

RECEPTION

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(Summary by D.L. Johnson)

The Word *Reception*

Why does a word that isn't directly in the Bible cause controversy? If the words aren't in the Bible, why do we use them? — [Well, its main word *receive* is in the Bible, although seldom in the way we will use it in this book. Secondly, we use words such as *Trinity* and *Rapture* which aren't Biblical.]

It is necessary to say that the person is not *received* into the "Church" membership or any other membership, for there is only one such membership in New Testament Christianity. By divine placement he has been a member of the one true Church from the moment he was saved (Acts 2:47): "Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." But for a certain length of time, he has not been following (2 Tim. 2:22): "Follow righteousness, faith, love, peace *with those* who call on the Lord out of a pure [undivided] heart." There is an "inside" and an "outside" of the practice of full assembly fellowship = (1 Cor.5:12-13): "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

In the early Church, for many years, every Christian became a part of a local assembly (including its privileges and responsibilities) when he or she was saved and thus broke bread in the Scriptural way, all in fellowship together (Acts 2:1-4,41,42,46,47): "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place . . . And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting . . . And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

(Acts 2:41,42): "Then they that gladly received His Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls . . . And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

(Acts 2:46,47): "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart . . . Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

This is the only way we can become a part of God's true Church! (1 Cor.12:13): "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Local assemblies were formed in city after city to represent that universal Church on earth. This is seen in Acts 2:42: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

In those early times we can only assume that upon salvation, local assembly privilege and responsibility were explained to the newly saved person—even children—and the person was received into the fellowship of the local assembly without question. All wanted to please their Lord. One of the things the person began to do was to break bread, which we will see was the outward

sign of fellowship together, as well as something the Lord asked that believers do in remembrance of Him. - (Luke 22:19,20): "He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me' . . . Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you.'"]

Chapter 1

THE BREAKING OF BREAD

Where does the expression *breaking of bread* come from and what does it mean? — Two verses will help define it. (1) (Acts 2:42): "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (2) (Acts 20:7) "On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread."

We see from these verses that the "breaking of bread" is the expression used for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20): "When ye come together therefore into one place." This shows the *collective* eating together of the one loaf of bread and the drinking of the one cup of wine. Both the eating together of the one loaf of bread and the drinking together of the cup are involved. (There are further details in this passage, given below.)

This "supper" was briefly mentioned by the Lord just before going to the cross in (1) (Matthew 26:26-29): "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body . . . And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink ye all of it . . . For this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins . . . But I say unto you, 'I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'" (2) and also (Mark 14:22-25).

But in (Luke) we see it actually *instituted*. = (Luke 22:14-20): "And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him . . . And He said unto them, 'With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer . . . For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God' . . . And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves . . . For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come . . . And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me . . . Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you.'"

The further details that are given by the Lord through special revelation to the apostle Paul are found in (1 Cor. 11:23-32): "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread. . . . And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, 'Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me . . . After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, 'This cup is the New Testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. . . . For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come . . . Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord . . . But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup . . . For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body . . . For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep . . . For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged . . . But when we are judged, we are chastened

of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

Please observe in Acts 2:42 how closely related the breaking of bread is associated with the fellowship, the gathering together of the early Church, as well as associated with the apostles' doctrine or teachings. — (Acts 2:42): “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” — We should have the same fellowship today with the apostles and their teachings as did the early believers. You and I are responsible to God to have *our* fellowship—and the breaking of bread is an integral part of it; in fact, the *expression* of it—with the apostles, based on their teaching (doctrine). — Sorrowfully, too often, the whole of Scripture has been replaced by creeds or the proclamations of denominational boards or religious leaders!

The *order* of any list in Scripture is important. First comes the apostles' doctrine in (Acts 2:42). Everything else hinges on that. (Amos 3:3): “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” We are to break bread with those who seek out and obey the apostles' doctrine and desire the apostles' fellowship. In the early Church that was every Christian. Sadly, today, it seems that it is the desire of very few Christians. Incidentally, (Amos 3:3) is a *biblical principle* —a *divine* principle. Its context deals with Israel, but who will stand up and deny that it is a truth for all time?]

