

**THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD**  
**ITS HISTORY, ITS OBSERVANCE, ITS MEANING**

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# FOREWORD

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**T**o the disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ who loves the Master and reverences His Word, there is no occasion more important and no privilege more precious than the Breaking of the Bread. “This do in remembrance of Me”, is both a loving invitation to be embraced and a clear command to be obeyed.

Yet it is nothing less than tragic that, so soon in Christian history, this precious ordinance was affected by accretions and associations which were never indicated by the Lord or His apostles. In due course this led to grave errors such as the “mass” and the acceptance of the bread and wine as means of grace, in the sense of themselves imparting spiritual life. Such vital issues are traced in this booklet, together with others, such as the simplicity of the prescribed acts, and the clear example of observance, collectively, on the first day of the week. The simple and uncomplicated observance of these latter scriptural principles would have precluded many of the errors which have come to surround the ordinance of the Remembrance.

It was, we must remember, “His own” (John 13:1) to whom the Master gave the command, “This do”, thus establishing the privilege as one which should come within the reach of all believers. The context and setting in which this should be expressed is, however, shown here to be plainly set out in the New Testament. It is part of the collective service of the people of God, gathered in churches of God. By their uniform understanding of the doctrine of the Lord, and the unity of their practice in the spiritual service of God’s house, they seek in appropriate humility to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the centre of all this is shown to be the Remembrance of the Lord Jesus; something to be cherished carefully and practised prayerfully in the sound condition

of heart required of disciples enjoying such an exalted privilege, closely associated as it is with the holy priesthood service of “living stones built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5).

It is appropriate that this should form the subject matter of one of a series of booklets published by Hayes Press on major topics of scripture doctrine. These booklets will aim to set out clearly and comprehensively the understanding within the Churches of God of the subjects considered. They will be made widely available to Christians for prayerful consideration. It is hoped that the truths expounded will strike a chord of warm appreciation with many; and, perhaps in some instances, challenge the heart to fresh thought and meditation on great truths of the faith.

The authors, publishers and distributors of these booklets will welcome correspondence or discussion with readers. It is our prayer that the Lord will richly bless this work, and others which will follow, in the Lord's will.

John Terrell

# CHAPTER 1: THE INSTITUTION

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There are three references to the Breaking of the Bread in the Gospels: Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25 and Luke 22:14-20. There is no mention at all in the Gospel by John. The account given by Luke is the most detailed of the three, and it will be referred to frequently in these pages.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Church of God at Corinth, however, makes a very important contribution to our understanding of the subject. By special revelation he was able to write corrective ministry on the observance of the Breaking of the Bread, as it would appear that the church there had erred considerably in this particular matter. Not only does the Apostle describe the institution in similar terms to the Luke record, but he clearly places the observance in the setting of a Church of God, stressing the importance of a proper spiritual condition and the correct church organisation as prerequisites to the weekly observance of the Breaking of the Bread (1 Cor.11:23-34).

## **The Occasion**

The Breaking of the Bread was instituted on the evening of the Jewish Passover (Luke 22:15). The Lord had expressed His very strong desire to eat this Passover with His disciples. He knew that His hour had come. The cross lay before Him, with all that it meant for Him and for us. His disciples had been His close companions for more than three years, and He knew the effect His departure would have upon them. He had many things to say to them, which the Apostle John has recorded so fully for us, and the occasion of the Passover meal was significantly the time when He chose to say them. He had in mind, however, not only those who were with Him that night, but also all who would be His disciples down

the centuries until His return, who, although never having seen Him, would love Him and rejoice at His remembrance.

In the Saviour's mind, there hung over the whole event the dreadful act of betrayal. He knew the one who would betray Him, and it was after the traitor had gone out to do his foul deed that He gave this new ordinance and His heart to heart talk. The importance of the betrayal cannot be ignored. The Apostle Paul speaks of "the night in which He was betrayed" (1 Cor.11:23), and the horror of what Judas was about to do obviously weighed heavily upon the Master's spirit. He knew that it was but the human expression of the power of the forces of evil which were to be brought to bear on Him in the next few hours. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness", He could say (Luke 22:53), but of all this the other disciples seemed to be completely unaware.

### **The Washing of the Feet**

Luke 22:7-13 describes the wonderful way in which the Lord had arranged for the Upper Room to be made available for their use. It is possible that as they entered the room the disciples had failed to notice the water pot which by custom was there for the washing of the feet. We learn later about the discussion they had had regarding their relative positions within the group, and the subject seems to have been an obsession with them. In great humility the Lord took off His robe, girded Himself with a towel and went from one to the other washing their feet. Peter protested, but the others apparently submitted to the very practical object lesson. The Lord's words were weighty. Having again put on His garments, He said, "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call Me, Master, and, Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:12-14).

Clearly the disciples were unable to grasp the importance of the Lord's words, because they returned again to their discussion about precedence.

The Lord had to teach them the difference between His kingdom and the kingdoms of the world in the matter of rank and precedence.

