul simply coined the words when he wrote of spiritual matters to the Achaian disciples.

It is also interesting to note that there were no public housing for the athletes who came from great distances to participate in the Games. The visitors camped in tents in the open fields that surrounded the facilities for the events. Not only did Paul see the Isthmian Games as an opportunity for evangelism, but he also saw them as an opportunity for his tentmaking business. Evidently, Aquila and Priscilla also took advantage of the opportunity, for it was in Corinth where Paul first encountered this tentmaking couple who had recently fled from Rome (See At 18:1-3). This common tentmaking business in the context of the Isthmian Games explains how Paul could have contacted the other two tentmakers.

It would not be difficult to assume that since the first disciples of Achaia may have been in Corinth for the occasion of the Isthmian Games, the members of the body throughout Achaia continued the tradition of an “Isthmian assembly.” They possibly had such an assembly every two years in order to take advantage of the evangelistic opportunity that the international event presented. However, in their behavior, they may have been blundering the opportunity.

At least this possibility explains why the gift of speaking in lan-

guages would have been so valuable during this biannual assembly. Since there would have been present at the games athletes of different language groups from throughout the Roman Empire, it would have been a tremendous opportunity for world evangelism. The opportunity was similar to that which was presented by the annual Jewish Passover/Pentecost feast in Jerusalem where the apostles stayed for at least fifteen years after the establishment of the church in Acts 2. The Achaian brethren may have simply scheduled an “Isthmian assembly” at the time of the Games. At least it would have been quite negligent on their part not to have taken advantage of such an opportunity.

Though the Isthmian Games presented the opportunity for world evangelism as the Passover/Pentecost feast in Jerusalem, the Achaian brethren were squandering the opportunity for evangelism because of their lack of love and immature behavior. They should have been manifesting the same spirit of love that the early Jewish disciples did in Jerusalem a little over twenty years before:

*Now all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all, as everyone had need. And continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart (At 2:44-46).*

The Achaian brethren were portraying the opposite of the above description of the first disciples in Jerusalem. It may have been a Greek cultural problem. Nevertheless, they needed to learn a great deal from the first Jewish disciples.

When we read the statement by Paul to the Achaian brethren, “*if the whole assembly [of Achaia] gathers in **one place** [in Corinth]” (1 Co 14:23), then in the historical context, we would probably be correct to assume that this was a biannual assembly of the saints from throughout Achaia who came together in Corinth for the mission opportunity of the Isthmian Games (See 1 Co 11:18). During their presence in Corinth at the time of the Games, they simply took the opportunity to assemble on Sunday in Corinth, having invited athletes of the games to*

come to the unique spring Sunday assemblies during the Games (See 1 Co 14:23).

Based on this possibility, Paul asked a specific question concerning the disciples' chaotic behavior that took place during this regional assembly. We quote the entirety of his question below with our assumption that his question was indeed made in the historical context of the biannual event of the "Isthmian assembly."

*Therefore, if the whole assembly [of the disciples from all Achaia] gathers in one place [in Corinth during the Games], and all speak with languages [of the different nationalities that are present during the Games], and there come in the uninformed [who know little or nothing about the church], or unbelievers [who are attending out of curiosity], **will they not say that you are mad** [if you conduct your assembly in confusion as in the idolatrous temple]? (1 Co 14:23).*

Unbelieving athletes assuredly attended the assemblies of the saints during the Games. But if they witnessed the rival competition between the tongue speakers and prophets, then they would assume that these people (Christians) were mad. It may have been that some of the brothers brought the competitive spirit of the Games into the assembly of the saints.

It would not be outside a relevant historical context to understand Paul's teaching concerning the assembly in 1 Corinthians 11-14 with the background of an occasional meeting of the Achaian saints in Corinth. Such an interpretation would certainly answer a great deal of questions concerning the nature of his instructions about problems that arose during this unique assembly.

#### **D. The meal and the Supper:**

It seems that only the disciples of Achaia had the problems in their regional assembly that are discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11-14. It seems that they had the problems because the disciples of Achaia had a large provincial assembly during the Isthmian Games. Paul's

instructions concerning the women keeping silent in this large combined provincial meeting would be appropriate. The instructions concerning the women keeping silent in such a combined assembly would answer some of the problems that came from women speaking out of order. Their speaking out of order was causing more confusion than what existed between the competitive language-speakers and teachers (prophets) (1 Co 14:34,35).

However, in their ordinary weekly small house meetings, the women would simply remain in their subjective relationship with their own husbands in the presence of visiting neighborhood families who assembled in their homes on Sunday. It would be unreasonable to think that the wife should become silent in the home assembly at the point when another family stepped into her living room for a time of praise and worship. If indeed a wife was not submissive to her own husband before the assembly, then she would be out of order in her relationship with her husband, as well as with guests, who would be attending the couple's house assembly (See 1 Tm 2:12).

We are told that the Corinthians in their regular weekly house fellowships came together on the first day of the week throughout Achaia (1 Co 16:2). However, we are not told that the meal of 1 Corinthians 11 was a combined weekly gathering of all the house groups. Throughout Achaia such would have been impossible on a weekly basis simply because people could not have walked across the province of Achaia to attend the assembly.

The 1 Corinthians 11 meeting may have been a periodic regional meeting in Corinth wherein the division that was occurring among the individual house fellowships manifested itself in the general love feast that took place in the city of Corinth. Add to this the problem of some disciples in Corinth not waiting for those who came from great distances from throughout Achaia. Their lack of love for one another was revealed by their gluttony of eating all the food before everyone arrived from throughout Achaia.

Whatever the historical setting, we must be careful that we do not read our modern-day system of institutional assembly behavior into the context. We do know, however, that the Corinthian disciples were con-

tinuing the Passover meal tradition through the love feast/Lord's Supper as part of a celebration feast, just as the disciples in Troas. We assume that they were so committed to the love feast/Supper that they were willing to keep such even during an occasional large provincial meeting in Corinth.

### E. The connection:

In the local context of the Corinthian culture, some during the assembly were still following the drunken behavior of the pagan temple culture of Corinth. They had made the general love feast an opportunity to manifest their pagan temple culture and arrogant attitudes. The love feast, therefore, became a reflection of their immature attitudes and lack of love for one another, rather than a reflection of the united nature of the *ekklesia* of Christ. Some who were possibly Christian athletes who participated in the Games may have been bringing their competitive spirit into the assembly of the saints.

Paul was harsh in this context with the immature behavior of those who competed for recognition during the assembly. **The reason for his harshness was in the fact that the Achaians, when they came together in Corinth, were attacking the unifying nature of the gospel.** The members of the body are bound together as one body through the gospel, just as the Father and Son are one (Jn 13:34,35). However, the Corinthian love feast manifested everything but love and unity. Their inconsiderate and competitive behavior was subsequently manifested to the unbelievers who may have showed up at the "love" feast. For this reason, their unbecoming behavior could lead to the loss of souls. At least those who judged them to be mad would certainly turn away from their assemblies, and thus, turn away from Christ. Mad assemblies offer no gospel appeal to the unbelieving public.

Paul's rebuke was not that they were violating some ceremonial rituals of either the love feast or the Supper. His rebuke was stern because the arrogant and competitive spirit among them was destroying the communal and participatory gospel nature of how Christians are to fellowship with one another when they came together in assem-

bly. Though he initially addressed them as the “church (assemblies) of God in Corinth” (1 Co 1:2), they would cease to be this united body of Christ if they continued in their disruptive assemblies that manifested before the world an unloving spirit.

If indeed the specific assembly about which Paul wrote was a provincial assembly during the Isthmian Games, then we can only imagine what attending athletes would be saying about the Christians of Achaia when they returned home after the Games. This may explain why the Holy Spirit focused specifically on this problem among the Achaian Christians. Their behavior was simply bad advertisement for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When the love among disciples is lost, as was typical with some in the regional assembly of Achaia in Corinth, then the lampstand of the gospel is taken from the city. The members of a loveless church may continue to meet, but because they manifest immature behavior with which they surround the love feast of celebration and the Lord’s Supper, they no longer reflect the gospel in their assemblies (See Rv 2:4). Paul saw this happening in Corinth, and thus, in his rebuke he identified and corrected such unbecoming behavior among the disciples.

One lesson is strikingly clear from Paul’s revelation surrounding the Corinthian problems: **If any assembly of disciples in any area manifests disorderly behavior in the love feast and the Supper, then the members are bad branding examples for the gospel.** The love feast/Supper is the perfect opportunity to determine if each member of the body has the heart of God. If members cannot sit down and eat together in harmony with one another, then they are not together as the one body of Christ wherein the gospel brings unity. The gospel of unity thus had little affect on the lives of some among them. If the members are competitive in their individual ministries, then they destroy the unity by which the organic body must function in harmony according to the gospel.

If the members’ autonomy from one another throughout a province or state has divided them to the point that they cannot come together in a common meeting in “Corinth,” then they are sectarian. One of the greatest lessons learned from regional love feasts, or lecture-

ships, is that such events provide everyone with the opportunity to manifest the unifying nature of the gospel of Christ. Regardless of where each member of the body sits on Sunday morning throughout the province or state, he or she is still a member of the one body of Christ. Regional assemblies must never be used as an opportunity to divide members from one another. We are all “of Christ.”

## Chapter 9

### THE CORINTHIAN ORDEAL

We must keep in mind that the Achaian disciples were young in the faith. They were probably five years or less in the faith, and thus, there were many young members among them who were still behaving as they did in the temple feasts from which they supposedly turned when they obeyed the gospel. In the 1 & 2 Corinthian letters, Paul rebuked some who were still involving themselves in the temple feasts, or at least behaving in the assembly of the saints as they had previously behaved in the temple feasts. He wrote in the first letter,

*But I say that the things that the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. And I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons (1 Co 10:20,21).*

The Christians in all Achaia were the temple of God (1 Co 3:16). They had no business yoking themselves with the temple of idols in the city of Corinth, especially in participating in the pagan temple feasts (2 Co 6:14-17). The problems addressed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 evidently originated from some who were bringing the behavior of the pagan temple feast into the love feast/Supper of the special Corinthian assembly.

The love feast/Supper is to be the reflection of the spiritual nature of the body of Christ. As we focus on this theme, we must not overlook Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Throughout his discus-

sions of the problems that prevailed around the Corinthians' love feast/Supper, he focused on problems that were carried over into their fellowship around the fellowship meal and Lord's Supper. The pagan temple behavior that some brought into the love feast made it impossible for them to be in a correct state of mind to partake of the Supper in a worthy manner. Thus, the very opposite of what the love feast/Supper was to represent and accomplish in reflecting unity and love, was actually reflecting rudeness and division.

### A. **Covenant celebration (vs 17):**

Because some of the disciples were ungodly in behavior before they came to the love feast assembly, their ungodliness was reflected in the love feast, and subsequently, their attitudes and behavior made them spiritually unworthy to partake of the Supper. Therefore, they did "*not come together for the better but for the worse.*" They did not come together to better their relationships with one another. Their coming together actually moved them further apart from one another, or at least, the love feast became an occasion that revealed division and inconsideration.

We discover in this judgment of Paul, however, the purpose for the love feast/Supper event. **It is to be an opportunity to bring the members of the body together in unity over a full meal of celebration, and to celebrate the sacrificial offering of the Son of God who made such possible.** This was as the purpose of the covenant meals of the Old Testament. The participants of the covenants celebrated their covenant relationship with one another by eating a meal together. In the love feast/Supper, the participants are to celebrate their covenant relationship with God, who through Jesus, were brought into a blood-bought covenant with God. In this case, the love feast/Supper is a celebration of our covenant with God.

### B. **Divided assemblies (vs 18):**

Before they even arrived at their common assembly, some were

saying, “*I am of Paul,*” others, “*I am of Apollos,*” and still others, “*I am of Cephas*” (1 Co 1:12). They had divided loyalties outside the assembly, which division was reflected in the regional assembly of the love feast. The purpose of a covenant feast was to bring people together. But in the Corinthian love feast, sectarian loyalties were revealed, and subsequently, they were driven apart from one another.

In considering Paul’s statements concerning their abuse of the love feast/Supper occasion, we must always keep in mind that the Corinthians were doing the opposite of what was to be accomplished. The love feast/Supper was to build unity, not division among the disciples. Churches that have love feasts with the Supper, are seeking to encourage unity among the members over a covenant meal. The covenant meal is a celebration of unity, and the Supper is the reason why the members are brought together in Christ. There is purpose in the love feast with the Supper, which purpose had unfortunately been abandoned by many in Corinth because the love feast was corrupted.

### **C. Factions reveal immaturity (vs 19):**

Those who were identified to have a loving heart that sought peace were those who did not manifest a spirit of division in their assembly during the love feast/Supper event. Assemblies often present an opportunity for factious people to be revealed to everyone. A love feast/Supper event is an opportunity to promote love and unity. If there are those among the members who are divisive in their spirit, such behavior will be manifested during a love feast/Supper event.

The unfortunate result of a simple ceremonial “chip and sip Supper” is that divisive personalities can often remain hidden. The divisive disciple is thus allowed to harbor resentment and division in his or her heart for years without being confronted and corrected in the spirit of eating together with the whole church.

### **D. Eating with a spirit of unity (vs 20):**

Because some had a divisive spirit before they even came to the

love feast/Supper assembly, meant that they were not coming to the table of the Lord in order to promote the unity that is to be celebrated in eating the Supper. If they did eat at the table, then their hypocrisy would be manifested to all, for all knew who the divisive brothers were among the members. Their divisive spirit, therefore, meant that the meal they were eating was not the Lord's meal. They had made it their own common meal by their divisive spirits. Whenever the love feast/Supper is conducted with wrong attitudes, then it becomes a common meal with no spiritual connotations.

### E. Rudeness must not prevail (vs 21):

The Greek word “supper” that is used here is *deipnon*. It is the Greek word that was used to define a full meal. (More later.)

Everyone brought their food to the *deipnon* (love feast), but some who lived in the city selfishly ate their food before the arrival of others from throughout the province. As a result, there was no food left for those brethren who came from great distances across Achaia. The rude and inconsiderate local brethren who brought their own food ate it before others arrived. They brought wine for the greater assembly, but drank it all. They subsequently became drunk because they drank all the wine that was meant for everyone for the Lord's Supper.

The rude and selfish behavior of some was based on their turning the love feast meal into their **own** common meal. They made it a common meal as they would eat at home. The Lord's covenant meal was thus changed to their own common meal by the manner in which they marginalized those who came late. Instead of recognizing that the love feast/Supper was a covenant meal that all present ate in communion with fellow covenanted people, they were eating as if they were at home during their own meal.

We need to view what happened in Corinth in reference to Paul's explanation of the unity that should be reflected in the meal. The Corinthians had made the covenant meal of the Lord their “own supper.” But Paul had already explained what eating the “one bread” symbolized. *“The bread that we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of*

***Christ? ... we are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Co 10:16,17).***

In order to emphasize the unity that the bread symbolized, some brethren sometimes use one loaf of bread with the fruit of the vine. The one loaf of bread is meant to symbolize the one body of all partakers. What we see today, however, is often a small pile of broken cracker crumbs in a plate that more often symbolizes a broken and fractured body. Division and individuality are portrayed more than fellowship and unity. At least the lack of bread teaches that the participants are maintaining more of a ritual than a celebratory supper.

