

The Covenant Meal



Relationship with God's People (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again. Yesterday I spoke to you on koinonia, the lifestyle of the New Covenant, a life of mutual commitment between God's people that is walked out in the light.

Today I'm going to speak about the distinctive New Testament ordinance or sacrament that symbolizes and perpetuates this special lifestyle. God's people over the centuries have adopted various names for this. Some call it the Eucharist, others Communion, or the Lord's Supper, or Breaking of Bread. For my purposes today the name is not important.

In my talk today I want to show you the direct connection between this ordinance and the covenant on which the Christian faith is based. In fact, I want to picture it for you as a covenant meal. We remember, of course, that is was at a meal that Jesus instituted the Eucharist or Communion or the Lord's Supper. That's what it's called the Lord's Supper. After the Passover supper, which He had eaten together with His disciples, He took two of the simple elements that were on the supper table, the bread and the wine, and He used those two elements to institute this very sacred and solemn ordinance or sacrament, whatever you want to call it. Here are the words that describe what Jesus did. In Matthew 26:26–28:

> "And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.'" (NAS)

Notice that through that simple exchange with His disciples of the elements of the bread and the wine, He entered into the New Covenant. This was the way in which He instituted that covenant. Always bear in mind that the word "covenant" and the word "testament" are the same in the original language. So when we speak about the New Testament we're speaking about the New Covenant. This is how the New Covenant was initiated between Jesus and His disciples. Therefore, it's a very solemn and significant and important

event for all those who are committed to Jesus.

What were its purposes? I would suggest that they could be expressed in three words: to commemorate, to perpetuate, to renew. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." In other words, always remember how the covenant was initiated. Always remember where this relationship began. Never forget that.

Secondly, it was to perpetuate it. It was to keep it always before them. It was to make it an ongoing relationship which would never cease, both between Jesus and His disciples and amongst the disciples themselves.

Thirdly, I believe it has the function to renew. I believe there are times in our Christian experience when we're beginning to slip from God's standards, from God's requirements, and one of the ways that God calls us back to His standards is by this covenant meal in which we are reminded, once again, of what it is all about, what it cost, what Jesus expects of us. What are the implications of this covenant meal? I want to point out to you that a covenant meal was nothing new in the Middle East at that time. Amongst the peoples of the Middle East for many, many centuries it's been understood that to eat bread with a man and to share the same cup were to make a very solemn and sacred commitment to him.

I'd like to illustrate this by a true story. It's found in the book O, Jerusalem, which describes the events in and around Jerusalem in the year 1948 when the state of Israel came into being and the war broke out between the Arabs surrounding Israel and the Jewish people in Israel. This story can be found in Chapter 29 of the book O, Jerusalem.

> "Just south of Jerusalem [Let me add, incidentally, that I was in Jerusalem at the time and I was an eyewitness of many of these things.] Just south of Jerusalem there was a Jewish kibbutz known as Kfar Etzion, which was isolated and which the main Jewish forces could not protect. This kibbutz was attacked by the Arab legion, the military force of Jordan and eventually succumbed to overwhelming military force and was virtually destroyed. Just a handful of Jewish persons were taken prisoner. One of them was a young Jewish woman named Eliza. The Arab soldiers captured her and as would be almost I might say normal in that situation at that time, they regarded her as the legitimate booty of war. They set about the rape her. They were just beginning to tear her clothes off when an amazing thing happened. An Arab officer walked up, shot the two soldiers dead, then pulled a piece of bread out of his pocket, gave it to this Jewish woman and said, 'Eat this.' When she'd eaten the bread, he said, 'Now you're under my protection. No one will touch you.'"

Why was she under his protection? Because she'd eaten of his bread. In other words, he'd established a visible covenant relationship with her. And even in the passions of war and of lust those Arab soldiers respected that covenant relationship between their officer and this young Jewish woman.