### **The Upper Room Ministry**

Following the lesson of the washing of the feet, the rest of the conversation seemed to take place around the table during the Passover meal. The Apostle John has recorded for us very fully the Lord's teaching on that memorable night. The revelation about His departure and the preparation of a place for them; the unity which existed between Himself and His Father, and the promise of another Comforter who would play a vital role in the lives and witness of the disciples; the lesson about fruit-bearing from the vine and its branches and the new commandment to love one another; the final intercessory prayer, uttered in their hearing.

How much of that lovely discourse they understood that night is difficult to say, but later, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there is no doubt that it returned to them with a clarity of understanding which would remain with them as long as they lived. We thank God for the light that shines across our Christian experience also from that night in the Upper Room.

### **The Institution**

It is difficult to determine in the events of that evening, the actual time when the institution took place. Perhaps it was before He began to speak, for the Passover meal would lead naturally into the taking of the loaf of bread and the cup of wine, and both events would provide an appropriate atmosphere for the teaching that would follow. The act of the institution is recorded simply yet clearly in the three gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is not possible to do better than to quote the words which describe the event:

“And He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave to them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me. And the cup in like manner after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood, even that which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:19-20).

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and He gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it” (Matthew 26:26-27).

“And as they were eating, He took bread, and when He had blessed, He brake it, and gave to them, and, said, Take ye: this is My body. And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave to them: and they all drank of it” (Mark 14:22-23).

There could be no mistaking the purpose of what the Lord had done. His desire was clearly expressed: “This do, in remembrance of Me” With His understanding of our failures, and in His great wisdom, He so ordained that His remembrance would be at the core of our spiritual lives. Whatever else of the events of that night might have been forgotten, it seems certain that those simple words and actions would remain with them for all their lives. It certainly became an integral part of the on-going activity of the new Church of God at Jerusalem, for we read that after the events of the day of Pentecost, the preaching, the baptizing and the adding: “they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).



## CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORICAL (DISPENSATIONAL) SETTING

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The Breaking of the Bread belongs exclusively to the Dispensation of Grace. Its observance by the disciples could have no relevance before the Saviour died upon the cross, and the Apostle Paul made it clear that it was “till He come” (1 Cor.11:26). It will therefore span the whole of the Christian era, yet it had its institution in the closing hours of the previous age, the age of the law of Moses.

As we have seen, its historical setting was in the night of the Jewish Passover; an event above all other Passovers, for it was the one of which the Lord Himself had said, “With desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer”. Its importance lay in the fact that the Great Passover Lamb was Himself present that night in the midst of Israel, and they knew it not. The city of Jerusalem was, as usual at Passover time, thronging with people. Jews had come from near and far to keep the annual remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt. They were unaware of the difference of this occasion. They did not know that their Messiah had come and that the Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God, was about to be sacrificed.

### **A Jewish “Remembrance”**

For Israel it was a night of memories. They had been commanded by God that throughout their generations they had never to forget the night of their redemption from Egypt. The manner of the keeping of the Passover may have been different from that first dramatic night when they were leaving Egypt behind for ever. Then, they were going out into the wilderness, slaves just delivered from bondage, to meet Jehovah at Sinai. They were about to become a nation, a holy nation, a nation of Kings and

Priests, covenanted to God by the law delivered to them at Sinai. They were to become a highly privileged people among whom God wished to dwell and to have His sanctuary.

One by one the privileges of their calling were lost to them in the centuries which followed, through disobedience and rebellion. They were still clinging to their memories, unaware (except for a faithful few) that the purposes of God in Christ were about to be fulfilled in their day and that the privileges of their divine nationhood were about to pass from them to another people.

### **The Transference of the Kingdom**

The disciples had heard their Master speak to Israel the epoch-making words: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). Later to them He had said: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

In these clear and unmistakable terms the Lord had made known that Israel had for the present forfeited their claims to be the people of God. The Passover, then, which they were keeping that night would be the last which had any real significance. The new people of God, the first of whom were the disciples of Jesus, were that night being given a new "remembrance" to keep, a remembrance which was much more significant and meaningful than the Passover: "This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19).

### **The New Covenant**

The covenant with Israel was "becoming old and waxing aged and nigh unto vanishing away" and that which was new, and making the first one old, was a better covenant with better promises. Christ, our Passover, was about to be sacrificed for us. The great type of the Paschal lamb was now

to be fulfilled in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

From then until now, and on until the day of His return, this new remembrance, this Breaking of the Bread, has been and will be kept by faithful disciples of Christ. Its observance began in the first Church of God at Jerusalem when "They continued stedfastly in ... the breaking of the bread". Over the years, many undoubtedly have had in mind the words of the Apostle, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. 11:26), aware that their returning Lord in His Person would replace the simple emblems, and the Breaking of the Bread, in its turn, would, like the Passover, fade away into the dimness of history, its dispensational purpose having been fulfilled.

## CHAPTER 3: THE OBSERVANCE IN THE EARLY CHURCHES

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After the night of the betrayal and the institution of the Breaking of the Bread, there followed the dramatic events of the Cross, the garden tomb and the morning of the resurrection. When the mist of their bewilderment began to clear, the marvellous truth of resurrection with all its implications dawned upon the disciples.

