

Answered Questions on the Guarded table and a Circle of Fellowship

Dear Dave,

While speaking with a young believer recently, the subject of the breaking of bread came up. They said they were not sure if it might be okay to break bread with us, and with another small group that was following the Lord. There was not a lot of details given. I did ask if these people broke bread with others from different groups of Christians. They said this group felt free to do this.

I was unsure what scriptures to give them at the time. From what I have read this may be the "endless chain of defilement" doctrine, but I am not sure. The Association with Evil by AE Booth does not seem to give a lot of scriptures on the topic.

Could you please help me by showing me what the scripture teaches.

In Christ,

Dear _____,

One way that may be helpful to address this subject of "the breaking of bread" is to realize that the breaking of bread is part of "the Lord's Supper" or the "lordly" supper (1 Cor. 11:20). The Lord instituted the breaking of the bread as the first part of observing His Supper and the partaking of the cup is the second part.

Mr. William Kelly points out that "the Lord's Supper":

1. Belongs to Him – The word "Lord's" is the translation of the Greek word kuriakos Strong's #2960, which means "belonging to the Lord." The Spirit of God only uses kuriako here and in Revelation 1:10: "The Lord's Day" which is the first day of the week.
2. Is Congregational – Communion of "the Lord's Supper" is not individual (as baptism is) but is "when we are come together" (v. 20). That is "when the whole church (local assembly) is come together" (1 Cor. 14:23).
3. Easily Perverted – Notice vs. 21, 22, 27-34. For it is a spiritual fellowship.
4. Suited sign of union of Christ and the church – Ephesians 5:22-33.
5. Occupied with remembering Him – v. 24.

Since "the Lord's Supper" belongs to the Lord, He therefore alone has the authority to tell how His Supper is to be observed and who it is that He invites to partake of His Supper.

As noticed in #4 above, "The Lord's Supper" is an expression of the union of Christ and the church, and in Matthew 18:15-20 the Lord shows that union by giving "the church" [which is the "two or three" who "are gathered" by the Spirit of God according to His Word] the responsibility to decide who is to be part of the assembly.

Answered Questions on the Guarded table and a Circle of Fellowship

The Lord first gave the truth of the church to the apostle Paul to proclaim (see Eph. 3:8-10), and in 1 Corinthians 5:4-13 Paul declared this same truth – that the gathered assembly is responsible to decide who is to be part of the assembly. “In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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” (vs. 4 & 5).

Paul’s first epistle to Timothy was written with the purpose “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 Timothy 3:15). Among the instructions for the assembly, in this epistle is the instruction regarding reception of people into the fellowship of the assembly: “Lay hands suddenly [hastily] on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22). In other words it is important that we know who we received into fellowship for “association with evil defiles” (1 Cor. 15:33).

Before the apostle Paul speaks of “the Lord’s Supper” in chapter 11, in chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians, he gives the doctrine or teaching regarding the emblems of “the Lord’s Supper.” From this doctrine we are taught who the assembly is to permit to partake of the Lord’s Supper: “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” (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17).

The Lord, when He instituted His supper, broke the bread first and then took the cup (Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19,20), and we are instructed that the bread is to be partaken of first when we observe His supper in 1 Cor. 11:23-26. However, you will notice that when presenting the doctrine regarding these emblems at “the Lord’s Supper” the “cup” is mentioned first! “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?”

The reason for this is that these emblems are how God’s people are to “show [or announce] the Lord’s death” (1 Cor. 11:26) by having “communion” or fellowship with Christ. The teaching regarding partaking of “the Lord’s Supper” is that the first expression of communion with Christ must have to do with the “cup”! The “cup” speaks of Christ’s blood as the Lord said: “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

Therefore, the first requirement for communion with Christ, and therefore to have the privilege to partake of “the Lord’s Supper” is that the person must have received Christ (and His work on the cross of Calvary) as his personal Saviour and Lord, and He must “know” on the authority of God’s Word that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son” has cleansed him “from all sin” (1 John 1:7; 5:13).