Chapter 2

QUESTIONS REGARDING RECEPTION

As we continue our study of reception to the breaking of bread, many questions arise. Some of these are:

- Should we receive any Christian who comes to the meeting for breaking bread?
- What if the Christian is known by someone to be *personally* godly, but is gathered with a group not meeting together on God's true ground, not following the apostles' doctrine?
- Is the breaking of bread an isolated act of the individual, or a collective act?
- When received to break bread under any circumstances, is the person immediately and *effectively* in assembly fellowship with those seeking to gather to the Lord's name alone and seeking to maintain His order for the gatherings of His Church?
- Does such a person, when received, always come under the discipline of the assembly, which would have to judge a person who left and went back to an unscriptural "church" position?
- Should one be received who does not believe in the position and practices we seek to maintain?
- What are the scriptural requirements for breaking bread?

- Are the moral and ecclesiastical (religious) *associations* of those with whom we break bread important, or are only their *personal* beliefs and practices important?

We already have touched on some of these questions and their answers in the previous pages, but much more proof is needed in some cases. Let us look to the Word of God for the answers and begin by looking at the different stages of the early Church to see the scriptural progression in relation to reception.]

Chapter 3

RECEPTION, FELLOWSHIP AND BREAKING BREAD IN THE EARLY CHURCH (A.D. 30)

In the early Church, beginning about AD 30, "the *Lord* added *together* daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47 JND). — All Christians expressed fellowship together in the breaking of bread. "They persevered in the teaching and *fellowship* of the apostles, in *breaking of bread* and prayers" (Acts 2:42 JND). By agreeing together with the apostles' doctrine, they were able to have true fellowship together with the apostles and the Lord: it was the fellowship the apostles taught!

Those having such fellowship (having things in common) broke bread together; those who broke bread together could pray together in agreement. As we've said, this verse defines our expressions of fellowship together. Note again the order of progression: it is important! "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). *God says we break bread with those who agree together on the apostles' doctrine, not simply because they are Christians!*

It is a wonderful fellowship together: meeting around the Lord Jesus, to His name alone, having fellowship with Him and with the apostles (although, now, all dead) by meeting together according to the plan they, by divine inspiration, gave us. First and foremost, we see that we have been "Called into the fellowship of His [God's] Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor.1:9)." It is first and foremost a fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ, *and it is expressed outwardly by the partaking of the bread and the wine as members of the one body of Christ*. Scripture thus speaks of a universal fellowship of all believers—a fellowship that man's failure cannot alter. This fellowship together was seen perfectly *practiced* by every Christian in Acts 2:42 and in 1 Corinthians 1:2. (Acts 2:42): "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (1 Cor. 1:2): "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

The Requirements to Break Bread in the Early Church were:

- ***Be a Christian!***
- ***Persevere in the apostles' doctrine.***
- ***At that time, all Christians were in agreement with, and sought to practice the Lord's will as to assembly fellowship.***

Chapter 4

A CHRISTIAN EXCLUDED FROM FELLOWSHIP IN THE CORINTHIAN LOCAL ASSEMBLY (A.D. 56)

The early Church went on happily together for about 25 years. During that time there was one discordant note. — [Ananias and his wife Sapphira conspired to lie about giving to the Church the proceeds from the sale of some property. (Acts 5:1-4,11): "A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. . . And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet . . . But Peter said, 'Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? . . . Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.'" — That was *unrighteousness* (not fundamental evil as we usually think of it)! Yet both died at the hand of God acting through His apostles." — And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."]

The *Lord* maintained strict discipline in the Church, until the rules for the house of God were better defined. (1 Tim. 3:15): "If I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Cor. 3:16): "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

Then the *responsibility* for discipline was placed in the hands of believers when gathered together. *Authority* was given to the local assembly to act in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor.5:4-5): "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus . . . Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

See also (Matt. 18:18): "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." *Righteousness* was still to be maintained!