### **The Things Concerning the Kingdom of God**

For forty days after His resurrection Christ sojourned with them. Unforgettable days those would be to the disciples, as they listened to their risen Lord discoursing on the “things concerning the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). One cannot but contrast their inability to comprehend His teaching in the Upper Room when He said that they would understand later, with their understanding of His teaching during the forty days. The veil had been lifted from their eyes, their doubts had evaporated, the petty contentions about precedence forgotten; they were in the daily presence of their risen Lord. They would hang upon His words. His teaching would now be better understood by them. The Kingdom of God had come and would find its expression in the churches of God which, as a result of their labours, would be planted in many places in the years ahead.

### **The Apostles' Teaching**

The Apostles were taught by the Lord the things concerning the Kingdom. The Faith, the body of doctrine, was delivered to them to hold, to implement, to teach, and to defend. The constitution of the Kingdom, its rule and government, its customs and practices were given to them in clear and unmistakable terms, for upon them was placed the responsibility of establishing the Kingdom of God, according to the divine pattern.

The things the Apostles were taught became in turn the Apostles' teaching. There were twelve men but they had one teaching, and one teaching only. The Church of God at Jerusalem was the first church to have the privilege of their verbal teaching and in this the church continued steadfastly. Later, as other churches were planted, they also in many cases had the same oral teaching from an Apostle and became imitators of the churches in Judaea. In this way the pattern of sound words was believed and practised in all the churches, and the Holy Spirit, in His over-ruling, ensured that this body of teaching was recorded for us in the written ministry of the Apostles to these early churches.

### **The First Church of God**

Ten days after the ascension, on the day of Pentecost, when they were all together with one accord in one place, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. In that state of unity of thought and position, the descending Spirit fused them together, as it were, in the eternal and impregnable unity of the Body of Christ. The Church which Christ had promised, of which He said "I will build My Church", became a reality. That day it had its earthly beginning, and from that moment they were united to Christ and to each other, and it could never again be otherwise.

The Apostles then began, with the power of the Spirit, to preach, and the astonishing events recorded in Acts chapter 2 took place. That same day when the Church the Body of Christ had its beginning, those who were together, and those who were later added (Acts 2:41), formed also the Church of God at Jerusalem. They gave witness and expression to the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and among their several continuing functions in Divine service was that of the Breaking of the Bread.

"They then that received his word were baptized ... and they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

## **The First Day of the Week**

It is necessary to distinguish between the observance of the Lord's remembrance and the daily eating of food. The two things are often described in similar words and appear almost side by side in Acts chapter 2. Verse 42 speaks of the ordinance, while verse 46 speaks of the ordinary meals of the early Christians. Unless this is understood, one could make the mistake of assuming that the ordinance was observed on occasions other than when the church was together.

The words of the Apostle in 1. Corinthians 11 seem directed to this very point when he teaches clearly the difference between eating at home and the observance of the Lord's remembrance. It was obviously an early ploy of the Adversary to destroy, if possible, the meaning and importance of the weekly remembrance. The church at Corinth was together *in church* (*en ecclesia - Gk.*) and on such occasions they carried out the Lord's command. There is no record of it having been observed at any other time.

Later in the Acts of the Apostles we read that the Church in Troas was together on the first day of the week to break bread and the occasion was also used by the Apostle for the teaching of the word of God (Acts 20:7). When we read this in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 16:2 and Revelation 1:10 (comparing also John 20:19), a clear picture emerges. There was a definite movement by the early Christians away from the Jewish Sabbath, and the first day of the week, the day of the Lord's resurrection, became the day on which those in the churches gathered together to break bread and to engage in other spiritual activities. It is also important to discern that it was on the first day of *every week* - not the first Lord's day of the month, or of the quarter.

## **Early Departures from Simplicity**

Although the early churches continued steadfastly to remember the Lord in this way, it was not many years before the purity and simplicity of the

Breaking of the Bread began to be affected. The false teachers with their evil teachings, and the pagan environment in which the early Christians lived, began to have their effect upon the pattern of sound words. Heresies began to be taught. Truths concerning the Person of the Lord came under attack. The Breaking of the Bread became clothed with ritual and ceremony and the bread and wine themselves became objects of reverence. To them were attributed qualities they did not possess. The simple elements became to some a sacrifice and the evil doctrine of transubstantiation was propounded. The partaking of the bread and wine became a sacerdotal privilege with the establishment of a priestly class.

Satan had achieved a great success. The churches of God planted by the Apostles in their primitive constitution and in that precious unity of doctrine and practice, gradually became unrecognisable as such, and by the end of the Apostolic age it would appear that many of them had in fact ceased to be true lampstands of divine testimony. The Lord was not among them. Many of the place names of the early churches mentioned in the New Testament continued to appear as churches in the evolving and expanding organisation that later became the empire of the (so-called) Bishop of Rome. These churches became influential, wealthy and powerful politically, but the power of the Spirit of God was not among them, and so each in turn ceased to be a true lampstand in divine testimony.