The use of a crumbled cracker does symbolize something, however. It symbolizes the fact that the brethren put so little time in preparation for the Supper that they do not take the time to prepare the bread for the Supper. In the urban context, we simply drive by the food store and conveniently buy crackers for the Supper. Our little consideration and legal ceremonial “act” of the Supper reflects our little consideration for one another and the One we struggle to remember. We ceremonially keep the Supper, therefore, not as an opportunity to promote love and unity, but to satisfy our own consciences because we have fulfilled some legal act of law.

We are often no better than some Corinthians who made the love feast/Supper their “own meal,” for we partake for ourselves in order to satisfy our own consciences. There are few who have restored the love feast/Supper in order to encourage the members to come together in order to think about others. It is the nature of true discipleship to put others before one’s self (Ph 2:3). In preparing food for others, the love feast is the ideal opportunity to manifest our servanthood of others.

We must be somewhat patient with ourselves in this matter. We are still struggling with the leftovers of the Reformation Movement over five hundred years ago. The Reformers failed to restore the love feast/Supper that was not a part of Roman Catholicism. The Catholic Church had centuries before discarded the love feast of the early church. The Lord’s Supper was minimized to a small wafer, and the priest drank all the wine. The Reformers also forgot the love feast of the first day of the week. The wine was restored for every individual, but the brevity

of the ceremony seemed to be more relevant to those who had not yet moved out of religion into honoring the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As “church” moved through the Industrial Revolution of the West, the “chip and sip” ceremony for the Lord’s Supper was more convenient to those who lived in a busy business world. When large assemblies became the proud goal of the “successful” church, there was simply no room for the tables of the love feast, or time for a complicated Lord’s Supper that was served with a love feast. Serving hundreds, if not thousands in a Sunday morning assembly demanded brevity as opposed to a fruitful time with one another around a love feast table.

There are certainly no instructions in Scripture concerning how long we must be at the table or how much bread and fruit of the vine we must eat and drink. The lack of information on this subject leaves the matter to our own opinions. We must, therefore, determine if the brevity of our “breaking of bread” has gone beyond having too little bread to “eat” and too little fruit of the vine to drink. On the other hand, it seems that some in Corinth could not get enough food to eat and wine to drink. At the same time, it seems that we cannot serve too little bread. We are down to a sip of the fruit of the vine in a small container. There is seemingly nothing wrong with such a brief “supper,” but we must keep in mind what the early Christians sought to accomplish with the love feast and Supper. It may be that we have faded into focusing more on ceremony than on celebration.

## **F. Satisfy hunger at home (vs 22):**

**The love feast was not a common meal.** It was a covenant meal among covenanted people, and thus, it was not to be eaten as a common meal. The disciples’ eating together manifested a common covenant relationship they had with God. If some were not providing the opportunity for everyone to eat of the meal, then they were in their gluttonous and inconsiderate behavior manifesting to all their lack of desire to fellowship with all the members in celebrating their common covenant together.

Some of the Corinthians were doing everything but reflecting the

oneness of the body of Christ in the common salvation that every member has in Christ (Jd 3). Therefore, in order for the glutton to be able to contain himself, he must eat something at home before he arrived at the covenant love feast wherein the Lord's Supper was observed to remember his covenant with God.

The rude and immature behavior of some brought shame on the *ekklesia* of God. Instead of reflecting the loving fellowship of the *ekklesia*, they revealed that there was little difference between the behavior of some at the pagan feast of the local temple and the love feast at the assembly of the people of God.

Paul revealed an important point when he questioned that they brought "*shame to those who have nothing.*" One of the reasons for the love feast was to provide an opportunity for the poorer families to eat at least one good meal during the week, and possibly take food home for the week. If the church as a whole did not have a love feast, then they would not be taking care of the poorer brothers and sisters, especially the widows and orphans. If they had the love feast, and yet behaved as they did by eating all the food as if they were in their own homes, then they were shaming the church by marginalizing the poor.

**Paul's advice is that the ones who have plenty of food should satisfy their hunger at home in order to be able to provide for the poor at the love feast.** His exhortation revealed two purposes for the feast in reference to food. It was an opportunity for those who lived in Corinth to provide food for those who traveled great distances back to their homes throughout Achaia. Second, it was an opportunity to provide for the poorer members who attended. Enough food should be brought in order that enough leftovers could feed both the sojourners and the poor.

### **G. Reflection of unity (vss 23-25):**

The Lord instituted His meal for the purpose of reflecting the unique unity of His body, the *ekklesia*. And by unity, we mean more than doctrinal agreement. The unity that is discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 is unity in behavioral relationships. Nothing is said

about doctrinal matters. So in verses 23–25 Paul revealed to the Achaians what the Lord had personally revealed to him in order that the members of the body renew their common fellowship in Christ on a regular basis.

**1. Bread (vss 23,24):** We must not forget the life that the Jews connected with bread. In 1 Corinthians 10:17 Paul said, “*For though we are many, we are **one bread and one body**, for we are all **partakers of that one bread**.*” There is life in the bread, that is, there is life in the one universal body of Christ. Every Christian is a partaker of this life because he or she has been baptized into the body (1 Co 12:13). What Jesus said in reference to the bread in 1 Corinthians 11:23 was to remind the members that He wanted them to understand that **Jesus’ one body was given for them in order that they become one living spiritual body**. By their behavior, however, the Corinthians were denying the very thing for which the bread symbolized, that is, the one living organic body.

The subject of the Lord’s meal and Supper should never be a subject of contention among the members of the body. If either becomes such, then the very purpose for which Christians come together to eat the meal, or partake of the Supper, reveals hypocrisy on the part of those who partake. Some would partake of both the bread and wine, but at the same time in their contentious actions reveal that they are hypocritically denying the unifying purpose for which the meal and Supper are to promote. Partaking of the “one bread” symbolizes that we are all one united body.

**2. The cup (vs 25):** Only Luke records that Jesus took the cup **before** the bread, and then again **after** the bread (Lk 22:17,19,20). We have often asked people why they partake of the bread before the fruit of the vine, and not after as did Jesus. The reply is usually, “Because this is what Jesus did when He instituted the Supper.” But this is not entirely true.

When Luke recorded the event of the last supper of Jesus, he recorded that Jesus partook of the cup both **before** and **after** He partook of the bread (Lk 22:14-20). Actually, during a typical Jewish Passover

meal the participants partook of the cup several times. Therefore, at least from Luke's account of the Passover meal, there is no established ("legal") order of serving the fruit of the vine and the bread.

In reference to the cup, both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus said, "*This is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many*" (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24). But here in the 1 Corinthians text, Paul says that Jesus personally told him, "*This cup is the new covenant in My blood*" (See also Lk 22:20). "Blood of the covenant" and "covenant in My blood" emphasize two things in reference to blood and covenants. Covenants of the Old Testament were ratified by the offering of blood. Thus the blood of an innocent offering was attached to the ratification of the covenant. A ratified covenant and the blood could not be separated.

In the case of Jesus' new covenant, **remission of sins resulted when one obeyed the conditions that were necessary in order to bring one into a covenant relationship with God.** As Jesus was crucified for our sins, so one must crucify himself and die with Christ in order to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:6). But then we must bury the old dead man of sin in order that he be raised with Christ (Rm 6:4,5). This is what happens when one obeys the gospel by being baptized for the remission of sins (At 2:38; 22:16). In obedience to the gospel one comes into contact with the sin-cleansing blood of Jesus. And thus, in baptism one comes into the blood-bought covenant of Jesus.

There is no cleansing power in the water of baptism. The cleansing power is in the blood of Jesus. One comes into a blood-bought covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through obedience to the gospel (See Mt 28:19,20). There is no remission of sins, therefore, outside the new covenant of Jesus because there is no cleansing blood outside Christ. The cleansing blood of Jesus, therefore, is accessed only when one obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in baptism (At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6). The blood-sanctified life is for those who have been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Co 12:13; 1 Jn 1:7).

**The blood in reference to the new covenant both ratified the covenant, as well as brought remission of sins to those who came into a covenant relationship with God.** When one obeys the gospel,

therefore, he receives remission of sins because of the blood of Jesus that ratified the new blood-bought covenant. If one is not baptized, he has neither remission of sins, nor has he come into a blood-bought covenant relationship with God.

## H. Observe often (vs 26):

The disciples in Corinth observed the provincial love feast/Supper, possibly when the Isthmian Games were conducted every two years in Corinth. However, the Troas brethren “broke bread” with the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week (At 20:7). It does not seem reasonable to conclude that the Corinthians observed the meal/Supper only every two years. Such a conclusion seems unreasonable in view of the purpose for which the meal and Supper were to be observed.

It is true that the problems of division among the Corinthians were revealed when they had the special provincial meal/Supper of Achaia in Corinth. Their dysfunctional behavior possibly revealed itself only every two years during the provincial assembly. However, since Christians do not establish their time of partaking through law—Acts 20:7 is not a law, but an example—then we would conclude that they partook **because they wanted to partake every first day of the week when they came together in their homes** (1 Co 16:1,2).

The church in Troas wanted to remember the gospel of grace **every first day of the week**. Therefore, when the house fellowships came together in their respective house assemblies, they wanted to remember the One who brought them all together as one church throughout the whole city and the world. It was as the Jews who partook of the Passover meal in their individual homes throughout Palestine. When they ate the Passover meal, **it was the whole nation eating together** (Ex 12:6). They could eat the Passover meal together without sitting in one another’s presence in a house.

The example of the church in Troas reveals that they wanted to keep the Supper every first day of the week because they simply wanted to do so. It is only natural for gospel-obedient people to remember the gospel through the Supper when they come together in their gospel

fellowship every first day of the week. This explains why religionists have little concern for the Supper in their assemblies. Religionists who have not obeyed the gospel have little concern for observing the Supper that reminds us of the gospel. On the other hand, it is not possible for gospel-obedient people to ignore a regular opportunity to sit at the table of the One who made it possible for them to sit at the table.

We must conclude that when the early Christians came together in their homes on the first day of the week, they sought to remember the sacrificial blood that brought them individually into the family of God, and thus into one universal nation of God.

In reference to the frequency of the disciples' observance of the Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:26, Paul does not give a specific time when they should partake of the Supper. Nevertheless, it should be **often**. "As-often-as" certainly means more than once a year. It is "as-often-as" because such is only natural for those who are in a gospel covenant relationship with God.

There is no command in the New Testament in reference to the frequency for the observance of the Supper. There is only the example of the church in Troas. Since the command is not present in the New Testament, we make a deduction from the assembly behavior of the early church. We conclude that the disciples came together on the first day of the week in order to break bread, that is, to celebrate their salvation in the love feast/Supper event (At 20:7). It was the gospel that motivated them to do so.

We conclude, therefore, that because the Supper was connected with the breaking of bread (a meal), then the early disciples observed the Supper every first day of the week with a meal in order to remind themselves of the blood-bought covenant they had with Jesus, as well as to remind Jesus to come again for them.

The early disciples observed this "reminder" every first day of the week because they wanted to. We might conclude, therefore, that those who do not want to remember the covenant and coming, have forgotten this part of the gospel. Or at least, these two aspects of the gospel have little importance when they come together. When assemblies exist because the attendees narcissistically want to get something out of them,

remembrance of the gospel through the Supper takes second place.

Partaking of the bread and cup was, as the Jewish Passover, an enacted message of something of the past, as well as something that was yet to come in the future. The Passover was instituted in order that Israel remember her Egyptian bondage of the past, but also to remember the promises of the future.

In the Supper, Christians remember their bondage in sin in the past, but also the promises of things in the future that are connected with the covenant relationship they now have with Christ. The “proclamation” of this truth continues throughout the existence of the church until Jesus comes again. The redemption that is remembered in the Supper, therefore, has not yet been completed. The final event of the gospel is yet to come. The proclamation of the redemption of the cross through the observance of the Supper will continue until Jesus comes again to redeem His people from this world.

The weekly partaking of the Supper, therefore, was also evangelistic. We can only imagine that if the Achaian disciples did indeed have a special gathering for a love feast/Supper during the Isthmian Games, they had a tremendous opportunity for world evangelism. If some unbelievers did attend the Sunday love feast/Supper event, and then saw someone stand up in the assembly with a cup in his hand—as Jesus did during the Passover meal—and say, “This is His blood,” someone would certainly ask, “Whose blood?” Then truly another purpose for publicly observing the Supper would be as Paul said, “*You proclaim the Lord’s death [to the world] until He comes*” (1 Co 11:26).

The “proclaiming” (preaching) of Jesus’ sacrificial death would be to the unbeliever, not to the believer. The believers already know the purpose of the Lord’s death. This is why they assemble to remember. But the unbeliever needed the gospel preached to him. The Lord’s Supper, therefore, is evangelistic in reference to reminding the world that the Son of God did die on a cruel cross for our sins. We thus continue to observe the Supper “as-often-as.” We do so in order to preach to the world who we are and who is coming for us.

## I. Unworthy behavior (vs 27):

Unworthiness in behavior negates the opportunity to partake. The phrase “unworthy manner” is an adverb of manner. In other words, it is the manner of behavior and state of mind **at the time when one partakes of the Supper**. It does not, and cannot, refer to our life in general before we come to the table. All have sinned, and thus we would all be considered unworthy in reference to being unable to lead a sinless life.

If we do not eat of the Supper because we had some sin in our life during the previous week, then we must understand that most of us could not partake of the Supper, for all have sinned (Rm 3:23). The problem would also be that if we believed that a “sinless week” gave us the right to eat the Supper, then we would sin because of self-righteous arrogance when we partake. We would be self-righteous and congratulating ourselves for living a supposedly sinless week. We would be as John wrote, “*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth*” (1 Jn 1:6). Even worse, John continued, “*If we say that we have no sin [and thus feel we can partake of the Supper], we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*” (1 Jn 1:8).

What is meant in the context of 1 Corinthians 11:27 is the Corinthians’ corruption of the love feast event itself. Some even became drunk. They become inconsiderate and rude in their drunkenness because they ate all the food before the arrival of those who came from great distances across Achaia. In other words, they were drunk when they partook of that which was meant for them to reflect on the sacrificial death of the *ekklesia* of Christ.

They were thus “*guilty of the body and the blood*” because they reflected in their behavior the exact opposite of what the love feast/Supper was to proclaim. The loving unity of the body and the common blood-bought covenant of the body was disgraced. Paul’s severe condemnation of these ungodly drunken brethren was not because they violated some ceremonial procedure that supposedly surrounded the feast and Supper. His focus was directly on the attitudes and immature behavior of the unholy hearts of those who marginalized others in the

body, as well as shaming the body because of their drunkenness.

### **J. Opportunity for self-reflection (vs 28):**

The Supper is an opportunity for self-evaluation. A man should examine his attitudes and behavior at the moment he joins with his fellow brothers and sisters in the Supper. If he is drunken, then he cannot do this. One of the reasons why the early Christians kept the love feast connected to the Supper was that the love feast laid the foundation of attitudes and behavior for the eating of the Supper. It is difficult for two brethren to continue an argument with one another when they are sitting across the same table and eating together. It is difficult to engage in quarrels when one's mouth is full of another brother's food.

Breaking bread was an occasion that naturally encouraged celebration and joy, as was the occasion of the Jewish Passover meal. The love feast, therefore, was the perfect social stimulus to prepare people's minds to join together in partaking of the bread and cup. The love feast reflected the unity of the body that was remembered through the Supper. **The Achaians could celebrate the unity of the provincial body of Christ in the Supper because of the unity by which they ate together during the love feast.**

### **K. Forgetting (vs 29):**

If we do not remember, we judge ourselves. If one has lost his senses in drunkenness, then certainly he would have no recollection of what he was doing at the time he ate the Supper with his fellow members. Through his behavior, therefore, he judged himself unworthy to partake of the Supper. In his drunkenness he would not be able to discern the brotherhood of the one body of disciples.

One becomes drunk because he is thinking of himself. But the Supper was a communal occasion where everyone was to be thinking about others. We eat and drink to remember one another. Some in Corinth were doing the opposite. They had denied one of the very

purposes for which the Supper was instituted. They did so by selfishly eating and drinking before everyone had arrived. They were thus not remembering the one body because they were thinking about their own physical body (1 Co 10:20,21).

### **L. Behavioral judge (vs 30):**

Our behavior is our judge. Some have affirmed that Paul's reference here was to physical matters. This could possibly be the case in reference to God's **direct** judgment in the early establishment of the church, which judgment was immediately measured out on Ananias and Sapphira (At 5:1-11).

However, we would affirm that what was happening in Corinth could also happen today. And since God does not render physical judgment immediately upon ungodly brethren today who defile the Supper, then we would assume that in this context the immature had judged themselves spiritually sick, if not spiritually dead. And if spiritually dead, it was time for them to grow up. This would provide one reason why the Holy Spirit directed this stern message to these disciples.

### **M. Self-judgment (vss 31,32):**

We have the opportunity to judge ourselves at the Supper. Paul's point is that if those who assembled judged their attitudes and behavior to be spiritually immature, and then corrected their attitudes and behavior, they would not be judged by the Lord. When we are judged by the Lord, the Lord disciplines us in life in order that we not be condemned with the world at the end of time. *"For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives"* (Hb 12:6). Therefore, we do not despise the disciplining of the Lord (Hb 12:5). Such discipline leads the sincere to repentance.

### **N. Coming together (vss 33,34):**

We come together to eat in fellowship. Some have erroneously

concluded from the statement made in verse 33 that Paul banned brethren from coming together to eat the love feast. But nothing could be further from the truth. Both Peter and Jude mentioned the existence of the love feast many years after Paul wrote the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11. Under no circumstances did any writer of Scripture forbid Christians from coming together to eat a fellowship meal. In fact, **the nature of the true *ekklesia* assumes that Christians will eat their food together “with gladness and sincerity of heart” (At 2:46).**

What Paul does instruct in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 is that they “*wait for one another*” when they decide to eat a love feast together. Waiting for one another symbolizes consideration for one another. It presents the opportunity for everyone to have food to eat, especially the poorer families. This is the reflection of the true church of Christ. The love feast/Supper is the opportunity for the *ekklesia* to proclaim before the world the sweet fellowship that all Christians enjoy in Christ.

Now if one cannot contain himself before everyone shows up for the love feast, then he should eat something at home before he comes to the assembly of the saints. He should do this lest on a hungry stomach he cannot control his hunger, and thus manifests an inconsiderate behavior by eating before everyone is present.

When Paul made the statement, “*when you come together to eat,*” we discover at least one reason for the coming together as the body of Christ. It was to come together for the love feast/Supper event. The word is “**eat,**” not snack. **They came together for the purpose of eating a meal.** In conjunction with what is stated in Acts 20:7, the early disciples had the practice of coming together to eat a meal in fellowship with one another. During or after this meal, they partook of the bread and fruit of the vine in order to celebrate their salvation through the gospel, as well as proclaim that Jesus was the Savior of the world.

One of their primary purposes for coming together was to eat a meal, and by such to stir up love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:33 were that they must wait for one another before they started eating. In this orderly manner, the poorer brothers and sisters, and those who came from great distances, would

have the opportunity to eat as much as everyone else. In the love feast, Christians must have all things in common (At 2:44). And the motivation for having all things in common is the gospel. Paul then brings his readers to a “*move excellent way*” in chapter 13.

## **Chapter 10**

### **THE BREAD**

The Jewish definition of unleavened bread is defined as bread that was void of yeast in the making of the bread itself. It is the type of bread that was used for the Passover meal, and thus commonly used in the Lord’s Supper in most assemblies of the church today. We arrive at this conclusion simply because the leaven was cast out of the Jewish home for the seven days of the Passover week (Ex 12:14-20). And since the bread that the Jewish disciples were eating during their last Passover with Jesus was unleavened, we copy the example for ourselves in using unleavened bread for the Supper that Jesus instituted. This may be a hermeneutical stretch to use only unleavened bread during the Lord’s Supper, but at least the using of such indicates our desire to continue with the symbolism that surrounded the unleavened bread during the Jewish Passover meal.

#### **A. Surrounding circumstances:**

It is true that the bread that Jesus used to institute the Supper was unleavened. However, throughout all the biblical accounts of the institution of the Supper, there is no emphasis placed on the bread being unleavened. Therefore, one could not argue the use of unleavened bread on the basis of command. Jesus simply did not command the use of unleavened bread. We can only deduct from His use of the Passover unleavened bread that was present at the time He instituted the Supper, that it was unleavened, which it was.

If we assume that the Jewish Christians used unleavened bread in the Lord’s Supper in order to metaphorically symbolize our deliverance from sin as the Jewish nation was delivered from the bondage of

Egyptian captivity, then the Egyptian Christians might have some difficulty with the substance of the metaphor.

Likewise, the Gentile Christians throughout the world who knew nothing about Israel's deliverance from Egyptian captivity would see no significance in the unleavened bread, for they would have known little or nothing about the Passover event of Israel. The hundreds of thousands of Gentiles around the world who had no Old Testament Scriptures would have known little about the unleavened bread of the Passover. To them, the simple gospel message of Jesus Christ was preached. They carried on with simple Christianity without all the Jews' metaphorical understandings of either the Passover or Jewish history.

Therefore, to affirm that the circumstances and elements surrounding the institution of the Supper are binding law may lean toward binding something that was never intended to be bound on the church by the Holy Spirit. This would be true because the Spirit knew that the gospel would go to places throughout the world where Gentiles knew nothing about the Jewish Passover. Therefore, if we bind something that was only part of the circumstances and elements of the Jewish Passover that surrounded the institution of the Supper, then we will run into a few problems in reference to consistency. In fact, we may be a little historically naive concerning the Gentile world that had no copies of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Then consider also all the circumstances surrounding the institution of the Supper. If these were binding, then we have proved too much in reference to how we should partake of the Supper. For instance, when the Jews observed the Passover, they were to have bitter herbs in the presence of the bread (Ex 12:8). Must we also have bitter herbs in the presence of the bread of the Lord's Supper? Also consider the fact that the Supper that was instituted by Jesus was conducted at night in an upper room. Are these circumstances during the institution of the Supper to be binding on us when we partake? When the Passover meal was first instituted before Israel was released from captivity, God instructed the participants to have a staff and to be wearing sandals (Ex 12:11). Are we also to have a staff in hand and be wearing sandals when we partake of the Supper? Must we obey these instruc-

tions when we eat the Supper simply because these were the circumstances surrounding the Jews' observance of the Passover, which circumstances were commanded by God in the first Passover?

The conclusion to our reasoning is obvious in reference to the use of unleavened bread. If unleavened bread must be the bread of the Supper simply because such was circumstantial at the time of the institution of the Supper, then we must consistently include all other circumstances that surrounded the institution of the Supper. This would include such things as eating the supper in an upper room at night, and having a staff in hand and sandals on our feet. These were all incidental circumstances that surrounded the Passover when Jesus instituted His Supper with His disciples. Therefore, our use of unleavened bread must find some other justification for its use other than the fact that it was a part of the circumstances that surrounded the Jewish Passover when Jesus instituted His Supper.

## **B. The leavening of sin:**

What we should do is consider the use of unleavened bread from the viewpoint of the blood-cleansed "body" of Christ. When Jesus said, "this is My body," we would ask to which body was He referring? His physical incarnate body was sacrificed on the cross. But the word "body" is also metaphorically used throughout Scripture in reference to the body of believers, the church (Cl 1:18).

**The body of believers is one blood-bought body, though there are many sanctified members** (1 Co 10:16,17). Though each member in the body of believers has various ministries, each is a part of the one body (1 Co 12:12-27). When we come to Paul's account of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, therefore, we must understand that his metaphorical use of the word "body" does not exclusively refer to the sacrificed physical body of Jesus for the sanctification of the spiritual body. He is referring to the sanctified members of the body.

If we conclude that the word "body" in 1 Corinthians 11 refers to the spiritual body of Christ, then we understand that His sacrificial offering for our sins brought us into a spiritual body of sanctified dis-

ciples. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul explains that Jesus was the Passover lamb for this body. Under Sinai law, the Passover lamb was to be without blemish (Ex 12:5). Jesus was the Passover lamb who was without sin (Hb 7:26; 9:14). He gave Himself as an offering for us in order that we too be a body sanctified of sin because of His cleansing blood that flows from Calvary. Because the individual members of the body walk in the light, they are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

In the thinking of the Jews, leaven was usually a symbol of evil, though in two parables of Jesus leaven was used as a symbol of the spreading influence of the kingdom reign of God (See Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20,21). But generally throughout Scripture, leaven is used as a figure to represent the influence of unrighteousness.

In the institution of the Passover, God's command that they cast out the leaven from their houses would symbolize the clearing of unrighteousness from their hearts in order to accept the command of God to flee Egypt. The clearing of their homes of leaven for seven days before the Passover meal was symbolic of clearing one's heart and mind of unrighteousness before eating the Passover lamb.

The concept of purging the leavening influence of evil from the body of Christ is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 5:5-8. The Corinthians were to purge out the sinful brother who was maintaining fellowship with them in their love feast. Paul exhorted the church, "***Purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened***" (1 Co 5:7). In focusing on the hearts of the Corinthians when they came to their love feast, during which they ate the Supper, he wrote,

*Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* (1 Co 5:8).

Christians are to live the Christ-centered life of righteousness. They are to continually purge unrighteousness out of their hearts. As the body of Christ, they are to purge out the wicked in order that they remain the new lump, unleavened of evil. Unleavened bread, therefore,

would symbolize that they as the body of Christ eat “*the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Co 5:8).

Jesus gave His body in order to cleanse His spiritual body, the church. In partaking of the Supper, we are individually examining ourselves in order to discover any unrighteous attitudes that we must purge from our hearts. Using unleavened bread follows the metaphorical use of such bread in the Jewish Passover, as well as the Holy Spirit’s reference to purging out the leaven of unrighteousness from ourselves. The depth of the metaphor, therefore, makes unleavened bread the natural symbol to reveal that at the Supper, Christians are recognizing again that they were purged of sin through the sacrificial offering of the Son of God on the cross. Partaking of the bread is a time of self-reflection in reference to the cleansing power of the blood.

Since partaking of the bread is a time of self-reflection as the family of God, then it can never be a time of self-righteousness. If we partake because of law, then we have the feeling of self-righteousness when we walk away from the table. We have been in assemblies where some people, after they had partaken of the Supper, arose up and left the assembly. They had assumed that since they had been obedient to the “law of the Supper,” they could leave the presence of their brethren.

But the Supper is not something to leave after we have supposedly performed a legal act of worship. In reference to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:17 that “*we are all partakers of that one bread,*” we understand that we partake together in order to celebrate the one body. There is a communal emphasis to the partaking of the bread in which we celebrate our fellowship with one another. Partaking together of the bread of the Supper is a celebration through which we cleave to one another because of the reconciliation of the cross. We remember that Jesus brought us near to God in one body through the atonement of the cross. We cleave to one another in one body because He became as we are in the flesh in order to bring restoration where there was separation. We will not, therefore, quickly walk away from the experience of eating (cleaving) with our brothers and sisters at the table.

The wisdom of the Holy Spirit in these matters is revealed in the simplicity of making unleavened bread. He knew that the Jews in their

travels would be in places where the acquiring of the elements of the bread would be difficult to find. The same would be the case in reference to the Christians being scattered throughout the world during and after the first century.

Making unleavened bread for the Lord's Supper, therefore, is not difficult. With some flour of some grain, mix in a little oil and water, and a pinch of salt. Add a raw egg if desired, and according to the amount of bread one is making. Roll the mixture flat, and then bake slowly in a pan over an open fire, occasionally turning the bread in the pan. If there is an oven available, then bake slowly until the bread is lightly browned on the outside.

## **Chapter 11**

### **THE FRUIT OF THE VINE**

After no more than three days, the juice of squeezed grapes has started to ferment into wine with an alcohol content. Therefore, after three days all the fruit of the vine in Palestine that had been extracted from the grapes after harvest was wine. It is senseless, therefore, to argue over points concerning the contents of the cup that Jesus held up before the disciples. The fruit of the vine in the cup was wine at the time of the Passover.

The fruit of the vine was very symbolic when it was used in reference to the "blood of the covenant" to which Jesus referred. Its symbolism ran historically deep in the culture of the Jews when Jesus held up the cup of wine. In fact, to argue that the cup contained grape juice would mean that the symbolism of the contents would lose all its cultural meaning in reference to the use of wine in the history of the Jews, but also for the rest of mankind at the time of the last Passover.

A brief review of history and science in reference to fermentation is very helpful. Science has now given us the knowledge that the alcohol and organic acids of wine have great antibacterial benefits. And in conjunction with its use, wine can help to a great extent in settling diarrhea. But from the beginning of time, the ancients knew nothing of how wine did its magic. They only knew that wine worked in reference

to healing wounds, settling stomachs and purifying water.

When the priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek, came to greet one of the forefathers of our faith and his fighting men who were returning from an intense battle, he brought with him bread and wine (Gn 14:18). He presented his gifts to Abraham and his men after they had returned from a fierce battle to rescue Lot, his family, and many others who had been taken captive by the marauding kings. Melchizedek's gift of bread is understandable. The men had to eat. But what about the wine?

We have always wondered about the use of wine throughout recorded history. We have usually concluded that it was only for consumption. But we were wrong. After Noah came forth from the ark, he "*planted a vineyard*" (Gn 9:20). There was a reason he did this. Of course there are those warnings about "strong drink," that is, wine that is consumed that has not been mixed with, or diluted by water (Pv 31:6).

But then there is a curious prophecy concerning the "scepter" that would not depart from Judah (Gn 49:10), an established prophecy in reference to the coming of the Messiah of Israel. In describing what the Messiah would do, a very unusual statement was made in the Genesis 49 prophecy: "*He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine. He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes*" (Gn 49:11). There was a hint of "cleansing" in this prophecy. Cleansing would be associated with the coming of the Christ (Messiah).

We have found that most Bible interpreters pay little attention to verse 11 of this prophecy, for most Bible interpreters are very distant from how the fruit of the vine was used by the ancients for purposes other than drinking. Most confine their understanding of wine to someone who was simply drunk. But why would the Christ "wash his garments in wine"?

A good Samaritan might enlighten our understanding. There was a traveler on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves. The thieves roughed him up in their act of theft to the point that he needed "medical" help. Then came the good Samaritan, whom Jesus

said “*went to him and bound up his wounds, **pouring on oil and wine***” (Lk 10:34). The wounds were bound, and then oil and wine were poured on the wounds. The text does not say that the wounded traveler drank the oil. Neither does it say that he drank the wine. What we are not told is that the wine was used as an antiseptic to clean his wounds.

The cases of Melchizedek and the good Samaritan may present a window through which we can understand the use of wine throughout the Old Testament era, and into the New Testament. It was certainly consumed as a product of the vine. However, after the grape juice is squeezed from the grapes, in the usual temperature of the day, the natural sugar of the juice starts to ferment into alcohol within only three days. **It is the alcohol and organic acids in the wine that disinfects that on which it is poured, or that with which it is mixed.** When wine is mixed with polluted water, the alcohol and organic acids in the wine kill the germs in the water. The water is thus “cleansed” by the wine. When the wine was poured on wounds, the wounds were disinfected. The antibacterial agent of wine was the only disinfectant available in ancient times.

And now we know why Melchizedek brought wine to Abraham and his men. Some of his men were suffering from wounds they had incurred in their battle with the marauding kings. As the traveler, whose wounds the Samaritan treated, Abraham’s men needed the antiseptic qualities of the wine for their wounds. Added to this is the possibility that they also needed to mix the wine with the water that was available in order that everyone have purified water to drink.

We remember that Timothy, in his travels, once suffered from stomach problems that possibly came from drinking polluted water. In order to solve the diarrhea, Paul instructed Timothy, “*Drink no longer water exclusively, but **use** a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities*” (1 Tm 5:23). Was Timothy instructed to stop drinking water? That would be impossible. What both Paul and Timothy knew, and what we usually do not, is that the wine was mixed with the water in order to “cleanse” (purify) the water.

The Greek word translated “use” in Paul’s instructions to Timothy, **is not** the word for drink. Of course Timothy would drink the wine

in his drinking of water that had been purified with wine. But Paul was instructing Timothy to use the wine with the water in order to purify the water. Timothy was suffering from drinking bad water. The disinfectant that had been used by the ancients since the beginning of time was God's natural purifying agent that came from the fermentation of the fruit of the vine. Therefore, when Noah came forth from the ark, one of the first things he did was to plant a "pharmacy" (a vineyard).

The mixing of the wine with water was practiced for centuries before the Christ came to "*tie his foal to the vine,*" and cleanse his clothes with wine. This helps us understand why Jesus attended a marriage feast where He would have the opportunity to work His first miracle, which miracle involved wine (See Jn 2:1-11). He wanted us to understand that the prophecy of Genesis 49:11 was beginning to be fulfilled in Him.

During the feast, the host explained that there was a difference between "inferior wine" and "good wine" (Jn 2:10). The only difference between the "inferior wine" and the "good wine" that Jesus created, was that one was possibly mixed with water and the other was not. The advantage of the water mixed with wine was that it was difficult to drink enough of it in order to become drunk. One can drink only so much liquid, and thus, one can drink only so much "inferior wine." But after one has drunk as much as he can of the "inferior wine" (mixed), then comes the "unmixed (good) wine," of which Jesus provided in abundance.

While we lived in Sao Paulo, Brazil many years ago, one would never, in any large populated Brazilian city, drink water directly from the tap. The water must first be filtered, and then, the filtered water was "cleansed" with a purifying agent. It was then safe to drink. It seems that Timothy had been drinking the water of the densely populated area of Ephesus, and as a result, he suffered some problems that came from drinking polluted water. Paul reminded him of the purifying agent of wine in order to clean up his water, cure his diarrhea, and thus, be returned to health.

We say all the preceding in order to better understand what Jesus meant on the night when He poured forth His cleansing blood on a

cross outside Jerusalem. Maybe there is more meaning to what Jesus said when He held up a cup of wine during His final supper with His disciples, and said, “*For this is My **blood** of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission [cleansing] of sins*” (Mt 26:28).

**The disciples who were sitting there had been taught that for centuries wine was used to cleanse water and heal wounds.** And now the fruit of the vine would take on a metaphorical meaning when it was drunk in remembrance of the new covenant. **The fruit of the vine (wine) would symbolize the cleansing blood of the covenant.** For His disciples who now walk in the light of this new covenant, “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7).

When a soldier pierced the side of Jesus on the cross, we now believe that we have a better understanding of the statement that John wrote of what seemed to be an insignificant event: “*blood and water came out*” (Jn 19:34). When we drink the fruit of the vine during the Lord’s Supper, we remember how water is cleansed when it is “mingled” with wine. When Jesus’ blood is mingled with our souls, we too are cleansed. **The cleansing power of the contents of the cup was on the minds of the disciples when Jesus held up the cup.** They knew that wine cleansed water and disinfected wounds. They would later understand that His blood would cleanse their souls of sin and continually disinfect us of sin when we wound ourselves.

The next time we partake of the “blood of the covenant,” it would be good to remember that the Christ was wounded in order to anoint our wounds with His cleansing blood. And as each one of us drink the fruit of the vine, we will remember that it is the blood of Jesus that flows continually through our veins in order to keep our souls disinfected of sin.

## Chapter 12

### CONTAINERS AND CONTENTS

In Matthew 26:29 Jesus said, “*I will not drink of this **fruit of the vine** from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom*” (See also Mk 14:25; Lk 22:16). The phrase “fruit

of the vine” (Gr., *genemata tou ampelou*) is used only by Matthew, Mark and Luke in their record of the words of Jesus at the time Jesus instituted the Supper. It is a phrase that was used by the translators of the Septuagint in Isaiah 32:12. It is also a phrase that is used for the wine at the Passover meal of the Jews (*M. Berakoth* 6:1).

In their accounts of the Supper, both Luke and Paul use the word “cup” as a **metonymy to refer to the contents of the cup** (Lk 22:17,20; 1 Co 10:16; 11:25,26). A metonymy is the use of the name of one thing in order to refer to something else. In the context of Jesus’ use of the word “cup,” **He was using the word to refer to what was actually contained in the cup.** His emphasis, therefore, was on the fruit of the vine, not the physical cup itself.

Because the word “cup” was used as a metonymy by Jesus to refer to the contents of the cup, we must not confuse ourselves in thinking that there is something significant about the container itself. The cup was only incidental in making it possible for the participants to drink its contents. There is no legal command by Jesus in the institution of the Supper to focus on incidentals that were present at the Passover meal. Even the contents of the cup were incidental in the sense that there was wine in the cup. He thus took the opportunity to place great spiritual significance on the contents, not the container.

The fact that the wine and cup were incidental to His pronouncement would assume that both the one cup and the fermented grape juice (wine) were incidental. In other words, if more cups are needed to distribute the fruit of the vine to many people, such does not contravene any mandate of Jesus. We are also assuming that the contents of the cup was wine. But since Jesus used the generic phrase “fruit of the vine,” then the contents could be any fruit of the vine, including grape juice.

Some have wondered concerning the contents of the cup, whether it was actual wine or grape juice. It goes without question that the contents of the cup at that time was wine. If we set grape juice out for any long period of time, it naturally ferments into wine. If we would make an argument that the contents of the cup must be wine, then we have proposed a very questionable argument. That is, if we have only

grape juice present, must we wait until it ferments into wine before it is “scriptural”? And as previously stated, must we also bind on ourselves the many other incidentals that were also present when Jesus instituted the Supper? **We must keep in mind that if we bind one incidental circumstance in reference to the Passover meal when Jesus instituted His Supper, then we must consistently bind all other incidentals.**

The history of the phrase “fruit of the vine” began with William Tyndale’s English translation of the Greek text. He translated *genematos tou ampelou* with the English phrase “fruits of the vine tree.” When the Geneva Bible was translated, the translators rendered the phrase “fruit of the vine.” This rendering subsequently became the common translation of the phrase in most English versions.

The word for wine also has an interesting use in the Bible. It is used both figuratively and literally. The English word comes from the Greek word *ampelos* (vine). It is used in James 3:12: “*Can ... a vine produce figs?*” In Revelation there was the call to gather the grapes from the vine, for they were ripe (Rv 14:18,19). In Revelation, as well as Matthew 7:16, *ampelos* is used to refer to the product of the vine, that is, the grapes. Thus *ampelos* is used literally to refer to the vine that produces the grapes. But it can also be used as a metonymy to refer to the product of the vine.

The use of the phrase “fruit of the vine” does not in and of itself define either grape juice or wine. But in reference to the spring of the year when Jesus instituted the Supper during the Passover, which was long past the grape harvest, we would certainly conclude that it was wine that was present at the Passover feast when He ate and drank with the disciples.

During the time of a Jewish Passover, rabbinical tradition assumed that each participant of the Passover was supplied with enough wine that would fill four cups. We would certainly disagree with some artist’s conceptions that there was only one cup on the table when Jesus instituted the fruit of the vine as a memorial of the cleansing blood of the covenant. There was a cup for everyone present, and there was a great deal of wine. Arguments that surround the use of only one cup to serve the fruit of the vine, therefore, are superfluous.

Arguments that result in unrealistic conclusions can never be correct. Suppose we use only one cup in a large assembly in order to observe the Supper. Now in a small house assembly there would be no problem. However, suppose we have a general meeting of all the saints in an area, for example, as the large assembly that took place in Corinth. Suppose there were 1,000 Christians present and everyone wants to observe the Supper together. If we were allowed to use only one cup during the meeting, we would run into some problems with time. If we used only one cup to serve the fruit of the vine to 1,000 people, taking about eight seconds for each individual to partake, including time to refill the cup, then consider how long it would take to serve everyone. The total time for everyone to drink from the one cup would be a little over 133 minutes or about two and a half hours. That which makes no sense cannot be binding as law. Sometimes common sense is the best hermeneutic.

## Chapter 13

### **THE LORD'S *DEIPNON***

Bible scholars do not question the fact that the early church celebrated a love feast when they came together on the first day of the week. Today, having such a feast is not common among churches throughout the world on a weekly basis. As the disciples of Jesus, we seek to understand the reason why the early disciples had a regular love feast as the foundation for the Lord's Supper. Was there something in the teachings of Jesus that led them to believe that love feasts, during which the Lord's Supper was observed, was a natural event for which they assembled as disciples of Jesus?

What is common among churches today are periodic love feasts. The partaking of the bread and fruit of the vine have been reserved for the weekly Sunday assembly, but the love feast has basically been reserved as occasional activity. Since many assemblies are urban, and constitute a large number of members, the love feast at a large assembled body is certainly difficult. On the other hand, since the early church met in the homes of the members, it was normal that a common meal

be eaten among all attending members. In fact, it would have been very inhospitable for a meal not to be offered. Jesus was invited to many such feasts. The early disciples simply carried on with the home love feast on Sunday.

Nevertheless, we invariably read into the text of the Scriptures our common practices in religious matters today. This is especially true in reference to the definition of some key words. We often attach our own life experiences, or “church ordinances” to the definition of words that an author uses to express his point. There is nothing unusual about this. It is simply a human characteristic of interpreting the thoughts of an author by our own beliefs, behavior and background.

For this reason, we must be on guard against interpreting the Scriptures with the influence of our own religious rites. We must always be cautious about reading our definitions of words into the words of the inspired writers. If we did read our beliefs and behavior into a text of Scripture, we must then judge this to be an opinionated and biased interpretation of what the Holy Spirit wrote. It is the task of the objective translator, as well as the reader, therefore, to put himself in the shoes of the original writer in order to understand what the writer sought to communicate to his immediate readers. This principle is the task of the honest biblical interpreter. And it is with this principle in mind that we tackle the definition of a Greek word that was used in reference to the definition of the love feast/Supper event of the early church.

The old English word “supper” finds its original definition in a rural family meal centuries ago that occurred in the evening after every one of the family came in from the fields. The word was based in a rural, farming culture. The laborers of the field could not enjoy a sumptuous feast in the middle of the day while they were in the heat of their manual labors. The consumption of a great amount of food in the heat of the midday sun, and in the midst of great labor, was not customary in the farming culture from which the word “supper” was originally born. Farmers ate in the middle of the day, but their “fellowship” supper, or full meal was in the evening.

The evening supper was a time for the family to come together for communication and reunion after a hard day’s work in the fields. Hav-

ing grown up on a farm, we can personally testify to the importance of family time during the evening supper. This was a time of communication about the events of the farm that had taken place during the day. It was a time for family renewal and the enjoyment of one another before bedtime. The word “supper” finds its definition, therefore, in this very important evening meal culture where a family came together to celebrate family and to discuss the work of the farm.

After a hard day of work in the fields, you can only imagine the type of suppers we enjoyed on the farm. A snack was often enjoyed during the day, but a full meal with all the trimmings was enjoyed around the family table at supper time. There was no snack in the evenings. As farmers who had put in a twelve hour day, we were hungry, and the table was spread with the best that could be eaten by those who had labored strenuously in the field. To farmers, therefore, the word “supper” always meant a **full meal** from which no one went away hungry.

The translators of our English Bibles did well when they used the word “supper” to translate the Greek word that had a similar setting and meaning in the first century. This was the Greek word *deipnon*. **This word refers to a full meal, and was defined after the rural culture of ancient peoples.** Food was certainly the primary substance of the definition, but as the English word “supper,” there was more to the definition of the word than food. **The *deipnon* was an event. It was an event of fellowship and communication.** It was a time of renewal and a conscious remembrance of the family. It was a feast around which friends and family came together to renew their common bond. In reference to food, there was no concept of a snack in the definition of the word *deipnon*. The great amount of food that was necessary for a supper took a great deal of time to prepare and eat, and thus, the opportunity for great communication. The *deipnon* was a rural social event.

The use of the word *deipnon* in the New Testament verifies this definition, and thus to a great extent, finds a good definition in the old English word “supper” as it was used in rural English culture. The use of the word in reference to the Lord’s Supper helps us understand what God intended to be accomplished when Christians came together as an

assembly of His people. With this in mind, consider the use of the word *deipnon* as it is defined by its use in the New Testament:

### A. Herod's *deipnon*:

*“Finally, an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday made a supper [deipnon] for his lords, high captains and chief men of Galilee”* (Mk 6:21).

Now we can imagine what type of *deipnon* this was. The *deipnon* was made for the highest ranking officials of Herod's kingdom. But more importantly, it was Herod's birthday *deipnon*. Every effort was thus made to make this a special event. Food was the physical adhesive that held the event together. The lords, high captains, and chief men did not just come together for food. This was an event of Herod's birthday, and thus they came together to celebrate and give honor to Herod while eating a sumptuous full meal.

There was no “snack” food. Such would have been an absolute insult to the guests. Herod would have been insulted, and the officials who attended would have been snubbed. A true *deipnon* (supper) was prepared in order that honor be given to Herod, as well as to those who attended.

The duration of this *deipnon* was not determined by how fast the food could be consumed. As the Jewish Passover meal, it was an event that carried on for hours. The amount of food, therefore, was determined by the duration of the event. If the affairs of the celebration carried on past the time when all the food was consumed, then the host would have been embarrassed. Enough food was prepared for the *deipnon*, therefore, in order to guarantee that the guests could eat during the entire sequence of events that took place during the feast.

And there were certainly a great deal of things that took place during this particular historical event. Though our record of this event in Mark 6 was the occasion for the beheading of John the Baptist, the number of events that took place emphasize the fact that a great period of time transpired during the feast. Dancing by the daughter of Herod,

took place. Conversation and a command for the beheading of John took place. The actual beheading of John took place. There was enough time for the head of John to be presented to Herod during the *deipnon*. This *deipnon* went on for hours. It was not a “snack-and-run” event.