You know, whenever I think about that I say to myself, "Those Arab soldiers and probably most of them were Moslems, had, in many ways, a much clearer understanding of what it means to "break bread" than many professing Christians today. Once bread had been broken between that officer and that woman, they were obligated by that sacred covenant symbol not to turn against her, not to abuse her, but to respect that relationship. So what does that covenant meal mean in terms of our relationship to one another? I'm going to give to you four words: commitment, unity, love, and loyalty. And I want to emphasize that last word. Once we break bread together, we are committed to be loyal to one another.

Now I want to turn to Paul's explanation of this covenant meal which is found in 1 Corinthians 11:23–30. I'm going to read those verses:

> "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." (NAS)

And when Paul says "a number sleep," what he means is a number have died untimely deaths before their time. That's a

very solemn picture of what this covenant meal is. It's a memorial of the covenant that Jesus initiated. It's a reminder of our covenant obligations to Him but also to one another. And Paul reminds us that we have, in partaking of this meal, to judge or discern the body rightly. That does not mean merely to discern the bread as the body of the Lord, but it means also to discern our fellow-believers who partake with us of the same covenant meal as members of the same body.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul has said because there is one loaf that we all partake of that one loaf, it means that we are one body. So to discern the body is to discern the unity of all who partake. It's to discern that we are all members of one body, that we all have covenant relationship with one another. That means that from the moment we enter into that relationship and renew it by the partaking of this covenant meal, we are committed to be loyal to one another.

Just like those Arab soldiers, in spite of their own personal feelings, had to respect that Jewish woman because their officer had broken bread with her, so regardless of our personal attitudes or emotions or feelings, when we break bread, when we take the covenant meal, we are obligated by that very act to be loyal to one another. We cannot afford to be treacherous. The great sin of Judas was summed up in Psalm 41:9, prophetically, where it says, "He who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." That's what made the treachery of Judas so particularly terrible, was that he first ate the bread and then betrayed the One with whom he had eaten bread.

Now I want to ask you, frankly, are we Christians not often guilty of that? Do we not eat bread with one another and then lift up our heel against one another, criticize, carry tales, act in a very unkind and uncharitable way? Paul says there are just two alternatives when we take that covenant meal. If we take it out of right relationships it will bring us blessing and health, but if our relationships are wrong it will bring us judgment, sickness and death. That's a very solemn thought. But then covenant relationships are a very solemn and serious business. May God help none of us to take them lightly.

Well, our time is up. I'll be with you again tomorrow at this time. I'll return to this theme of covenant commitment. I'll be speaking tomorrow about conduct that undermines covenant.

Radio Program

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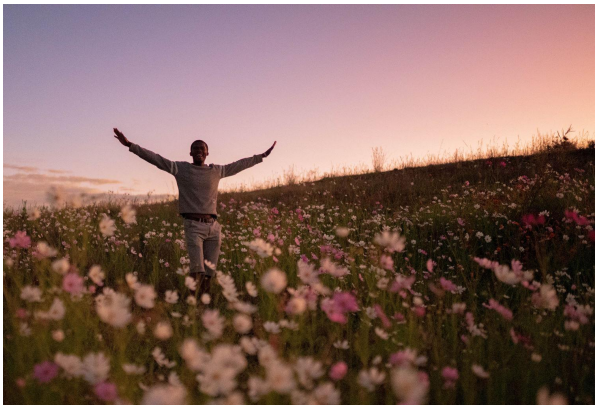

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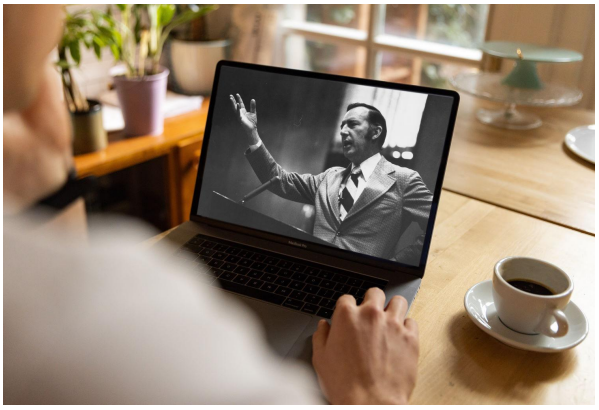

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