The precious inheritance of divine truth was largely lost in the centuries of darkness and ignorance which followed and that unique part of it, the Breaking of the Bread, became largely unrecognisable as such. The darkness deepened, ecclesiastical corruption of the most serious kind was all around, and the most evil crimes were perpetrated in the name of Christianity. In a spiritual sense it could be said: "And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Genesis 1:2).

## CHAPTER 4: THE REDISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH

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**E**ven in the darkest of ages in the world's history there have been men and women faithful to God. For centuries, while the excesses of Rome ravaged Europe, we know that in many places there were those who abhorred what was going on. They recoiled from the evil doctrines and could not accept the sovereignty of the so-called Bishops of Rome. According to the light they had they remained true to God and to His word, and it seems certain also that as part of their Christian experience, and in their own way, they would keep the ordinance of the Breaking of the Bread.

### **Light After Darkness**

In the goodness of God, however, “the Spirit of God was moving upon the face of the waters” and men began to return to the word of God. Slowly the precious truths were re-established by men whose names are for ever honoured among evangelical Christians as those who, under God, brought about a new age. The whole world awakened from the darkness of ignorance and superstition to a new day of divine enlightenment and to the re-establishing of God's word as the final authority among many Christians.

It is not part of our study to examine in detail the re-emerging of divine truth. The process was not the work of a day, but rather of centuries, and it was not until the early part of the 19th century and the first meetings of the Brethren movement that there emerged again in the minds of some the truth of the Breaking of the Bread. To some of those early brethren it became a vitally important truth, the focal point of their exis-



tence as a movement, and the determinant of the basis of their gathering together.

### **The Priesthood of All Believers**

The gatherings for the Breaking of the Bread became also the occasion when they offered up praise and worship to God, and ministered the word of God to each other. The priesthood of all believers began to be taught and the movement away from the established churches, with their priestly classes, grew in momentum. The gatherings of Christians grew also in number and the spirit of evangelism developed in their midst. The movement which had begun in continental Europe was drawing near its climax in the British Isles. The formation of the Brethren movement was in effect the preliminary for that which was to follow - the establishment of the Churches of God.

### **Access to the Lord's Table**

There was a general acceptance by those early companies of Christians that all those who were believers on the Lord Jesus Christ had the right to come and partake of the bread and wine. However, this lovely ideal ran counter to much of the teaching of the established churches and the "Communion" which they practised, whereby non-believers could take part in that communion. As a result many of the adherents of these churches began to gather separately with other Christians to break bread, while continuing in their own associations for other activities.

This principle of the "open table" was destined however to become a fundamental issue upon which the brethren movement eventually divided into two main camps. Some maintained that all who belonged to Christ had the right to come together for this purpose with others of like faith, at any time and in any place. Others discerned that life in Christ was not enough, and that soundness in doctrine and sanctity of life were equally

important in determining whether an individual was able to take part in the Breaking of the Bread.

### **Divisions in the Brethren Movement**

The debate was long and bitter. Letters were written, papers were published and conferences were held, but no agreement emerged, and the Brethren movement which began with such promise and great potential became divided. One faction went into an exclusivism which in the course of time became more and more entrenched and isolated from other believers. The other faction became “open” in its basis of gathering and, because of the wide variety of “openness” which resulted, became fragmented, and with the fragmentation came a determination to maintain the individuality and autonomy of each assembly. As a result, the Open Brethren movement today is without any constitution, and has no means of achieving a unity of doctrine or practice. It has become a heterogeneous and amorphous movement with no corporate direction.

### **No Uniformity in Observance**

As the Breaking of the Bread became re-established, we are unable to trace precisely why its observance became so varied. There appears to have been no attempt to standardize the observance, and, in any case, it seems unlikely that a standard would have been acceptable, since there was no forum for discussion where a consensus could have been achieved. It seems more apparent, however, that the manner of observance was as varied as it was possible to be and that which should have been the means of unity and edification among Christians became rather the cause of the most heated controversies and the most devastating divisions.

Meanwhile, in the non-conformist churches there was also a growing awareness of the importance of the ordinance to the life of their members and to the spiritual quality of the denomination. At no time, how-

ever, does there appear to have been any attempt to arrive at a uniformity of observance. Rather, there developed a wide variety of ceremonies and rituals without even a general acceptance that the Breaking of the Bread has its place firmly on the first day of every week. The practice of the established churches was not affected by these outside developments. The Communion service with its liturgy and ceremony has remained virtually unchanged.

### **The Return to Simplicity**

Although in this particular matter of the Breaking of the Bread the Brethren movement may be criticised, it is true to say, however, that throughout the nineteenth century it brought about a whole new understanding of the word of God. Men of deep spiritual insight, on both sides of the division, by their written and spoken ministry exalted the Person of Christ, and in relation to this, the Breaking of the Bread became the central occasion around which each assembly had its being, and associated with it, the children of God worshipped the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a consequence, the ordinance of the Breaking of the Bread returned in large measure to the original simplicity in the manner of observance, and in equally large measure to its importance in the lives of Christian men and women. Their spiritual meditation was enriched, their appreciation of Christ was deepened and their understanding and teaching of the word became Christ-centred.