In the event of Herod's birthday *deipnon*, the Holy Spirit established an initial definition for His use of the word *deipnon* in the New Testament. The Spirit wants us to understand that the *deipnon* was an event where food was the adhesive around which several other events took place. There was celebration, honor given, activities carried out, conversation, and a renewal of Herod's kingdom position.

Today, the English word “feast” could also be used to translate the word *deipnon*, though many of our English translations have stayed with the word “supper.” But keep in mind that the New Testament definition of *deipnon* is **first determined by the context of the event in which the word was used**. It was used in reference to Herod's birthday feast, and in a similar manner, it was used in the following events of the New Testament that are mentioned throughout this chapter. The use of the word in the following events clearly defines the word according to its common use in the first century.

## **B. Jesus' *deipnon*:**

*Then He [Jesus] said also to him who invited Him, “When you prepare a dinner or **supper** [deipnon], do not call your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you prepare a feast [deipnon], call the poor, cripple, lame and blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Lk 14:12-14).*

The social environment of the *deipnon* that Jesus sought to institute among His disciples was different than the previous *deipnon* that was conducted by Herod. Herod's *deipnon* was worldly and exclusive. Where Herod sought to receive honor from his guests, Jesus on the other hand wanted the poor, cripple, lame and blind to be honored by

an invitation. He wanted His disciples' suppers to be an inclusive occasion, especially for those who were financially and physically disadvantaged. Where Herod sought to be repaid with loyalty from his guests, Jesus taught that we must be loyal to those who cannot repay our good deeds. However, regardless of the difference in the special environment of the two feasts, the definition of the word *deipnon* in reference to the meal was the same.

The *deipnon* about which Jesus spoke was to be an event of feasting and fellowship. It was an inclusive *deipnon* where a full meal was served. Now imagine inviting the poor, cripple, lame and blind just for a snack or cup of soup. Was this what Jesus had in mind? The very purpose for which the *deipnon* was to be held would be totally reversed if only a snack was offered to the guests. When Jesus wanted us to give honor to the poor, crippled, lame and blind, what message would we be giving to these guests if we served them only a snack? After the snack, would we then go somewhere else and enjoy a full meal by ourselves at the local restaurant, or with our own family by ourselves? There is something about the thought of doing this that is contrary to the spirit of living the gospel of Jesus.

Jesus' *deipnon* that is defined in the text of Luke 14:12-14 was a meal during which one was involved in fellowship and communication with no strings attached. In other words, the host, through the *deipnon*, sacrificed without expecting something in return. In order to manifest this sacrifice, a full meal of food was prepared. No snack would have ever communicated to the guests that the host was sincere in his or her efforts to fellowship and communicate with the disadvantaged.

We must not assume by Jesus' reference to those who were not invited that a *deipnon* could not be held for friends, family and relatives. His point in the context is that we must conduct a *deipnon* experience beyond our friends, family and relatives. Our feasts with friends and family, to the exclusion of the financially and physically disadvantaged, is the type of feast that Herod conducted. Jesus wanted us to invite everyone.

We must understand the historical context in which Jesus' instructions were given. The culture of the rich and famous at the time was

defined by Herod's *deipnon*. Only friends and officials were invited to Herod's supper. There were thus too many in the culture of the time who wanted to do as Herod. They practiced exclusive suppers. The *deipnon* among the rich and famous became a meal of exclusion. Jesus initiated a gospel paradigm shift in reference to having a *deipnon*. And it seems that the first Christians carried on with Jesus' instructions (See At 2:44-46).

Jesus wanted to reverse the exclusive sentiment in reference to the *deipnon* that would be conducted by His disciples. The *deipnon* of the disciples of Jesus was to be inclusive of all, not only of friends, family and relatives. The poor, cripple, lame and blind were to be included.

Culturally speaking, therefore, Jesus added a new definition to the *deipnon* of the times. Everyone was to be invited. There were to be no restrictions if one were not of the financial status of the host. There were to be no restrictions because one was physically disadvantaged. There were to be no restrictions because one was not of the same social status with others. The *deipnon* of the disciples of Jesus was to be totally inclusive. We see in Jesus' instructions of Luke 14:12-14 that He was laying the foundation upon which He would eventually establish His *deipnon* that was to be practiced by His disciples. **It was a *deipnon* that would reflect the gospel character of those who had obeyed the gospel.**

Unless we confine Jesus' teaching on this matter to the culture of His immediate time, we must read again verse 14 where He stated, "*For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*" The resurrection of the just and unjust will take place in the last day when Jesus comes again (Jn 5:28,29; At 24:15). We assume that this applies to us also. Therefore, until He comes again at the end of time of all things, Jesus expects His disciples at any time in history to conduct the *deipnon* about which He spoke in Luke 14.

Now as a reminder, and because Jesus' instructions concerning His *deipnon* are to be practiced among His disciples until His final coming, we must not forget that this *deipnon* was not a snack for the poor and physically disadvantaged. Jesus' *deipnon* was a full meal as would be given to one's friends, family and relatives. As one would

prepare for friends, family and relatives, he or she should also prepare a *deipnon* (supper) for the poor, crippled, lame and blind.

We must have these special feasts until Jesus comes again. This may be a real paradigm shift for some, but it is a shift that we must seriously consider in order to restore the gospel fellowship of the love feast/Lord's Supper event.

Lest we stray from the point, we must not assume that the Lord's Supper is the *deipnon* about which Jesus spoke in the context of Luke 14. All that we want from the event of the Luke 14 *deipnon* is the definition of the word. And the definition of the word *deipnon* as it was used by Jesus is that it was a full meal around which communication and fellowship took place. We would conclude, therefore, that the early Christians founded their love feasts on the principles that He explained in Luke 14.

### **C. A *deipnon* for Jesus:**

*Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper [deipnon] and Martha served (Jn 12:1,2).*

We can only imagine the atmosphere of this *deipnon*. It was certainly an occasion of great celebration and joy. It was a supper that was specifically prepared for Jesus to celebrate the resurrection of Lazarus. The occasion was a time of celebration, for it was probably the first meal that Jesus enjoyed with Lazarus, Mary and Martha after Lazarus' resurrection. In fact, Mary was so overcome with thanksgiving that she bowed to her knees and anointed the feet of Jesus with a very expensive ointment (Jn 12:3). Though an impromptu action on her part, the anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary manifested that the event was not a snack-and-run event.

Mary did not anoint Jesus' feet at the time of Lazarus' resurrection. She did not anoint His feet at any time between Lazarus' resurrection and the event of the *deipnon* in the context of John 12. The fact was that the atmosphere of the *deipnon* presented an opportunity for

her to reveal her extreme gratitude to Jesus for raising her brother from the dead. From what took place during this *deipnon*, we would assume that a *deipnon* is a time when unusual things can take place as people manifest their extreme gratitude for what Jesus has done in raising all of us from our spiritual death in sin. For the Christian, the *deipnon* is a sacred event of the week. It is a time for expressing gratitude and manifesting celebration that is centered around the eating of a meal together.

#### **D. The last *deipnon* of Jesus:**

*Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And during supper [deipnon], the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God, and was going back to God, rose from the supper [deipnon] ... (Jn 13:1-14).*

The context of this event was the last *deipnon* (the Passover meal) that Jesus ate with His disciples. This *deipnon* carried on for several hours. During this time Jesus rose from the table and washed the disciples' feet. Sometime during this particular occasion, John, the brother of James, was leaning on the breast of Jesus (Jn 21:20). Also during this *deipnon* Jesus rebuked the disciples concerning their competitive discussions with one another (Lk 22:22-30). There was much eating, much speaking, and a great deal of events that took place. The *deipnon* was the occasion for all this conversation and events to occur. Though the washing of the feet of the disciples, and the institution of the "Lord's Meal" took place on this occasion, it was common for those who ate the Passover meal to enjoy a great feast.

It was customary that those who ate at the *deipnon* of the Passover, and other feasts, to recline or lounge on carpets or pillows around the food that was placed on a low lying table before everyone. In this relaxing posture they could stay a great deal of time in eating and enjoying one another's company.

On this particular occasion, Jesus metaphorically took ownership of the “table.” He claimed the common table that was used for the food. He did so when He said to the disciples that they would eat and drink “*at My table*” (Lk 22:30). Jesus’ emphasis was not on the physical wooden table. Neither was His primary focus on the food. However, the food played a significant part in establishing the environment around which the events of this meal took place, and thus, it became the definition of “My table” that He claimed.

When Jesus said “My table,” His emphasis was seated in the events that took place on this occasion. There was much food, much talk, and many events that surrounded “His table” meal with the disciples. Therefore, when we later read in the New Testament concerning the table of the Lord, we must not forget that the table was at the time of its original establishment an opportunity for conversation and eating.

When Luke recorded the statement of Luke 22:30 in his letter to Theophilus over thirty years after the actual event, “the table of the Lord” was known as a time when the disciples feasted. Theophilus would thus interpret this statement of Luke to refer to a table meal of the disciples of Jesus during which Jesus took a portion of the fruit of the vine and bread in order to establish a memorial of His body and blood.

As we read this statement in our Bibles today, we would also interpret “My table” to refer to what took place during the last Passover meal that Jesus had with the disciples. There is no reason why we should change the environment or substances of “the table.” It was a table of food then, and now the “Lord’s table” is still a time for feasting, fellowship and remembrance during which a memorial is made in reference to the body and blood of Jesus.

Our traditional practice has been to separate the *deipnon* that took place on the Passover from the event of Jesus using the fruit of the vine and bread of the *deipnon* to establish a memorial of His body and blood. We thus establish two “tables.” One “table” was the meal during which the “table” of the Lord was established. The other “table” was the abbreviated “chip and sip” of the *deipnon*.

But as we dig deeper into the practice of the New Testament church,

it is evident that the early Christians did not make this separation. They continued with the events of the occasion of the Passover *deipnon*. A full meal was prepared and eaten, during or after which the Lord's Supper was eaten as a part of the meal. There was only one table meal, during which Jesus changed the Passover table meal into His own table meal.

### **E. The final *deipnon*:**

*“Then he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper [deipnon] of the Lamb...”’ (Rv 19:9).*

*Then I saw an angel standing in the sun. And he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, “Come and gather yourselves together for the great supper [deipnon] of God ...” (Rv 19:17).*

Described in the preceding two statements of Revelation 19:9 & 17 is the great marriage *deipnon* that is yet to come. The metaphor of this final *deipnon* is based in the real and actual marriage meal that was conducted at a marriage celebration. During such a feast there was great celebration, much food, loving fellowship, and many events that brought rejoicing to the parties who were brought together in marriage. The meaning of the metaphor, therefore, is what we will experience in the great marriage banquet to come.

A metaphor derives its meaning from that which is earthly and literal. What is earthly and literal with the supper (*deipnon*) that is mentioned in these texts of Revelation is a full meal of celebration. The angel in Revelation metaphorically encouraged the saints with a “great *deipnon*” that they will have with the Lord when He comes again. It will be great because it will be the *deipnon* of God. We cannot imagine that the “great *deipnon*” that God will provide for the faithful will be only a snack. It will be a great celebration feast with the Lord because the gospel will have been completed through the resurrection of the righteous into eternal glory

## Chapter 14

### FELLOWSHIP IN BREAKING BREAD

We have studied through the preceding texts of the New Testament where the word *deipnon* is used in order to bring ourselves to the subject of this chapter. In view of the definition of the word *deipnon* that is contextually defined in the New Testament, we do not think much discussion is necessary to be continued as to what reference is made in the context of 1 Corinthians 11. Speaking against the Corinthians' immature attitudes and behavior with which they conducted themselves during the Lord's *deipnon*, Paul wrote,

*Therefore, when you come together, it is not to eat the Lord's **supper** [deipnon]. For in eating, each one takes before others his own **supper** [deipnon]. And one is hungry and another is drunken (1 Co 11:20,21).*

Paul rebuked the Corinthians with the words, "*But in giving these instructions [concerning the love feast] I do not praise you because you do not come together [for the love feast] for the better **but for the worse**" (1 Co 11:17). "Therefore," Paul continued, "when you come together [for the love feast], it is not to eat the Lord's *supper* (deipnon) [because of your immature attitudes and behavior]" (1 Co 11:20). In this context, therefore, Paul was writing about their love feast (*deipnon*) during which their dysfunctional and divisive attitudes were revealed. The eating of the meal together had become an occasion where the rude behavior of some was revealed (See 1 Co 11:19).*

Paul then wrote of a personal encounter that he had with Jesus during which he received the following information,

*For I have received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread. And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "**This is My body which is for you. This do in remembrance of Me.**" After the same manner He took the cup also after **supper** [deipnon], saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood" (1 Co 11:23-25).*

The Corinthians had messed up a completely good *deipnon* event by their inconsiderate behavior. In their eating of the Lord's *deipnon*, they had made it their own meal in that each one ate his own food before others arrived. They were inconsiderate and immature. Paul exhorted them in the conclusion of his exhortations concerning their behavior: "*Brethren, do not be children in thinking. However, in malice be babes, but in thinking be mature*" (1 Co 14:20).

In a negative way, the Corinthians' dysfunctional and immature behavior during the love feast explains what a love feast should not be. Some were being gluttons and drunks, for some were consuming all the food and drinking all the wine. Therefore, it is evident from the statements that Paul made in 1 Corinthians 11 that the early disciples sat at the "Lord's table" during their love feast. There was no separation between the table feast and the "Lord's table." The love feast laid the spiritual and emotional foundation upon which the Supper was better understood.

The following sources of this chapter are given, not to establish authority, but to present a historical consensus of thought of scholars concerning the meal fellowship of the early disciples in conjunction with the Lord's Supper. These are obvious conclusions to which many Bible students have come. Therefore, the Bible student must not forget that with his particular translation of the Bible, he too can arrive at an understanding of those Bible subjects that are necessary to obey in order to please God.

Both Jesus and the writers of the New Testament quoted from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. But neither Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit who inspired the writers of the New Testament, resorted to the "original" Hebrew words and phrases of the Hebrew text in order to give "authority" to what Jesus personally spoke, or what the Holy Spirit inspired the early New Testament writers to write.

Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that the text of the New Testament was first written in the common Greek language of the day. For this reason, we must to the best of our ability understand what the first recipients understood through the common words that were originally

used by the Holy Spirit. Most translators of the text have done well by bringing essential interpretations of key words into the language of our native tongue. Because of this readers can trust their current translation of the Greek texts.

God is pleased that any disciple can use the translation in his hand to come to an understanding of the message of the gospel and fundamental teachings that are necessary for salvation. **Every teaching that is difficult to understand, or must be understood only by scholars and dictated to the church, therefore, cannot be made a requirement for salvation and fellowship of the saints.** This principle must be understood when studying the subject of the Lord's Supper and love feast.

#### A. *New Bible Commentary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, "The Breaking of Bread":*

"In the early church of the Acts there are scattered references to table-fellowship. 'E.g. Acts 2:42,46 where the phrase is 'breaking of bread'. In Acts 20:7 (but not 27:35, which describes an ordinary, non-cultic meal) there is a reference to a fellowship meal, using the identical phrase. The fact that no mention of the cup is ever made in Acts leads H. Lietzmann ... to the elaborate thesis that this Jerusalem communion in one kind is the earliest and most original form of the sacrament, .... It was, *ex hypothesi*, a fellowship meal beginning with the familiar Jewish custom of breaking of bread—a continuation, in fact, of the common meals of the Galilean ministry when the Lord fed the crowds and in which the Lord and his disciples formed a *haburah*."

"... the name 'breaking of bread' may be a quasi-technical expression for the whole meal. What is significant about the early form of the Eucharist is the note of *joy* which stems directly, not so much from the Galilean meals as from the post-resurrection appearances, many of which are associated with a meal between the victorious Lord and his own (Lk. 24:30-35,36-48; Jn. 21:9ff; Acts 1:4 (RV mg.); 10:41; Rev. 3:20)."

## **B. *New Bible Commentary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, “Love Feast”:***

“St. Paul’s account [in 1 Cor. 11:17-34] of the administration of the Eucharist [Lord’s supper] shows it set in the context of a fellowship supper. His farewell discourse at Troas which continued till midnight was delivered at a fellowship meal on the first day of the week which included the Eucharist (Acts 20:7ff).”

“Although the common custom of fellowship meals among the Jews may have been sufficient ground for the primitive Agape [feast], some would trace the practice to the actual circumstances of the Last Supper. The sacrament was instituted at a Passover meal. Some scholars contend for another type of fellowship meal customary in the *qiddush* and *haburah* gatherings. The early disciples probably reproduced the setting of the first Eucharist, preceding it with such a fellowship meal. The separation of the meal or Agape from the Eucharist lies outside the times of the NT.”

## **C. *John Mark Hicks, Come to the Table (Fairmount, CA: Leafwood Pub., 2003), p. 80:***

“Jesus instituted a supper where his people might remember him. His model for this supper was the sacrificial meals of the Hebrew Bible. In particular, he instituted his own supper in the context of a Passover meal. Jesus instituted a meal, not just bread and wine. The meal (in Luke, cup-bread-supper-cup) fulfills the Passover in the kingdom of God and anticipates the full messianic banquet in the new heaven and new earth. If the Old Testament festivals involved a full meal (like the Passover) and the future messianic banquet involves a full meal, the new covenant meal, the Lord’s supper, also involves a full meal.”

## **D. *F. F. Bruce, Acts of the Apostles, 1951:***

“‘The breaking of bread’ referred to in Acts 2:42,46 may describe a common meal which included both the Agape [feast] and Eucharist [Lord’s supper].”

**E. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Canon Leon Morris, I Corinthians, (1976: Inter-varsity Press, p. 158):***

1 Corinthians 11:21 “reveals that at Corinth the Holy Communion was not simply a token meal as with us, but an actual meal. Moreover it seems clear that it was a meal to which each of the participants brought food.”

**F. *The New Lion Encyclopedia, John Drane:***

“The early church observed the Lord’s supper as an exclusive community meal.”

**G. *The Dictionary of the Bible, J.G. Simpson, James Hastings, ed. “Eucharist” (1909: T & T Clark, Edinburg), p. 244:***

“The name Lord’s supper, though legitimately derived from 1 Cor 11 vs 20, is not there applied to the sacrament itself, but to the Love Feast or Agape, a meal commemorating the Last Supper, and not yet separated from the Eucharist when St. Paul wrote.”

**H. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, “Bread” (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), p. 543:***

“The idea of hospitality developed into the ancient Christian custom of connecting the *agape* [feast] (Jude 12; cf. 1 Cor. 11:21) with the Lord’s supper. Community by partaking of the same bread is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:17. But the first idea in the Lord’s Supper is still another symbolism: the conception of the bread of life, the spiritual food given to mankind when Christ surrendered Himself unto death in order that His followers might find life eternal. This institution of holy communion (Mt. 26:26), has been expanded largely in Jn. 6:32-58, words spoken when ‘the Passover ... was at hand’ (Jn 6:4), and when Christ had shown Himself the divine host by the multiplying of bread. So the symbolism of bread in Israel’s religion and the symbolism of bread in the common life

of the eastern countries were joined to the central theme of the Lord's Supper: the sacrifice of Christ as the life-bread for His people.

**I. I. Howard Marshal, *Christian Beliefs: An Introductory Study Guide* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p. 80:**

“This simple rite [the Lord's supper] was observed by His disciples, at first as part of a communal meal, Sunday by Sunday.”

**J. *Christian History*, John Dooch, ed. (Nashville, TN: Methodist Publishing House), Issue 37, p. 3:**

“In the first century, the Lord's Supper included not only the bread and the cup but an entire meal.”

**K. In A.D. 112, Pliny wrote to Caesar Trajan of the Roman Empire concerning one of the Sunday habits of Christians.**

“It was their [Christians'] habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing .... After this was done, their custom was to depart and meet again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food.”

## Chapter 15

### DISAPPEARANCE OF THE MEAL

Few people question that the early disciples had a weekly celebration feast, during which they observed the Lord's memorial. At the end of the first century, Ignatius, whom tradition says was a disciple of the apostle John, wrote,

“And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a **festival**, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all the days” (*Epistle to the Magnesians*, Ch. IX).

Ignatius' statement seems to indicate the events of the first day of

the week assembly of Christians throughout the first century. Other than the records of this occasion that we find in the New Testament, there is also the testimony of the *Didache* (or, “Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”). The *Didache* was written around the end of the first century. In the teaching of this document, the love feast and Lord’s memorial were still celebrated as one event.

When Ignatius was martyred around A.D. 115, he too mentioned in his writings that the love feast and Supper were still celebrated as one feast. But by the late second century and early third century there was discussion concerning the separation of the two celebrations. By the middle of the third century and first of the fourth century, the separation was complete. During the fourth century the love feast was actually forbidden in some assemblies.

There have been several suggestions concerning why this separation occurred. Some have suggested that when pagan practices in reference to the assembly made their way into the early assemblies of the disciples, the celebration of the love feast had to go. The primary reason for this change, however, was probably the result of a change from small home assemblies to large assemblies in purpose-built “church buildings.” When the early church turned from small assemblies that were primarily home oriented to larger assemblies in public buildings, it was difficult to continue the love feast. The result was that the love feast gave way to the observance of the Lord’s Supper that was customized to a small wafer of bread and a sip of wine in order to accommodate larger gatherings of people.

In the large assemblies the atmosphere of the fellowship of the members changed. The contact of the members with one another during the weekly assembly turned from being communal as it was in the homes, to more formal assemblies where the attendees changed from being participants to becoming spectators. Subsequently, the manner by which the saints communed with one another was abbreviated to what is commonly practiced today in large assembly churches.

By the middle and end of the fourth century, the love feast lost out as a part of the assembly of the disciples on the first day of the week. When church buildings that were first introduced by Emperor

Constantine of Rome, became the common place of assembly in urban centers, the love feasts were banned from the buildings. In fact, at the Council of Laodicea in A.D. 363 the love feast was forbidden in the church buildings. Though this banning was the ruling of an apostate religious movement, the tradition of the abbreviated “chip and sip” supper has continued to this day in the assemblies of most churches.

No Bible historian denies the fact that the Lord’s Supper was observed in the first century by the early Christians in their homes and during a full meal. The environment surrounding the Supper was a full meal of fellowship among the disciples who met regularly on the first day of the week as the disciples did in the breaking of bread in Troas (At 20:7). However, things have unfortunately changed. When the love feast began to disappear from the Sunday fellowship of the saints, the terms “breaking bread” and “Lord’s Supper” were used less frequently in historical records from the second century.

One of the first terms to be used to replace this terminology was the word “Eucharist.” This is a Greek term that means “giving thanks.” It should be noted that this term is nowhere used in Scripture to refer to the Lord’s Supper. The common use of the term in reference to the Supper reflected the change many began to make in their understanding of the purpose of the Supper.

Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200) was one of the first historical writers to use the term “Eucharist” in reference to the Supper. What was a memorial remembrance, or reminder in reference to Jesus coming again, became a “sacrament” where the sinner offered his obedience in a self-sanctifying performance to merit the grace of God. Partaking of the Supper changed from remembering the sanctification of the blood of the cross to obtaining our own self-sanctification by obediently partaking of the Supper. It was a subtle change. This Roman Catholic view of the Eucharist has subsequently been retained by many religious groups, and thus, the Supper ceased being a communal meal of remembrance. It became to many a self-sanctifying religious ritual.

The Eucharist became a somber ritual that was performed by the priestly class of the Catholic Church. As the administrators of the sacrament, therefore, the Catholic priests became the official officers be-

fore whom the people had to appear in order to have the sacrament administered on their behalf. The Eucharist became a legal ritual of the church that was performed only by the clergy.

The Eucharist was not an occasion to celebrate the sanctification that the participants already had through the cross of Christ. It became a ritual by which the participants would obtain sanctification. The leaders in the Reformation Movement moved away from the Catholic priest being the center of reference in performing the self-sanctifying ritual of the Supper. However, the move in the Reformed churches was to the individual member who was to assume his own responsibility of performing the ritual of the Supper in order to sanctify himself.

We must never forget that in the early church the love feast/Supper was an occasion of mutual celebration when the disciples came together to remember and remind the Lord. But when many of the church went into apostasy, all this changed. When the apostasy came, so also did the change in reference to the purpose of the Supper. The love feast was abandoned and the Supper became a self-sanctifying sacrament of sacrifice for the sins of those who submitted to the control of the religious leaders. During the Reformation Movement five hundred years ago, the individual member took the place of the Catholic priest. As a result, the self-sanctifying ritual of the Supper continued within the four walls of denominational churches throughout the world.

The change of the Supper from an occasion to remember the sanctification of the cross and a reminder to Jesus that He come again, changed to a legal ritual. The change of the Supper to such a ritual eventually gave rise in the fourth century to the doctrine of transubstantiation. This was the belief that the bread changed into the literal body of Jesus and the wine into His blood. When adherents were administered the bread they were supposedly given the literal offering of Jesus' body. When the priest drank of the wine, he was drinking of the blood of remission on behalf of the people. The result was that the people came to the sacrament with fear, hoping for the forgiveness of their sins through the wine that had transformed into literal blood, and which the priest drank on their behalf.

In this way, the Roman Catholic priests maintained control over the people. Unless the people showed up for the administration of the Supper by the priests, they received no forgiveness of sins through the priest's administration of the Supper on their behalf. This centrality of the priests in the forgiveness of the people was recently revealed in the movie, *Silence*. The movie was set in the seventeenth century of Japan. The power of the Roman Catholic priests over the persecuted Japanese Catholics of that century was revealed in one statement of the movie: "The people honor you, the priests, above the Christ." They honored the priests because the priests had the power of administering the sacraments of the church.

This belief concerning the priests and Lord's Supper has prevailed for centuries. Many of the Protestant churches that pulled away in protest against the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century carried with them the belief that the Supper event itself was a "self-sanctifying offering" for the sins of the people. Today, many Protestant churches carry on with a ceremonial "chip and sip" ritual that is referred to as "Holy Communion." Emphasis is on the "sacrament" and "elements." It is observed in the atmosphere of something similar to a funeral service wherein the pastor exhorts the prospective partakers to examine themselves in order to determine if they are "worthy" in character to be able to partake of the "holy emblems." As the priests of the Catholic Church, some pastors of Protestant churches today have become the administrators of the "sacrament," and the people continue to be subjected to the pastor's control, thinking that they have no offering for sin if they do not partake of the symbolic cracker and sip of grape juice, or wine.

The Lord's Supper, therefore, has to some continued to be a religious ritual of self-sanctification whereby one justifies himself before God in his obedience to "the law of the Supper." The forgiveness of one's sins is supposedly based on performing the legalities of the Supper. Once the ritual is performed, then the attendee can walk away with the feeling that he has somehow cleansed himself because he has performed a legal law of worship.

Churches continue to have occasional love feasts. However, the

emphasis of the feast seems to be more on the food than on the love that surrounds the mutual covenant that the participants have with one another, which covenant was celebrated by partaking of the blood of the covenant. When the Lord's Supper was removed from the love feast, the feast lost much of its spiritual connectivity between the participants and Christ. As with the Passover meal that Jesus enjoyed with His disciples, the full spiritual significance of the Supper is revealed best when it is seated in the environment of the love feast. Our communing at the love feast prepares our minds to commune with Jesus after the feast through the Supper.

The early disciples believed that it was best that the Supper should be eaten in conjunction with a love feast in order that the participants enjoy the love and appreciation that identifies the disciples of Jesus (See Jn 13:34,35). When the Supper is so observed it seems to retain its significance as an occasion when Christians join in and celebrate their gospel fellowship that comes from the cross. It seems that this was the purpose of the love feast/Supper of the first century Christians.

Because the Supper has been separated from the environment of the love meal, it has often turned into a cold legal ritual similar to the rituals of the religions around us. Whether priests, pastors or official administrators, some have often subjected the people to a morbid ceremony wherein they make the offering for the people. If we compared the typical modern-day medieval performance of the Supper with the celebration of the love feast/Supper that was characteristic of the early church, we would have to confess that there are some significant differences in the atmosphere surrounding the Supper. At least we must recognize that the typical Lord's Supper that is commonly practiced today in assemblies is quite different from that which we read about in the New Testament. This does not assume that what is practiced today is wrong. However, it does indicate that in the area of our observance of the Supper, we are somewhat removed from the custom of the love feast/Supper of the first century.

## Chapter 16

### CHEATING OURSELVES

Was it wrong to abolish the love feast as a part of the Sunday assembly of the saints? Unless one can find a command in the New Testament that instructs the saints to have a love feast every Sunday, the answer to the question is “No.” Especially among those church groups that were more Jewish oriented, the early love feast/Supper was carried over into the early church from the Passover meal. For almost three centuries, many Christians enjoyed their Sunday assemblies as an opportunity for a celebratory meal together. It was a joyous occasion and an opportunity to enjoy one another’s fellowship. And since Christians were the minority faith in a harsh idolatrous world, we can understand why they placed a great deal of emphasis on the fellowship of the love feast. However, we would be presumptuous to affirm that every church of disciples in the first century had a love feast at every assembly.

The Lord’s Supper with a full meal was a joyous occasion that was combined as one event in the week for many of the early disciples. There was much food present during these feasts. In fact, there was enough wine available during the occasion that would allow some in Corinth to become drunk. Nevertheless, the picture we see of the Sunday feast of many of the early Christians was certainly different than the typical Sunday assembly that is witnessed today in the typical gathering of Christians. This is particularly true in reference to urban churches.

#### **A. Feasting together:**

Since there are no commands in reference to the frequency and location of the love feast, then we would conclude that the further we move away from the example of the early church, the more we realize that we are missing something in our relationships with one another. Since all of us seek better relationships with one another in Christ, we realize that we are cheating ourselves. We are cheating ourselves of

the blessings that the early Christians enjoyed from their fellowship around the table of the Lord in a love feast environment.

Since most churches today have removed the love feast from their regular Sunday assemblies, they have deprived themselves of a weekly fellowship of love that naturally prevails during a fellowship meal. They have deprived themselves of a fellowship meal of unity that would help take our minds off our busy world and into being worthy in mind to partake of the Supper.

God made us creatures who love to rejoice together over a good meal. But if a good meal has not been prepared on a regular basis for all the saints, then we cheat ourselves by not being able to enjoy food together as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not that we violate any commandment. We simply cheat ourselves as the *ekklesia* of Christ by not presenting the opportunity for the saints to enjoy the loving fellowship around a feast. Most churches realize this, and thus they plan for occasional love feasts for themselves.

