

A Church's Priorities, Part 3: Communion (Acts 2:42)

Please turn in God's Word to Acts chapter 2 where we're studying the priorities of the church that Christ built, the first 4 marks of the Spirit-filled church that the Spirit highlights in Acts 2, v. 42. Next week I'll be out of town and my fellow pastor/elder John Rucker will be bringing the Word, then I'll be back for one more in this series, then special Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter messages. Then our book study in the weeks and months ahead I plan a return to Genesis and the life of Abraham I was teaching Sunday evenings last year, because there's foundational concepts for our life of faith in the beginning of the Bible. But before then, we're in Acts 2:42.

In the beginning of the NT church, we're studying foundational concepts and commitments for our life of faith. These aren't new concepts, but it's good to review and renew our commitment to the basics as we begin in this new building, getting back to the basics, reminding ourselves why we do what we do (or should) as a church

⁴² *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

NKJV "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...*"

A church's priority #1 is Bible doctrine or teaching in Acts 2:42. The 2nd priority that marked the early church is closely related to the first, or at least it should be, and that is *fellowship*. The 4th devotion in v. 42 is "prayer," and there's no surprise there. But the 3rd priority of this church makes me think of the Sesame Street song "which one of these is not like the others?" Why is "breaking of bread" given such a prominent place in Acts 2:42? The church was really devoted to teaching God's Word, prayer, and they were really into *eating bread*? They were continuing steadfastly not only in breaking open the Word but breaking bread and chowing down? They lifted up the supremacy of good preaching and good pastries? Doesn't one of these things seem not like the others, eating bread?

Actually, *eating bread* (200+ verses) is different than verses about *breaking bread* (6 other texts) or '*the breaking of bread*' (1 other). As always, we need to start with the context of Scripture or we can get into some weird theology or application. I like to eat good food as much as anybody, and if you want to have us over I'll eat some.

Our girls have always loved to eat any bread, rolls, or broken torn off pieces of anything bread-like, and we have to teach them that mankind "shall not live by bread alone." But this verse isn't primarily about the early church eating carbohydrates, it's the specific phrase for *communion*, the bread broken into pieces and it was shared with the followers of Christ, and the cup was shared, in obedience to and in remembrance of Christ and His life and death.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 10 just so you don't take just my word for it. I want to read it from the NKJV which uses the word '*communion*' in 1 Cor. **10:16**: "*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?*" ¹⁷ *For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*"

break'+bread=communion also in Mt 26:26, Mk 14:22, Lk 22:19

The translation I usually read from (NASB) uses the word *sharing* instead of *communion*, the cup is "*a sharing in the blood of Christ ...the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ.*" The other major translations call the bread and cup a *participation* in the body and blood of Christ. It's the Greek word *koinonia* that we looked at last week, often translated "fellowship." Breaking bread was a phrase in the early church for *communion*, where because of the fellowship we share with Christ and His family, because of the common union or communion we have spiritually, we express that visibly in eating pieces of bread and drinking the cup of the fruit of the vine, as Jesus called it. Some use wine, others a non-alcoholic fruit of the vine (grape juice, the biblical word included both).

Some churches use a loaf of leavened bread with yeast, or more commonly unleavened bread or crackers are used. But the point is not to divide over things like that, but to be united as the body of Christ in communion with Him and in fellowship with His family.

1 Cor 10:17 emphasizes a oneness and unity of the body that we all partake of or participate in, not just physically, but spiritually also. There's a close connection between fellowship and communion or breaking of bread here, the same word and phrases as Acts 2:42 in the same verse, *koinonia* and *the breaking of bread*, and it gives a clear picture of the spiritual nature of fellowship and broken bread. Breaking bread wasn't just their diet, it's a devotion to communion.

We are one body, 1 Cor 10:17 says. We are all parts of the body of Christ and we eat parts or pieces of bread that represent His body. When Jesus' physical body was here on earth, He instituted this ordinance for His spiritual body to remember Christ's life for us. It is not His actual body, but we're to remember His actual body/life.