The second expression of communion the Lord desires from His people is: “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” (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). – The bread in the Lord’s Supper is not only a picture of Christ’s physical body which was broken for us on the cross of Calvary, but it is also His spiritual body of all believers which is called the church, or assembly, with

Answered Questions on the Guarded table and a Circle of Fellowship

Him as Head of that body. We know this because we are told: “For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread”

Therefore, when we partake of the Lord’s Supper we are to do it owning no body of people and seek to represent no body other than the body of all believers—we do it not to represent the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodists, the Baptists, etc., or even the brethren! The Lord’s Supper is meant to represent only the link between Christ and His Church—which includes all believers: “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NKJV). Therefore, when a person desires to break bread the assembly must be assured that that person seeks to represent only Christ and His body and by partaking of the bread own his/her part in that body, the “one body” of all believers.

Down through the years the Lord’s people have—as was true of the apostle Paul— responded to the Lord’s words: “This do in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The Lord may call a newborn soul to answer to His dying request and may not realize any more than that His blood has saved them, so they take their place in the assembly to learn. But souls exposed to error that “the Lord’s Supper” is open to all men or to all believers or that it is left up to each individual to decide, and other errors, we are responsible to instruct them, and the assembly is responsible to follow the Scriptures about this precious privilege for “the Lord’s Supper” is all for Him.

These are more than “a few words” which I had hoped to send to you when I began to write this. But I trust you will find some help through the Scriptures above which do not give permission to just any person to break bread no matter how spiritual or how earnest they may seem to be to please the Lord. The Scriptures rather teach a “guarded table” – guarded by the Spirit of God through the Word through each local assembly – as to whom the Lord invites to His Supper.

In Him,
Dave Johnson

Dear Dave,

Thank you for your thoughtful and lengthy reply. Truly what is important, is the remembrance of our Lord Himself, in the way that He would have us to do it, in communion with Him, and seeking to represent the body of Christ.

You may have answered it, but do you have any thoughts on the below questions that I have been discussing with this young brother. It would also be helpful for my edification.

1a) Since the assembly receives, what does scripture teach about someone that has been received by two different fellowships? In other words, does the scripture teach that someone in our local assembly can only break bread with our fellowship and nowhere else? If so, where does the Lord, through the Word teach this?

1b) If someone does break bread somewhere else, what does the scripture say about our local assembly defilement due to that action? Your explanation was a lot clearer on the basic principle of it is the “Lord’s Table” and the “Assembly Receives”. I agree that this is the groundwork from

Answered Questions on the Guarded table and a Circle of Fellowship

scripture that we can then learn how the Lord would have us gather where there are multiple groups of Christians seeking to honor Him.

Thank you for your help.

In Christ,

Dear _____

Thank you for your questions. Your first question is:

1a) Since the assembly receives, what does scripture teach about someone that has been received by two different fellowships? In other words, does the scripture teach that someone in our local assembly can only break bread with our fellowship and nowhere else? If so, where does the Lord, through the Word teach this?

The mere mention of “two different fellowships” is glaringly something different than the Lord’s words when He first mentioned the church, He announced: “on this Rock [the confession that Jesus is “the Christ the Son of the living God”] I will build My assembly [singular], and hades’ gates shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:16-18, JND).

“Two different fellowships” is also something different than what the Lord said when He instituted His supper: “He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body [singular] which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19).

The Lord has only one physical body and the apostle Paul, led by the Spirit of God, when proclaiming the doctrine (teaching) of the bread in the Lord’s Supper also speaks of the “one body” of all believers: “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” (1 Cor. 10:16,17). “My assembly;” “My body;” “the body of Christ;” “one body” and “one bread” states the truth regarding the testimony of Christ through His church or assembly.

The idea of “two different fellowships” is also contrary to the truth that the Lord directs us in His Word to have. This is that each local assembly is linked together (distance alone separating) as is stated in 1 Corinthians 1:2: “with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” Therefore, not only when “two or three are gathered” by the Spirit of God through His Word in a local assembly, “unto” or in worship of “My [His] Name,” representing “the church” (Matt. 18:20, 17), but all the assemblies together are linked as one fellowship, representing the wonderful truth that there is only “one body” of believers, under Christ as Head of His body, the assembly, on this earth.

Regarding the “one fellowship” or as is sometimes referred to: “the circle of fellowship,” the Greek word the Spirit of God uses is Strong’s #1577 ekklesia. It is translated “church” and “churches” in the KJV and “assembly” and “assemblies” by J. N. Darby and F. W. Grant. This word ekklesia means

Answered Questions on the Guarded table and a Circle of Fellowship

“a called out company” – called out of the world to Christ. The Scriptures teach that the churches [plural] or assemblies are to be together in the sense that they each have the same teaching, fellowship and discipline:

1. Teaching: “But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain [direct – NAS] I in all churches” (1 Cor. 7:17). – Examples: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (1 Cor. 14:34). – “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye” (1 Cor. 16:1,2).

2. Fellowship: “And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches” (2 Cor. 8:18). – Care: “Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28).

3. Discipline: “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom [practice – NAS], neither the churches of God” (1 Cor. 11:16). – “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33).

Above is a mere sample of the Scriptures that tell us that the assemblies (each composed of “two or three” who “are gathered” to represent the “one body” by being directed by Christ as Head) are linked with every other assembly who likewise “are gathered” calling “on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2).

In view of the above Scriptures there is a serious problem if a person (which you speak of) is being “received by two different fellowships.” However, we should not be alarmed or taken by surprise but such confusion. The Lord knew this would happen to the profession of His assembly testimony, does not want His people to be surprised to find “two fellowships” where a person is received by both fellowships so the Spirit of God has told us how to deal with it in the Second epistle of Timothy which is especially written for “the last days” of God’s grace, when “difficult times shall be there” (2 Tim. 3:1, JND).

“Two fellowships” could arise because the Lord has led each of those fellowships by His Word to be gathered only unto His Name, each not knowing there was another fellowship has also been guided by the Spirit to do the same. – But even if that were true, for a person to be allowed to be received by both fellowships, and both fellowships receiving the same individual—shows a lack of following the Scriptures by both the one being received and the fellowships receiving that person!

This leads to your second question:

1b) If someone does break bread somewhere else, what does the scripture say about our local assembly defilement due to that action?

We have the answer to this question in the First epistle of Timothy where it was written: “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 Tim. 3:15).

Answered Questions on the Guarded table and a Circle of Fellowship

Among the instruction in that epistle about the house of God in order is: “Lay hands suddenly [hastily] on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). There are a number of reasons for not being hasty in receiving a person, because:

1. “Fellowship” is based on knowledge and in the matter we are considering —knowing the person especially regarding functioning in the assembly. We must know that when he/she partakes of the Lord’s Supper he/she is doing it to represent the “one body” of all believers and no other group (1 Cor. 10:16,17).

2. “Neither be partaker of other men’s sins” – The assembly must know that the person has no unjudged “sins” morally: for “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Cor.5:6), or doctrinal evil (Gal. 5:9). Or the assembly is “partaker” of those sins!

3. Of our own selves: “Keep thyself pure” – Association with evil defiles us: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33).

In Matthew 18:15-20 the Lord as Head of the assembly stresses the importance of assembly discipline first—before assembly prayer in verse 19 and 20, and thus it is first in importance. In that portion He gives the responsibility to the “the two or three [who] are gathered unto My Name” as the representation of His church to discipline anyone who will not judge and give up his sin. Why is discipline so important in His assembly? Because He is holy! The word “holy” means that God hates sin—which includes anything that is not according to His Word. The Psalmist proclaims: “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2). We cannot give the Lord the glory due His name unless we do it in “the beauty of holiness.”

I would mention in closing that by saying that there is only “one body” and one representation of Christ’s assembly—I do not imply in any way that the fellowship we are with is the only one that has “the Lord’s table” as some hold—namely the TWs or NHH brethren. If the truth of God is “revealed by the Spirit of God” to our hearts (1 Cor. 2:10), through faith in His Word (“through faith we understand” – Heb. 11: 3), and He gives us the faith to act upon it—this can only cause us to humbly praise Him! To claim that we only have the Lord’s Table sponsors only pride. There may be many fellowships and many individuals who, by seeking to please the Lord by following the Scriptures, are gathered on the ground or principles of the “one body” and guard participation of the Lord’s Supper—whom we do not know of, and they do not know of us. 2 Timothy allows that this may be true especially in the “last days” we live in.

Trust these Scriptures help to answer your good questions. I welcome any more questions and thoughts you may have.

In Him,
Dave Johnson
August 2012