In this way the recovery of truth was nearing completion, but the true setting of the ordinance was not yet understood. The ordinance of the Breaking of the Bread is firmly placed in its setting in a Church of God by the teaching of Acts 2:41-42: "They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and the prayers". This scripture, and not Matthew 18:20, is the authority for gathering together, and for

continuing steadfastly in, among other things, the keeping of the ordinance.

# CHAPTER 5: THE OBSERVANCE TODAY

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**I**t is necessary to approach the study of how the ordinance should be kept with the utmost care. No man-made components can be inserted into the order of its keeping. There is no room for “good ideas”, human ingenuity or compromise. From the scripture references, we can clearly identify the key elements in the ordinance and so arrive at an understanding of what our Lord commanded us to do.

## **The Order of the Remembrance Today**

The essential elements are as follows:

- There are two materials in the ordinance, bread and wine,
- The bread is in the form of a loaf and the wine is in a cup.,
- There is a taking of the loaf,
- a giving of thanks for it,
- a breaking of it,
- a distribution to all present,
- a partaking of it individually,
- a discerning,
- a taking of the cup of wine.
- a giving thanks for it,
- a pouring out,
- a distribution to all present,
- a partaking of it individually,
- a discerning.

*(There is a possible reservation relative to the cup of wine, as to whether the cup should be taken and the wine poured out. This is accepted as a matter of difficulty, and will be dealt with later.)*

While these essential elements can be identified readily, the scriptures referred to do not give specific guidance as to how, where, when and by whom it should be done. The actual step by step observance must therefore be arrived at by a spiritual understanding of its meaning and by the necessity for the observance to be carried out in a manner worthy of the Lord we seek to remember.

### **The Observance Among the Churches of God**

As a result of a sincere desire to attain a unity in the observance of the Breaking of the Bread and to have uniformity in the manner of its observance, the Churches of God have for many years observed the ordinance in the way which is now described. This unity was achieved by the elders of the churches coming to a general mind on the matter after prayerful consideration together the issues involved. The manner of the observance is as follows:

- A brother acting on behalf of those gathered together takes a loaf of bread into his hands
- he thanks God for it
- he breaks the loaf
- he passes it to those gathered
- they all break a portion from it and eat it.

When that has been done:

- the same brother takes the cup of wine into his hands

- he thanks God for it
- he pours it out
- he passes it to those gathered
- they each drink of it.

In carrying out these actions the following orderly method is observed:

- The observance is carried out at the very beginning of the occasion when those in the local Church of God are gathered together for the first time on the first day of the week. It is the purpose for which the church has gathered together and we judge that the Breaking of the Bread should be carried out at the commencement of the service.
- It is considered essential that one person should act on behalf of the Church in both these actions. When he does so, in a sense he loses his individuality in that he speaks and acts for all the others. It should not always be the same person on each occasion, but rather as the Holy Spirit may move different individuals on different occasions, but for each observance, *one* brother should give thanks for the bread and also for the wine, as on the occasion of the institution the Lord Himself took both the bread and the wine, so setting us the example.
- In giving thanks for the loaf he may do so in a few words, but it is the normal practice to express an appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ to His God and Father as the Spirit may lead, or to contemplate the greatness and glory of God and of His wonderful plan of salvation. This should take no more than a few minutes, at the end of which the assembled company should say the "AMEN".

- This same brother should then break the loaf and pass it to those of the church who are present to partake of it. The breaking of the bread is a symbolic act, for in breaking it he is doing something which can never be undone. “This is My body which is given for you”, were the words of the Lord. He went to the cross and was put to death. It was the final act of giving Himself; it was the final act of sacrifice. The loaf need only be broken once, although for convenience it may be necessary to break it into three or more portions to facilitate circulation, but it should be left to each individual to break off a portion, and to eat it.
- After an acceptable pause, when the unused portions of the loaf have been returned to the table, the same brother should likewise thank God for the cup of wine. Again in a few words, or perhaps also expressing some Spirit-led meditation on the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, at the end of which those present should say the “AMEN”.
- He should pour the wine into another cup, or cups, and pass to each one to partake of it. It is not the general practice in the Churches of God to have individual cups, although there may be special circumstances where this may be necessary. Normally the number of cups is limited to that which may be necessary to facilitate circulation to the number of persons present.

There may be persons present who are not in a church of God, and are simply observers. These would not, of course, share in the bread and wine, since only those believers who have been baptized and added to a Church of God can take part in the Breaking of the Bread (Acts 2:41-42).