This brings us to the apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian local assembly about 25 years after the Church began at Pentecost (Acts 2)—about AD 56. Paul had been given the assignment to make known the *mystery* of the Church (Eph.3:3-10): "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words . . . Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) . . . Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit . . . That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel . . . Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power . . . Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ . . . And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ . . . To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." A mystery in the Bible is not something puzzling or mysterious as we think of the word, but something, always in God's mind, but previously hidden from mankind. The Church was always in God's mind, but was *hidden* (Eph.3:4-5): "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ . . . Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his

holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." – It was not revealed until Pentecost (Acts 2), although the Lord had hinted of it to His disciples in (Matt.16:18): "I say also unto thee, 'That thou art Peter (a small stone = John 1:42), and upon this rock ("this Rock" is not so much the Person, but the truth of the Diety of Christ upon which the Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." – "upon" which the Church rests. (1 Cor. 3:11): "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." – (1 Cor. 10:4): "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

There were Old Testament pictures of Christ and His Church, although those Old Testament believers didn't know it. So, Paul wrote to the Corinthian assembly to make known the proper functioning of a godly local assembly and to correct a number of sins that had crept in among them.

Freedom from Moral Sin — [Although the Corinthians were still part of that universal oneness seen in practice in the early Church, their *thoughts* had become divisive (1 Cor.1:11-13; 3:3-4): "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you . . . Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ . . . Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? . . . For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? . . . For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" – Those divisive thoughts were the *mental* beginning of *denominationalism*—that unscriptural principle of dividing up Christians into different "names" as is almost universally practiced today.

Further, there was another serious problem at Corinth. An on-going sexual sin in the Corinthian assembly was the occasion for Paul with apostolic authority to give written instructions to all who are gathered to the Lord's name (1 Cor. 1:1-2): "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother. . . Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

As to maintaining holiness and godly order in a local assembly. (1 Cor. 5:1): "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife." – Using that sin as the occasion to do so, Paul then proceeded to lay down new requirements for maintaining fellowship together—not new in the sense they weren't important before, but they hadn't been spelled out in writing to the assemblies as relating to Church fellowship. (1 Cor. 5:13): "But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

When an assembly is gathered together in the Lord's name, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, it has divinely-given *authority* and *responsibility* to act *according to Scripture*. This authority extends to the most severe form of *discipline*—*excommunication* or *putting away from among yourselves*. At least when the apostles were involved in the action, the excommunication included delivering the sinning person to Satan, not that Satan might kill the person (which he would like to do), but that the person may be in Satan's sieve" (Luke 22:31): "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.'" — The *flesh* (the corrupted sinful nature mankind is born with) may be made of no effect and the believer restored."

Despite some recent claims, it is evident from the context and from 2 Corinthians 7 that the defilement that leavened the Corinthian assembly was due to the *immorality*, not the assembly being puffed up. Are blood-bought saints, the Corinthians *were* unleavened as far as eternity was

concerned, but they were to *act* in God's government in His Assembly on earth to become again unleavened in a practical sense, for they were *corporately defiled*. — (2 Cor. 7:9-11): "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing . . . For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death . . . For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

Despite claims to the opposite, this sinning man was a Christian who was fully restored. (2 Cor.2:6): "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." — We aren't given the details, but he obviously repented of his sin and confessed it! Yet he was called "evil" or "wicked" (Gk: *poneros*: bad, evil) because he was *characterized* by his sins.]

Chapter 5

THE EFFECT OF ASSOCIATIONS

1 Corinthians 10:16-21 — Association in the Breaking of Bread. — There is a deep association with those with whom we break bread. — "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? . . . For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread . . . Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifice's partakers of the altar? . . . What say I then? that the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything? . . . But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils . . . Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils."

The Unequal Yoke (2 Cor. 6:14-18) — "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? . . . And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? . . . And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you . . . And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

2 Timothy 2:19-22. — "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, 'Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity . . . But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor . . . If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.'" — There can be no liberty to carry on the service (worship) of God unless we withdraw from what is not right and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord

out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22)."

The False Teacher (2 John 9-11). — "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son . . . If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed . . . For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

Chapter 9

SO, YOU WANT TO BREAK BREAD?

Why is breaking bread where Christians seek to maintain the truth of the Church so important? Because the Church is God's central plan for this dispensation — [(Eph. 3:3-11): "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words . . . Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) . . . Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit . . . That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel . . . Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power . . . Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ . . . And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ . . . To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God . . . According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." He in the future will present it to Himself (Eph. 5:25-27): "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it . . . That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word . . . *That He might present it to Himself* a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." The Church is His bride and wife for eternity (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:9): "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready . . . And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints . . . And He saith unto me, Write, 'Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And He saith unto me, 'These are the true sayings of God.'" . . . And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, 'Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.'" (Eph. 1:23): "Which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." = (1 Cor. 1:9): "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord."