



Understanding Communion / Breaking Bread

It is important to understand the seriousness of communion/breaking bread, and we are warned it must be taken very seriously in the Bible.

These are the warnings we see in the scriptures.

20 When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. (1 Corinthians 11:20-22)

And;

27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another-- 34 if any one is hungry, let him eat at home--lest you come together to be condemned. About the other things I will give directions when I come. (1 Corinthians 11:27-34)

These are dire warnings, so we need to ensure we treat this matter with the utmost respect.

What is Communion/Breaking Bread?

Communion or Breaking Bread, depending on your preference, is a number of things. First, it is a replication of the Last Supper where the Lord first instructed

His disciples to carry out this ordinance. But to gain insight into what it represents, let us look at what the scripture tells us.

23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

There are several points in these words that tell us much about the communion/breaking bread practice.

1. It is a replication of the Last Supper on the night that Jesus was betrayed
2. We must give thanks for both the bread and the cup before taking it
3. The bread represents the body of Jesus who died for us
4. The cup represents the blood of Jesus poured out for us to establish the New Covenant
5. We take these symbols to remember His death, which He did in obedience to the Father
6. When we take communion/breaking bread, we are proclaiming to all that we believe in the Lord's death until He returns.

These are the things we must remember and know about communion.

One interesting point we should also take away from this is the issue of Easter.

The broad church commemorates Easter to remember the Lord's death and resurrection. However, there is nothing written in the Bible about holding such a holiday. Easter is an invention of the church and it has no biblical or scriptural backing to support it.

The only way that the Lord Himself told us to remember His death is through the practice of communion or breaking bread. And as we saw from the first few scriptures in this article, it is to be taken very seriously.

Why was Communion/Breaking Bread done this way?

It is a fascinating study to look at when trying to understand why Communion/Breaking Bread is carried out the way it is. There are many points of symbolism in it, and one of the main pieces of symbology is the link to a Galilean wedding.

Weddings in Galilee were quite different from other places, and there was all manner of symbolism in them. In fact, as we study the scriptures, we see this symbolism repeated over and over in many aspects of Christianity.

It makes some sense that Jesus would use this symbology of the Galilean wedding, because in the end He will be united with the Church, who is called the Bride of Christ (see Revelation 21:9). If we as the church are the Bride of Christ, then using wedding analogies makes sense.

A Galilean wedding begins with the process of betrothal. The prospective bride and groom meet at the gates of the town with the whole town as witness, and there the terms of the betrothal are read out by the father of the groom, and witnessed by all present. This document is then held as the “betrothal covenant” and it is binding on both bride and groom.

I would add also that this betrothal is quite different from what we call an engagement today. It is more powerful, more binding, and it basically binds the bride and groom together in ways that an engagement does not. From the time that the covenant is accepted, the groom then becomes responsible for his betrothed in all financial matters and is responsible for the costs associated with the wedding, including her gowns and so on.

What is also interesting is from the moment of betrothal when the covenant is agreed, the bride and groom separate and may not come into contact again until the day of the wedding. Just as Christ brought the new covenant into effect at His death, and He returned to the Father until the time the Father chooses for His return, the timing of which no-one knows.

In the same way, it is the father of the groom who determines the day and time when the groom can go and get his bride, and it is usually in the middle of the night, which is why Jesus says in scripture that He will come like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2, Mark 13:32-37, Matthew 24:42-44).

We also see that we need to be ready because we do not know the day or the house when the Lord will return (Matthew 24:42), and in the same way, the people who were invited to the wedding feasts in Galilee had to watch and be ready to go with the groom as he went to collect his bride, so that they could go into the wedding feast. If they were not ready, they missed out because the door to the father’s house was locked after the bride and groom and all of the guests were inside and no-one was allowed in or out until the festivities were completed.

We see this similar situation with the ten maidens or ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. Five of them were ready and five were not, and those who were not were locked out of the wedding feast.

Now, returning to the point in time when the covenant was read out at the main gate to the town, there were several things that took place that point directly to our practice of communion/breaking bread.

Once the covenant was read out, the groom takes a cup of wine and drinks from it. He then offers the cup to his bride, and at this point she can accept the cup and drink from it to seal the covenant and the groom's proposal, or she can reject the proposal at this time by refusing to drink.

This is interesting because at that point the prospective bride has all the power and the free will to accept or reject the offer of marriage. In the same way, people today have the free will to accept or reject the proposal of Jesus to come with Him, or not.

When she drinks and accepts the proposal of marriage under the conditions of the covenant, the cup is then wrapped up and is not used again until the wedding feast takes place. The groom then says words to this effect, "I will not drink again from this cup until I drink it anew in my father's house." This is basically the same as Jesus stated at the Last Supper in Luke 22:18.

Then there is bread offered, from which the groom takes a piece and then offers it to the bride to take a piece. They both eat the bread to consummate the betrothal.

The symbolism of the eating of the bread in the wedding is to show they are now one. It basically shows they are in "communion" with each other because eating the bread symbolises that "what is in you is also in me." And because of this, they are one.

In like manner Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be in His people so that what was in Jesus, is in us too. And in this way, we are one with Him.

As an example of this from Judaism, we see Paul describe it this way:

16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? (1 Corinthians 10:16-18)

When we take the cup and the bread in communion, we are participating in the sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We as Christians all over the world are one body because we participate in the one bread and the one cup that represent the body and blood of Christ. We are partners in the sacrifice of Jesus because we participate in the bread and the cup.

This is the same as saying, “What is in you, is in me.” We are together because we partake of the same sacrifice as Jesus and are part of His sacrifice.

These marriage analogies are not well known today. But those who were listening to Christ in the early church would have understood exactly what this symbology represented.

And there is more symbology from the wedding and betrothal practices peppered throughout the New Testament.

So, this is a basic understanding of what communion represents and why it is to be taken so seriously.