The two problems previously mentioned in the matter of the cup of wine have caused difficulty among Christians and have resulted in a variety of procedures. It is accepted that while scripture clearly says the Lord “took bread”, it does not say that He took a cup of wine. On the other hand, it seems the most natural thing for Him to do with the wine as He did with the loaf - to take it into His hands as He thanked God for it. He uses the pronoun “this” (not “that”) when He said, “this is the cup of the new covenant ...” which would seem to indicate that He had the cup in His hands. This view is also supported by the words, “in like manner” which suggest that as He had taken the loaf, given thanks, broken it and passed it round, a similar sequence of events took place with the cup of wine.

There has also been considerable debate as to whether the wine should be poured out. Scripture does not say that the Lord poured out the wine, and it is possible that He simply passed it round in the original cup. One must look therefore to see if there is any other indication as to what He did. The words, “in like manner” may again provide the answer. When He took the loaf He gave thanks for it, broke it, and then said, “this is my body”. The words “in like manner” would suggest that He took a cup, gave thanks for it, did something and also said something. We know what He said, but we do not know what He did.

It is possible to see a parallel with that which He did with the bread. As he broke the loaf before giving it to His disciples, in like manner He poured the wine before passing it to them. As the breaking of the loaf was a symbolic act, the “in like manner” would also indicate a symbolic act with the cup. “This ... cup ... which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20). The parallel to the “breaking” would be the “pouring”, a symbol of the pouring out which He accomplished by giving Himself on the cross, when He shed His blood and paid the great price for our salvation.

These are areas of discernment. When there is no clear word from the Lord, we must discern by the careful reading of the Word and by seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit what is right and proper to be done.

### **When and by Whom It Should Be Observed**

We have already noticed in Chapter 3 that the first day of the week quickly replaced the Sabbath Day in the lives of the early Christians. The practice of observing the Breaking of the Bread came to be established in the Church of God at Jerusalem and it was undoubtedly the will of the Lord that it should be so. It was part of the "things concerning the Kingdom of God", which He passed on to His Apostles during the forty days of His sojourning with them before His ascension.

The missionary Apostles would establish in every church of God which was planted, the pattern of divine service which the risen Christ had ordained, and the picture emerges of the New Testament churches of God, spread abroad throughout the Roman Empire, having a uniformity of doctrine and practice, and a fellowship together in the practical out-working of their life and witness to the world of their day.

With such a pattern so clearly defined in the churches of the first century, one is surprised at the confusion of practice which exists today. The regular weekly, first day observance is no longer the general practice among all Christians and sometimes "the first day of the week becomes the first Sunday of the month, or of the quarter, or some other arbitrary period of time. The word of Scripture is clear. "And upon the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread (Acts 20:7), "and they continued stedfastly" to do so (Acts 2:42).

The picture also emerges of the Breaking of the Bread being observed by the churches of God of that day. There is never any suggestion that it was carried out other than by a church of God. Individuals did not observe the Breaking of the Bread, nor did groups of people who were not in

churches of God. It had its observance only by those who, like their fellow believers in Jerusalem, were born again, baptized as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and added to a church of God.

### **The Importance of a Right Condition**

The importance of a proper spiritual condition as a prerequisite to taking part in the observance of the Breaking of the Bread cannot be over-emphasised. The Apostle in his corrective teaching to the church at Corinth gives a warning of the serious consequences of eating and drinking of the bread and the wine when in an unworthy condition (1 Cor.11:27). It is the individual's responsibility to examine himself before taking part in the Breaking of the Bread. The Apostle said, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat", but it is necessary to know what such an examination should involve.

Sins of the grosser kind involve a putting away from the church and therefore access to the Breaking of the Bread is not possible for those who have been so dealt with. It is possible however, for such sins not to become known to others and the individual involved may remain in the church. The teaching is clear in 1 Corinthians 5:6, that the presence of such in the church defiles the whole church, in the same way as a small amount of leaven permeates the whole dough. The church, if it becomes aware of such sin, must "purge out" so that it may be pure and wholesome again. The solemn responsibility rests with the individual not to hide such grosser sins, but to confess them and have them dealt with in the God-given way. This is part of the self-examination process.

There are other sins, however, which, although they do not merit the extreme action, nevertheless must be dealt with before one can be worthy of partaking. Such may be known only to the individual and to God, and for such confession and forgiveness is possible (1 John 1:9). This should take place before partaking of the emblems.

Personal relationships between brothers and sisters in the Lord may be strained. Offence may have been caused and therefore full fellowship may not be possible in the Breaking of the Bread. This situation must be dealt with before gathering together for the observance. None of these situations may exist, but individuals may be in a low spiritual condition. Faith may be weak, Christian living may be very difficult, doubts and fears may be prevalent and the pressures of life too much to permit full pleasure at the Remembrance. In whatever condition we are on the first day of the week, we are required to conduct this self-examination, and to assess our worthiness or otherwise to observe the Breaking of the Bread.

Such an assessment can only be subjective and no one else may decide for us. The Apostle's words, however, are clear and solemn: "Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord" (1 Cor.11:27). However, it is worth noting that the Apostle goes on to say, "But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup (1 Cor.11:28). This is a *positive* exhortation to the believer. The object of the examination is that it should lead to the partaking of the emblems, not that it should result in abstention from so doing.