However, when most churches gather on Sunday there is often a ceremonial Lord's Supper. It is quick and simple, and can easily be carried out to serve a great number of people in a large assembly. The elements have almost become a symbol to symbolize the symbols. Jesus meant for the **eating** and **drinking** of the bread and fruit of the vine to symbolize His body and blood. But we now symbolize the **eating** and **drinking** with a small piece of cracker and sip of juice. But again, unless we can find a command that is violated, then certainly such a ceremonial observance is not wrong. The point is not that something is violated, but opportunities are lost. The spirit of eating and drinking together at a meal as the family of God is lost in our efforts to hurry on with the rest of our busy schedules.

The typical "fast-food Supper" that is observed by most churches today reflects the nature of the industrial/business urban culture in which many Christians live. We simply do not want to take the time to enjoy a meal together on Sunday. Some churches take pride in the fact that they can serve the Lord's Supper to a great number of people in a very short time on Sunday morning. In fact, since the attention span of the average Western citizen in listening to a lesson is now less than twenty

minutes, it is difficult to confine the “eating and drinking” of the Supper within the typical “hour of worship.”

Such behavior is a reflection of the nature of our fellowship. An “hour of worship” is something that we have created after our own desires, and according to the hustle and bustle of our life-styles. We thus deprive ourselves of ourselves. We deprive ourselves of a loving fellowship with those with whom we have a common salvation.

What is commendable, however, is that many Christians realize the dilemma they are in, especially in an urban setting. Admittedly, it is quite difficult to have a “congregational love feast” in an urban setting. It is simply impossible to have a love feast of five hundred people or more in the building that was designed for attendance only. Also, when the church is meeting in a school hall, congregational love feasts are virtually impossible.

Nevertheless, many members have not lost their desire to restore the loving communicative atmosphere that is characteristic of a love feast. These are those members who are searching after every assembly to find visitors they can take home with them for their family love feast. Others are looking for someone to take out to eat at a local restaurant. We have found that those members who are filled with gospel love will find some way or means by which to release their love around a plate of food.

Some assemblies in the rural African context have been quite creative in their efforts to restore the love feast. A large pot is set on the fire (coals) close to the place of assembly. Those who seek to donate to the food of the love feast bring their mealie (corn meal) and put it in the pot of boiling water. Others bring “greens.” During the assembly, the food cooks. By the time the assembly is over, the food is cooked and the love feast begins. Everyone must eat on Sunday, and everyone usually eats the same thing. African brothers and sisters have just decided to eat the same thing with one another on the first day of the week.

The preceding is in contrast to some situations in which we have found ourselves. In fact, some have a traditional Sunday meal with their immediate families only. There is nothing wrong with this. The

problem comes when some members seek to speed up the assembly of all the members in order to rush off to their own family meal. In house churches this can present itself sometimes as rude behavior. For example, some host families have often become inconsiderate in this practice. They will be preparing food for their own family in the background of the assembly, waiting for the assembly to conclude in order that the attending members leave the house. Once everyone is gone, then the family can eat their own exclusive meal together.

It is obvious that such behavior is inconsiderate, especially in the context that some attending members have had little food for the week. The Christians who lived in Corinth reversed this practice. They ate all the food before the arrival of those who came from great distances throughout the province of Achaia. When conducting a love feast, such behavior is both rude and inconsiderate, and thus, defeats the purpose of the love feast. When no love is manifested in the event, then the love feast is simply a feast.

The Scriptures say nothing about how many people or where, or how love feasts are to be conducted. In a house setting Jesus took the cup after the Passover meal. What many today do is first partake of the cup in the assembly, and then they have a love feast with some invited guests at their home, or at a local restaurant. The beautiful thing about the law of liberty is that God allows us to use our ingenuity in order to accomplish the purpose of a love feast. As long as we are motivated by the gospel of God's love for us, and we are inclusive in our love feasts, then God is pleased.

It is always good to read the spirit of the early church that was recorded by Luke in Acts 2:41-47. If we can capture the spirit of celebration of the early disciples, we can understand why the Sunday love feast was such an opportunity for rejoicing among the early disciples. The spirit of the early *ekklesia* was reflected in their Sunday meal with the Lord. Are we missing something by seeking to minimize "church" to the point that we cannot spend time with one another around a meal? However, this does not mean that the whole church must celebrate a love feast all together at the same place. It seems that the first disciples in the urban setting of Jerusalem celebrated their love feast from house

to house, not as one congregational meal. They could not go out to a restaurant together, for there were no restaurants. They simply continued “*daily with one accord in ... breaking bread from house to house*” (At 2:46). Those churches that meet in the homes of the members need to closely review this inclusive relationship in reference to the love feast.

## **B. Lack of elements:**

There are different scenarios around the world in reference to our present observance of the Supper. There are the “full meal” brethren where the Supper is observed either during or after a meal. This would be the more fulfilling by which to reflect the participatory fellowship of an entire group of people. Then there are the “chip and sip” brethren who eat the Supper and run because of a lack of time. Or, these may be those who run home or off to a restaurant by themselves.

But then there are the “no element” situations where there is neither fruit of the vine nor bread, or both, available in order to celebrate the Supper. What should brethren who are in such situations do in reference to partaking at the table of the Lord? This is not an uncommon occurrence throughout the world, especially in the desert regions of the world, or during times of famine and war. Thousands of brethren go for months without any fruit of the vine, or even bread. Should such brethren in their assemblies simply forsake the opportunity to remember the significance of the fruit of the vine and bread that are used to stimulate remembrance of their gospel atonement? It may be for this reason that Paul, in reference to the Supper, said, “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup*” (1 Co 11:26).

For many brethren throughout the world, “as-often-as” is very infrequent because they have no fruit of the vine or bread, or both. What they do during their time together is take time to remember, though they do not have the elements to eat and drink. We see nothing wrong with this simply because in the institution of the Supper, Jesus wanted us to focus on the spiritual aspects of the physical props of the bread and wine, not on the elements themselves. There is nothing holy about

bread and wine. What is holy is that which is signified. If there is no bread and wine available, then we can still take time to focus on the holy significance of the body and blood. The lack of bread and wine does not negate the fact that we are the holy nation of God (1 Pt 2:9). (As will be seen later, we must not forget the Israelites in the wilderness.)

### **C. Necessity to eat:**

In reference to the love feast, people must eat food on Sunday. When even the most destitute of people come together, they can eat together. Sunday is not an established day of fasting. If it is not, then everyone can come together in order to eat together, or at least go to their homes in small groups in order to have love feasts from house to house as did the early urban Christians in Jerusalem. The food that would have been prepared to eat in the home after the Sunday assembly can be shared with others who likewise prepared an after-assembly meal for their families. As the Passover meal could be shared with another family in one's home, it seems that the early Jewish Christians continued with this tradition.

We have found that too many Western commentaries have established the rules for eating the Supper and love feast. It is easy for the West to have plenty of food for consumption. But this is not a reality in much of the developing world. The assembly of the saints on the first day of the week, therefore, is an opportunity to share. At least the poor have an opportunity to eat on this day, or to be invited to someone's family meal to eat. Those who have much have an opportunity to share with those who lack. Jesus shared with us, and it is possible that the early disciples realized that the Sunday assembly was an opportunity to have all things in common as Jesus had all things in common with us (At 2:44). Their home meals were changed from exclusive family meals on Sunday to inclusive love feasts for invited guests (At 2:46).

## Chapter 17

### FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

In the New Testament there is no command concerning the time when Christians should assemble on a regular basis. We have only the example of the early Christians as to when they assembled, assuming that verbally the apostles had communicated to them that the first day of the week was the day of regular assembly (At 20:7; 1 Co 16:1,2). However, we must keep in mind that the early Christians also met daily in some situations (At 2:42). We can understand why they met daily if the opportunity was available for them to gather either in small groups or as the entire number of disciples in a particular city. But in the first century, their meeting on the first day of the week was unique as a group of religious people.

We also assume that they made the decision to meet on Sunday simply because **Sunday was a day for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus** (Mk 16:1,2). It was also the day when the gospel was first officially announced to the world (At 2:1 – Pentecost was the first day of the week).

The foundational purpose of their assembly was fellowship, joy, celebration and continual mutual edification. These reasons for assembly were carried over into the love feast/Supper atmosphere of their Sunday assembly. If their emphasis was only on the atoning death of Jesus, then we would expect them to have met regularly on Friday, the day Jesus was crucified for our sins. But they met on Sunday, the day Jesus was raised from the dead. Sunday, therefore, was a day of joy and celebration. It became their special “Lord’s Day” meeting when they came together to celebrate, not to mourn (See Rv 1:10).

In discussing the subject of this chapter, we assume that everyone understands that there was no special Sunday holiday in the Roman calendar of the first century. Christian slaves, and employed people, had to work all day Sunday, just like any other work day of the week. For this reason, the Lord’s Supper was truly a “supper,” a meal that was eaten in the evening when everyone came home from their work.

In reference to the observance of the Supper, Jesus said that His

disciples should do this in reference to the body and blood. Therefore, the question arises concerning how often should we observe the Supper.

We would first consider Acts 2:42 in reference to the disciples' continuation of certain practices immediately after the baptism of about 3,000 people, and thus, the beginning of the church. *“And **they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, and fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**”*

They continued in the breaking of bread, though in this context of Acts 2 we are told only that they continued daily in their evangelistic outreach in the temple courtyard. The breaking of bread was from house to house. When we refer to Paul's statement to the Corinthians concerning the frequency of the early disciples' observance of the Supper, we discover again that there was no specific time. He simply stated, *“For as often as you eat the bread and drink this cup”* (1 Co 11:26).

“Continuing steadfastly” and “as-often-as” do not give a specific day of the week when the early disciples partook of the Supper. In fact, there **is no command** in the New Testament concerning when the early Christians should partake of the Supper. We have only deductions from examples to draw conclusions.

Since we have concluded that “breaking bread” referred to the eating of a full love feast meal, and that the Supper was a part of the love feast, then we could conclude that the disciples partook of the Supper during a love feast when they came together. We must now determine when they came together for the love feast/Supper. This day of the week is not stated in the house to house meetings of Acts 2.

### A. Textual evidence for Sunday:

The disciples did come together for the love feast, during which they partook of the Supper (1 Co 11:21). In the Corinthian context, they came together on the first day of the week (Sunday) (1 Co 16:1,2). The Christians in Troas also came together on the first day of the week to break bread in a love feast/Supper celebration. In the Acts 20:7 statement concerning their coming together, the occasion was specifi-

cally for the purpose of eating the love feast with the Lord's Supper. We are assuming, therefore, that the Supper was observed on the first day of the week when the Troas Christians came together to eat the love meal.

The Acts 20:7 statement by Luke affirms that the disciples in Troas *"were gathered together."* The verb Luke used is in the passive voice. The indication is, therefore, that their coming together was a mutual decision on the part of every member. The majority, at least, had made a decision to eat together in a communal meal on Sunday. The phrase in the verse, *"to break bread,"* is an infinitive. The phrase could therefore be rendered "for the breaking of bread." In other words, the primary purpose for their coming together was the celebration of the love feast/Supper event. If we were to use the example of the Troas disciples, then we would also come together for a love feast on the first day of the week, during which we would partake of the Lord's Supper. What many churches do today is come together for the Lord's Supper, but they forget the example of the love feast, if indeed either the love feast or Supper is restricted to the first day of the week because of an example.

Sometimes we are not consistent in our interpretations. For example, if the Acts 20:7 establishes a mandate for the day on which the Supper is to be observed, **then it also establishes a "law" for the day on which the love feast should be conducted.** Some bind the Supper on Sunday, **but reserve the love feast for any other day of the week.** It seems that some have simply ignored this apparent inconsistency since we have already established that the early disciples partook of the Supper during their breaking of bread in a love feast.

To evade this inconsistency in interpretation and application, we have conjectured that the phrase "breaking bread" refers exclusively to the Lord's Supper. But we are not the ones who must be convinced that the "breaking of bread" in Acts 20:7 refers **exclusively** to the Lord's Supper. This is an understanding of which Theophilus, the recipient of the document of Acts, must be convinced. As stated previously, Theophilus' understanding of the phrase "breaking of bread" was based on the common usage of the phrase in the culture in which he lived. Luke assumed that Theophilus would interpret the phrase to mean a

full meal, which was consistent with its use throughout the documents of Luke and Acts.

The frequency of the disciples' coming together to "break bread" is historically stated in Acts 20:7. Their coming together on the first day of the week is factually stated in 1 Corinthians 16:2. Since the Troas and Corinthian Christians came together on Sunday for the love feast, we would not be presumptuous to conclude that it was their common practice to come together also on the first day of the week in order to partake of the Supper that was celebrated in conjunction with the love feast. Unfortunately, what began in the fourth century was a scaled down "breaking of bread" to the Supper only. "Breaking bread" became a simple partaking of a piece of bread and a sip of the fruit of the vine. Today, we are left with a legacy of what is an abbreviated celebratory event that was originally on the first day of the week in the first century a celebratory meal and Supper event.

In this context, we should also consider the Acts 2:46 historical account in reference to the daily breaking of bread by the early Christians in Jerusalem. "*And continuing **daily** with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart.*"

In the context of daily fellowship meals from house to house, also consider the Jerusalem disciples' daily evangelistic work in the temple courtyard. This is brought out in Acts 5:42: "*And **daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.***" Since this daily activity refers to preaching Jesus as the Christ, then their ministry in the temple was for evangelistic purposes. The believers already accepted Jesus as the Christ. They did not need to be reminded every day from house to house that He was.

Since Acts 2:46 refers to their evangelistic outreach in the temple courtyard, the reference to the breaking of bread from house to house indicates that there were also daily fellowships in their homes as they came together to eat with one another. Acts 2:46 is stating that the early disciples were not only evangelistically active on a daily basis in the temple courtyard, but also daily active in having meals with one another in their homes.

We would suggest, therefore, that in every context where the phrase “breaking bread” is mentioned, **we do not have to include that the Lord’s Supper was observed.** In fact, Luke wanted us to be clear on this because he specifically mentioned “food” in Acts 2:46 when using the phrase “breaking bread.” But he did not refer to food in verse 42.

## **B. Historical evidence for Sunday:**

We add here some quotations of the early church writers only as evidence to point out the fact that the first Christians established a Sunday heritage of observing the Supper. Just a few quotations of the early church writers of the second century confirms the fact that the early Christians assembled on Sunday for the love feast and Lord’s Supper.

### **1. *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (written around A.D. 120):**

“But every Lord’s Day you do gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure” (Ch. XIV).

### **2. *First Apology*, Justin Martyr (around A.D. 140):**

“And on that day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits .... Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks has been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors [helps] the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and

the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead” (Ch. LXVII).

### **3. *Stromata*, Clement of Alexander (around A.D. 194):**

“He in fulfillment of the precept, according to the gospel, keeps the Lord’s Day, when he abandons an evil disposition and assumes that of the Gnostic, glorifying the Lord’s resurrection in himself” (Book VII, Ch. XII).

### **4. *On Idolatry*, Tertullian (around A.D. 200):**

“To the heathens each festive day occurs but one annually; you have a festive day every eighth day [Sunday]” (Ch. XIV).