## CHAPTER 6: THE MEANING OF THE OBSERVANCE

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In His wisdom the Lord knew how important the Breaking of the Bread would be to His disciples after His departure. It was essential for each one of them to be able to remember Him, because, with the passing of time, even the most vivid of recollections fade in the memory. The Lord provided for this by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell within each of them, and the Spirit would, among His many blessings, recall to their memories the things concerning the Lord Jesus, particularly the things He had said to them (John 14:26). This blessed Person dwells also with every believer today and still provides this important aid to our memories.

However, there is more to the Breaking of the Bread than just remembering. One can remember at any time, and the Christian may often meditate alone and in private upon the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Breaking of the Bread is a corporate act of remembrance which cannot be carried out other than when believers are gathered together for that purpose. It is a commemoration; a repetition of what He Himself did on the night of the Institution.

The Apostle Paul taught the Church at Corinth that the observance of the Breaking of the Bread was also a proclamation: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. 11:26). It is part of our corporate witness, and in the taking part of the emblems we declare to any who might witness, the fact, and the effect of the Lord's death. Such witnesses to the actual observance will certainly be those who are present, but it may also be a witness to unseen eyes, whose interest in what is being done here on earth may be intense.

It is also a time of fellowship together when we can share, not only in the elements of bread and wine, but also in our thoughts and appreciation of the Lord and of His God and Father. The broken loaf and the poured-out wine are the focal points of the meditation of those who are gathered together. In thought they can span the whole of time from eternity to eternity, as they contemplate the Bible-wide revelation of God's plan of salvation, and they can muse on the fulfilment of that plan in the coming of the Son of God into the world, the short years of His earthly sojourn and the final offering of Himself upon the cross.

### **The Broken Loaf**

The breaking of the loaf is a symbolic act. As the loaf is taken and thanks offered for it, the Lord's own words, "This is My body which is given for you" will often come to mind and begin a train of thought. The coming into the world of the Son of God; the body prepared for Him and the Bethlehem scene. The infancy; the early years at Nazareth and the carpenter's shop. The silent years of preparation; His public ministry and the dramatic closing days of His earthly life.

Such a contemplation can move us into a meditation of His love and compassion during His daily life among men, when He shared the whole range of human experience with others. His joy and sorrow; His weariness, hunger and thirst. His happiness in human companionship and His sadness at His rejection by those who would not have Him. Then the dark hours in the Garden of Gethsemane; the trials, the scourgings, the mockery and finally the crucifixion. So much was experienced by Him, so much endured, so much seen and heard and spoken. So much grace and love shown forth.

"What grace, O Lord, and beauty shone

Around Thy steps below!

What patient love was seen in all

Thy life and death of woe!”

As the loaf is broken, the crucified body can never be far from the thoughts, and some of the great texts of Scripture may come to mind:

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

“Who His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree” (1 Peter 2:24).

“The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20).

“When He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3).

“But now once at the end of the ages hath He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

Then the quiet moment of sharing in the broken loaf as each in turn takes a morsel.

### **The Poured-out Wine**

The pouring out of the wine is also a symbolic act. When the cup of wine is taken and thanks offered for it, again the Lord's words will come to mind: “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, even that which is poured out for you”.

Here also we may begin to muse upon the spiritual truths which lie behind the purpose of the Lord's life on earth and the final sacrifice upon the cross, The age-old principle that “apart from the shedding of blood there can be no remission [of sin]” (Hebrews 9:22); the early lessons

about the value of the blood of the sin-offering, from the offerings of Cain and Abel; the truth of substitution as revealed to Abraham on Mount Moriah and about redemption from the night of the Passover in Egypt.

The meditations may continue as one considers how the types and shadows of the past take substance in the Son of God. How John the Baptist declared the Christ to be “The Lamb of God” and Paul describes Him as “Christ our Passover” who was sacrificed for us. How the prophets spoke about Him in language so unmistakably clear and how it was all fulfilled by Him in the days of His flesh. As the cup is poured, the meditation is again centred upon the cross, and the final cry, “It is finished”. Then the quiet reflective moment, as the wine is shared.

How beautifully the two elements in the Remembrance complement each other. Both have their vital teaching as to the completeness of the work of Christ. The two are clearly seen in the scriptures, their meanings so evident in such references as: “by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10) and “wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).

The act of remembrance complete, the meditations can continue in praise and worship to God as the thoughts are occupied, perhaps, with the wonder of the resurrection, His ascension and the sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The work of salvation being complete, and God's plan of salvation now fulfilled, all honour, glory, majesty and power can be ascribed to the Son.



## CHAPTER 7: ENTRANCE INTO THE HOLIES

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Our study so far has been confined to the observance of the ordinance of the Breaking of the Bread. We have tried to establish how we may keep the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, “This do” It is also important, however, to remember that there are other things which accompany the Breaking of the Bread.

### “This Do”, “Draw Near”, “Offer Up”

We have in Hebrews 10:19-22, the exhortation, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus ... and having a great priest over the House of God; let us draw near ...” and in 1 Peter 2:5, “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ...”

We must now consider whether the occasion of the Breaking of the Bread is not also the time when the people of God can draw near into the presence of God to offer up spiritual sacrifices. We have already seen from the New Testament records that the early churches came together on the first day of the week for the Breaking of the Bread, and on what more appropriate occasion could they have also obeyed the exhortations to “draw near” and “offer up”?

### A Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation

The Apostle Peter, in the same chapter, also refers later to a Royal Priesthood and a Holy Nation (1 Peter 2:9). All these terms obviously apply to the Christians to whom he wrote but there is no mistaking the parallel language to that which was applicable to God's ancient people, Israel

(Exodus 19:15). We have also already noted (chapter 2) the transfer of the Kingdom from Israel to “the little flock”.

The inference therefore is clear, that the Christians of Peter's day were fulfilling the same role in relation to God as Israel had fulfilled in the days when the Tabernacle was in their midst. It is essential therefore that we try to understand the position which Israel occupied in the purposes of God and what their privileges and responsibilities were as the people of God. It was to the children of Israel, redeemed by blood, delivered from Egypt, separated by the Red Sea and gathered to Himself at Sinai that God gave the terms of His covenant.

“Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me from among all peoples: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6).

The children of Israel heard from Moses “all the words of the Lord” and responded by saying, “all the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do” (Exodus 24:3). They were then sprinkled with the blood of the covenant, which covenant was the charter of their divine nationhood. In Exodus 25, these same people, cleansed from their disobedience over the Golden Calf, were again given the word of the Lord by Moses: “Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (verse 8).

Then followed the detailed arrangements which governed the construction of the Sanctuary; its service, its Priesthood and its sacrifices and offerings. Also, there was given to them the law by which they would live together as the people of God, which was intended to ensure that as God's holy nation they would, by their manner of life, individually and collectively, live up to the high standard required by God for those whom He had called to this privileged position.

### **Access to the Presence of God**

The service of the Sanctuary of the Tabernacle was a drawing near and an offering up, although because of failure the nation drew near and offered up only through their priesthood, and in a manner carefully prescribed and meticulously observed. This arrangement for Israel as the then people of God is “a parable for the time now present” (Hebrews 9:9) and the Apostle Peter taught those to whom he wrote that they stood in the same relationship to God as did Israel in their day. The privilege of worshipping in the sanctuary of God belongs therefore to the people of God in the spiritual House of God, who, as a holy priesthood, are exhorted to draw near through the Great High Priest to offer up spiritual sacrifices. This precious activity can find no more appropriate occasion or setting than when the people of God are gathered together to remember the Lord in the Breaking of the Bread.

Although the parallel is clear there is one major difference. The access into the presence of God is now no longer restricted to the High Priest only. We are exhorted: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ...” (Hebrews 10: 19). The way is no longer barred. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ has opened up the way. We have “a great priest” over the House of God (Hebrews 10:21) through whom we draw near to worship.

### **Holding Fast**

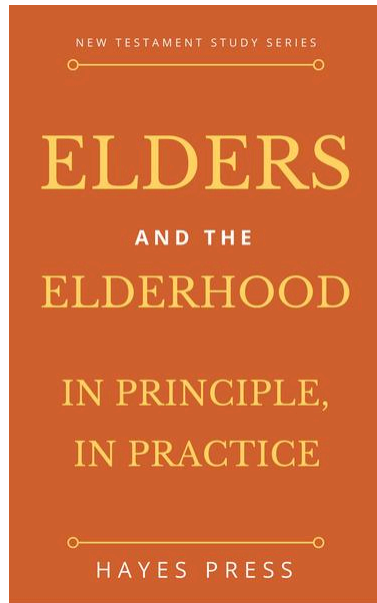
However, there is a solemn warning associated with the House of God and its service. Such a divine position is not unconditional, and there may be a failing away from it. While the eternal life of the believer can never be affected, the place which he may have among the people of God can be forfeited if, like Israel of old, sin and disobedience bring about the judgement of the Lord, “Whose house are we, if we hold fast ...” (Hebrews 3:6).

In the Breaking of the Bread, disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ gathered together in churches of God have a great advantage over the people of Israel. The weekly calling to remembrance and associated meditations on His person should obviate any failing away, and the holy privilege of service in the Sanctuary of God as a Holy Priesthood should be regarded by them as the highest and richest of all of life's experiences. Very soon our Lord will come, and faith will give place to reality. Until we have that blessed experience, the weekly remembrance in the Breaking of the Bread can deepen our appreciation of His lovely Person and provide us with a foretaste of what the future holds for us.

“What will it be to dwell above,  
And with the Lord of glory reign,  
Since the sweet earnest of His love  
So brightens all this dreary plain!  
No heart can think, no tongue explain,  
What joy 'twill be with Christ to reign.  
This is the joy we seek to know,  
For this with patience we would wait;  
Till, called from earth and all below,  
We rise, our gracious Lord to meet,  
His home for evermore to share,  
And praise the love that brought us there.”



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