A few years ago in our travels we came across a group of disciples who were meeting and praising God, thinking they were the only Christians in existence in their area. They were meeting together on the first day of the week and partaking of the Lord’s Supper. They did not know all the arguments in reference to meeting on the first day of the week in order to partake of the Supper. We asked them why they believed that the eating of the Supper on every first day of the week was important. They simply replied, “Well, that is the only natural thing to do.” Gospel-obedient people seek to remember the gospel of the grace of God when they come together. They need no commandment to remember the gospel that motivates them to come together in order to celebrate their salvation.

Christians meet to partake of the Supper, not because of some law they have devised to support their case, but because of the gospel. It is the gospel of the incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, present reign, and coming again of Jesus that motivates Christians to regularly partake of the Supper in order to proclaim to the world that they are gospel-obedient people. It is the gospel of His coming again about which

Christians seek to remind Jesus to come for them. Gospel-driven Christians, therefore, partake of the Supper, not because they must according to law. They do so because they want to reveal their appreciation to God for His grace that came through Jesus. It is because of this grace that Christians have been baptized into one body (1 Co 12:13). It is as Paul wrote,

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not the **fellowship** of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the **fellowship** of the body of Christ? For though we are many, **we are one bread and one body**, for we are **all partakers of that one bread** (1 Co 10:16,17).*

In this revelation of Paul to all of us, the partaking of the bread and cup is more than a memorial of Jesus' incarnate body that was offered and the blood of the covenant that was poured out for the remission of sins. 1 Corinthians 10:16,17 is about us and our fellowship with one another as the *ekklesia* of Christ. Eating and drinking during the Supper, therefore, is the natural thing to do. In eating together, we commune with one another. We fellowship as the one body of Christ. We manifest our oneness by partaking together in assembly of the one bread.

## Chapter 18

### THE REAL WORLD

It is only natural that we reflect on the one body of Christ when all of us eat and drink together at the table of our Lord on the first day of the week. It is not something that we must be commanded to do. It is something that naturally happens when gospel-obedient people realize that they have a common salvation in the body of Christ. Who would not want to do this as often as possible when Christians come together on the first day of the week?

This final chapter is centered around common sense and the repetition of some very important conclusions that have already been stated. God did not issue any commands that violate common sense, or binds on His people things they could not do in unfortunate circumstances.

In all our discussions and disagreements surrounding the Lord's Supper we must always resort to common sense. Unfortunately, there are times when it is difficult to comply with that which we seek to do. But we must remember that God is a God of understanding, mercy and grace. So when it comes to discussing anything concerning the Lord's Supper, everyone must manifest a spirit of understanding, mercy and grace, just as God did toward Israel in their wilderness wanderings. It is this spirit of understanding, mercy and grace that gospel-obedient people seek to remind themselves of when they surround the table of the Lord.

### **A. Following the instructions:**

We need to exercise common sense in following the instructions of Jesus when He said, "This do in remembrance of Me." When He personally revealed to Paul instructions concerning the institutions of the Supper, Jesus did not reveal a particular day of the week when the disciples should observe the Supper. After quoting the Lord's personal instructions to him concerning the Supper, Paul only stated, "*as often as*" (1 Co 11:26).

Under normal circumstances, "as-often-as" was interpreted to be on the first day of the week by the early disciples. We assume that they partook on this day because of a verbal command of the apostles, for there is no written command in reference to the Supper on the first day of the week. It is for this reason that Christians today partake when they come together on the first day of the week.

But there are a few things we must consider because there are two physical elements involved in partaking of the Supper. The Passover of Israel would illustrate that we too have some difficulties in reference to the elements. Consider the time between the Israelites' second and third observance of the Passover. Immediately before they left Egypt they observed the Passover to initiate its institution (Ex 12; Nm 33:3). They did not keep the Passover again until they were in the wilderness of Sinai (Nm 9:1-5). When Israel first came into the land of promise, God instructed them that they must restore the Passover (Dt 16). But

this was about thirty-eight years after they left Mount Sinai, the last time they had kept the Passover. It seems, therefore, that they did not keep the Passover throughout their years of wandering in the wilderness.

We are not told why Israel did not keep the Passover during their thirty-eight years in the wilderness. However, we could certainly assume why they did not. They could not make unleavened bread in the wilderness, for they had no grain out of which to make flour. They were wandering from place to place, not farming in one location. It was a wilderness area. God fed them with quail and “manna” from heaven. The Hebrew word “manna” means, “what is it?” Though they did not know what it was, it was surely not unleavened bread.

When we have no “elements” for the Lord’s Supper, then it is impossible to **eat** the bread and **drink** of the fruit of the vine after the example of the Lord during His last Passover. God never condemned Israel for not keeping the Passover for thirty-eight years. So when we do not have the “legal” elements for the Supper, would it not be fair that we use what we have? After all, the sanctification that we remember is not in legally partaking of the elements, nor in our self-sanctifying efforts to legally comply with some prescribed physical elements. The sanctification is in the blood of the cross, not in our efforts to self-sanctify ourselves through legal “bread” and “wine.”

We must not forget that if any circumstances surrounding the Supper are legal, then we are observing the Supper on the basis of justifying ourselves through the keeping of legalities. And if we are partaking simply to keep law, then we may be partaking in order to justify ourselves through the practice of perfect law-keeping every first day of the week. It might be good here to read again Paul’s statement on matters as this:

*“... knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law, for by works of law no flesh will be justified” (Gl 2:16).*

When Jesus commanded us to keep the Supper in remembrance of Him, He was not referring to keeping the Supper as a legal statute of law in order that we justify ourselves through law keeping. If He were, then we would be partaking of the Supper in remembrance of our own self-justification through the keeping of law. We would be worried about “keeping the law of the Supper.” This is self-justification, which self-justification sets aside the justification of Jesus we have through the cross that we seek to remember in the Supper.

There is no paradox in reference to the Christians’ observance of the Supper. Paul’s statement of 1 Timothy 1:9 possibly helps us understand this point: “*Knowing this, that **the law is not made for a righteous man.***” Gospel-driven people need no law in order to do that which is right. They are righteous according to God’s righteousness, not according to their own righteousness that they presume to accomplish for themselves through perfect law-keeping (See Rm 10:1-3). Therefore, Christians come to the table of the Lord **because they already have been made righteous by the gospel of God.** They are righteous before they arrive at the table. They are not made righteous because they have come to the table in order to accomplish righteousness through the perfect performance of law.

The self-righteous religionist assumes confidence in his weekly obedience to the “law of the table.” On the other hand, those who are imputed with the righteousness of God go away from the table truly thankful for the One who made them righteous through the cross before they arrived at the table. They came to the table because of the righteousness of God through the cross. They did not come to become righteous.

## **B. The elements:**

There are times when the Supper simply cannot be kept. Many brethren throughout the world are often “in the wilderness” when it comes to the bread and fruit of the vine of the Lord’s Supper. Does the absence of the physical elements for the Supper make them lawbreakers? The vast number of the saints today live in developing countries

of the world. They cannot get up on Sunday morning and drive by a food store on their way to the assembly in order to purchase bread and wine.

In many situations in economically depressed areas no one has any money to buy the elements for the Supper. In such situations we have noticed that the contribution is taken up on Sunday just to buy the elements for the Supper for the following Sunday. The purpose of the contribution has thus changed from benevolence and evangelism to buying the elements for the Supper.

Too many of the books and articles that are written on the Lord's Supper have been written by blessed Western brethren who have no struggles with acquiring bread and the fruit of the vine for the Supper. And too many brethren in the developing world extract their research from Western-published books. Western writers usually have little understanding of the real world in which the brethren of the developing world (Third World) live. They subsequently impose guilt on brethren in the developing world who cannot comply with some supposed legal requirements for observing the Supper on a regular basis.

We were once in the country of Guyana in South America on an evangelistic mission shortly after the termination of eight years of communist rule in that country. During the years of communist rule, there was no bread in the country. Guyana is a very tropical country, and thus, the people could not grow their own grain to make bread. They simply went without bread for almost eight years. How would we suppose the brethren in Guyana partook of the "bread" during the Supper during those years?

If several disciples were living in some isolated place in Mongolia, or somewhere in a desert region, it would be difficult for them to have any fruit of the vine, or even bread for the Supper. In some places of the world, people have no knowledge of the fruit of the vine. Wine simply does not exist. And in Islamic countries as Saudi Arabia, not only is drinking alcoholic beverages forbidden, but to have alcohol in one's home is against the law. This is true in most Islamic countries of the world. For those brethren who feel that only wine can be used in the Super, then we would assume that the Supper with wine would always be against the law in Islamic countries.

In some places of the world there is no grain from which to make flour in order to make bread. The Holy Spirit knew that Christians throughout history would sometimes live under such circumstances. For this reason, some who are quite naïve about such matters should be a little more cautious about binding laws surrounding the Supper where God has bound no laws.

In our hermeneutics to interpret all passages that refer to the Supper, we must understand that in some circumstances the Holy Spirit simply left the matter to us to determine what to do. If we make suggestions on the matter, some would take our suggestions and consider them to be law. Therefore, we will make no suggestions lest our opinions become matters of law. When circumstances arise that make it impossible to comply with all matters surrounding the observance of the Supper, then it would be good to at least take a moment to remember what we are to remember in the Supper. We are cross-justified saints of God because our sanctification was accomplished two thousand years ago.

Those who live in urban centers of the world sometimes need to have a reality check on these matters, and thus, allow those brethren who live in those isolated areas of the world where bread and fruit of the vine are virtually nonexistent to determine for themselves what they will do in reference to the elements of the Lord's Supper.

When the early disciples of Judea were scattered because of the persecution (At 8:4), we are sure they did not go forth with grapes in their pockets or grape vines attached to their belts. There would have been many occasions when they did not observe the Lord's Supper for extended periods of time. If one assumes that the observance of the Supper validates the existence of his Christianity, then he will have difficulty in dealing with this common problem that is so prevalent throughout the developing world today. At times, there are simply no grapes, and sometimes no grain to make bread. What would Jesus advise in such situations? Use common sense. He would probably say the same thing He said to an early evangelist on his travels, "as-often-as."

We have found that brethren have a great deal of ingenuity in ref-

erence to the fruit of the vine in the Supper. We have drunk the juice of boiled raisins, squeezed grapes, diluted wine, undiluted wine, and some liquids about which we asked no questions. Out of necessity, we have eaten about every sort of “bread” there is, if indeed some of it could be called “bread.” The word “manna” (“what is it?”) would be more appropriate to describe the “bread” that some have used. Brethren have simply done the best they could in situations where acquiring the elements for the Supper on a weekly basis is a challenge.

The brethren in these difficult areas of the developing world, or isolated and depressed circumstances, must not burden themselves with guilt by reading the essays of some First World “scholar” who can easily go to the nearest food center for the elements of the Supper. We must simply resort to common sense in these matters, realizing that God is pleased with our efforts to do the best we can. Jesus instituted the Supper on the foundation of knowing every situation in which His disciples would be throughout the world and throughout history. Common sense, therefore, must prevail.

### **C. Cheated:**

Now in reference to the partaking of the Supper, some have cheated themselves by the infrequency by which they keep the Supper. If churches have access to the elements for the Supper, it is difficult to understand why they have only an “Easter Supper” or “Christmas Supper.” If churches have access to the bread and fruit of the vine, their infrequent observance of the Supper betrays their lack of motivation by the gospel.

Since the Supper is the center of reference during a covenant meal that the disciples celebrate in fellowship with one another, we wonder about the infrequent observance of the Supper by some churches. We sometimes question whether those who call themselves disciples of Jesus are actually motivated by the gospel in appreciation of what Jesus did on the cross. It is only natural that gospel-obedient disciples remember through the Supper the gospel by which they are saved. However, if one has not obeyed the gospel in baptism, then we can under-

stand why there would be little emphasis in churches that teach one is saved by faith only apart from obedience to the gospel.

There are also those who cheat themselves of extended fellowship together with a simple “chip and sip” ritual. Most churches today observe the Supper after this manner. It is not something that is wrong. It is only something that deprives us of observing the Supper on the foundation of a unifying fellowship meal. We have found that though some brethren yearn for the foundational love feast, out of convenience, they desire to continue with the abbreviated Supper. This is especially true in urban centers where individual Christians have little time for one another in their busy schedules. But also, it is difficult to have a weekly love feast, especially among churches in large assemblies.

It was interesting to note a recent social study in the United Kingdom concerning social interaction. The results revealed that about 60% of the people from their late teens to twenty-five identified themselves as being lonely. We would assume that this percentage is not far off from what exists in many urban centers around the world. Because many churches have ignored any weekly fellowship love feast, regardless of the day on which it is conducted, they may be missing a great opportunity for evangelistic outreach with the gospel of hope.

In order to offer fellowship to the lonely, there are those brethren who seek to restore the foundational love feast in order to enjoy the spirit of celebrating fellowship around the Lord’s meal. This may not always be possible on a regular basis, but at least it is an effort on the part of some to bring the members of the body together in the spirit of fellowshiping over a full meal. Regardless of the regularity of the fellowship love feasts, it is certainly commendable to see churches restoring such in their fellowship with one another.

Someone once complained to us that they could not have the full fellowship meal because there were too many poor members in the church. We truly do not think this brother understood the nature of the *ekklesia* of Christ, nor one of the purposes for the love feast. Some of the Corinthians used the opportunity of the absence of the poor to eat all the food and drink all the wine before the poorer brethren arrived at the general assembly. Would we be this way as the church of Christ by

simply not having a love feast at all? Is not one purpose for the fellowship meal to make sure that poorer brothers and sisters, with their children, have at least one good meal a week? What have we become when we forsake the love feast because we have too many poor brethren among us?

If a church forsakes the feast because of the poor, then that is a church that has lost its identity as a body of Christ. It has simply become an institution of religionists who assemble under the name of Jesus, but have forgotten the function of the gospel in their lives. It might be good to remind ourselves of what James said on this matter, for those to whom he wrote had some problems in their relationship with the poor.

*My brethren, do not show favoritism and hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if there should come into your assembly a man with a gold ring in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in filthy clothes, and you show respect to the one who wears the fine clothing, and you say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor, "**You stand there, or sit here at my footstool,**" have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (Js 2:1-4).*

The Lord's Supper is not a ritual to validate who we are. We are not keeping a ceremonial act to identify ourselves as a church. The Lord's meal is a reflection of who we are in our obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. We observe the Supper, therefore, not out of obedience to law, but out of our response to the gospel of God's grace that was revealed on a cross outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. It is for this reason that there never was any need for a commandment as to when we should keep the Supper. It is a gospel response to keep it "as-often-as" we can in our appreciation for all that we have in Christ. To many of the first Christians, the occasion was every first day of the week when they came together for the purpose of eating the love feast. It would be best to continue this example lest we forget what we are to remember, and specifically forget to remind Jesus to come and deliver us from this world.

When the early disciples came together to eat, they did not come to a funeral service. The love feast was a joyous covenant meal that was different than their common meals they ate daily at home. It was different because it was eaten with covenanted people in order to proclaim Jesus, and in preparation for the final banquet meal that will be eaten when Jesus comes again (Rv 19). And thus we look forward to eating the banquet meal with Jesus upon His return. Until that celebration, we will continue to proclaim the gospel through the eating of the Supper.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**