11:23 *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; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'*

So you can go back to Acts 2 but I just wanted you to see that the NT epistles (which give the commands to the church) affirm that it was not just the early church's practice to break bread, or tradition that came later. Communion was commanded by Jesus to His first apostles and church. Paul says this instruction is for all churches.

Acts 2:42 seems to be the first time the followers of Christ began to obey this ordinance or institution of Christ. Acts 2:41 says many were baptized and added to the church (and we want people to be baptized before joining our number today). Baptism is usually the first ordinance and first step of obedience that marks the start of the Christian life, repenting, renouncing your old life, and testifying of your faith in Christ before witnesses in the waters of baptism. Then the ongoing ordinance is communion, and that's why churches for essentially all of church history haven't encouraged the un-baptized to take communion. It goes against the pattern of Acts 2:41-42 and church history after it, but also I think Jesus gives baptism priority:

Matt. 28:19 *"make disciples...baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you..."* And the first command, or first step of obedience of a disciple there, is to be baptized. Christ gave 2 ordinances to His followers, baptism and communion, and I want to start with where He starts His great commission: baptism. I don't want to encourage the thinking in children or young people (or older people) that communion is less important and we can take it lightly but then somewhere down the road, some years off in the future I'll become a real serious follower of Jesus and get baptized.

I don't think it's healthy to take communion for years before being baptized, *or to treat lightly or think lightly of either ordinance.*

If you're a parent of children becoming young adults who've shown interest in baptism (or if you just want to be ready for that in the future when your kids are ready for a public testimony in baptism), there is a booklet I would like to recommend as a study guide and I want to start using that more in preparation for baptism

Baptism is the priority 1st step of obedience for Christ's disciples, but for today, I want to look at communion in Acts 2:42 in light of the 1st church and context of Acts 2, as we prepare as a church for communion today at the conclusion of this message. Providentially this 3rd priority in our Acts 2:42 series falls on communion Sunday, and it's a good time for us to keep in mind why we do what we do.

We need to remember that v. 38-41 comes before v. 42 in context, specifically that repentance in v. 38 should precede even baptism and communion. If you are not repentant, or aren't sure if you are, then the application of this message for you is not communion, it's conversion, you need to repent of your sins first and be a disciple.

Today, just pass the plates by, plate and cup pass today, and talk with one of us pastor/elders or shepherds after this service (one of them will give the closing words up front and our wives or other ladies are also available to talk or pray with a lady, I'll be in back).

If you are a follower of Jesus, but are living in unrepentant sin and have not done what you can to make it right with God or a fellow believer you have sin with, you also need to repent like v. 38 says before you would eat of the bread like v. 42 says. It's a symbol of the body. Sins against the body need to be repented of, reconciled as possible. Yeast is a permeating influence in the body that grows. Passover's unleavened bread symbolizes that in OT. Reconciling is vital, and if you're not ready today, commit to go, be reconciled to your brother and sister first before next communion (Matt 5:23-24)

For the rest of our time, I want us to go back earlier in the context to v. 1 and consider some of the theology of its OT context as well. The context or background of Acts 2:42 goes back to v. 1: *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.*

Acts 2:1-42 all happen the same day of Pentecost, and v. 42 is what marked this church from its birthday onward; teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

What you may not know is that this was part in some measure of what God had revealed about this day of Pentecost in the OT. I find it amazing to study and see how God prefigured and pictured and planned this a long time before in OT law, which pointed to Christ in ways I hope you find exciting today. So what was/is Pentecost?

Pentecost is simply the Greek word for “50th,” and Luke the Greek writer and author of the book of Acts uses the term Greek-speaking Jews used for what the Hebrews called *Shavuot* (Feast of weeks), a religious festival the 50th day after the Passover Sabbath. It was a day devout God-fearing Jews would travel from various countries to Jerusalem, and v. 5 explains they were staying or dwelling there.

The Holy Spirit doesn’t do these sort of things by coincidence, it’s by Providence (God’s coordinating, orchestrating, predestinating plan that includes all things, like Ephesians 1:11 says). Bread was a part of the Pentecost Feast of Weeks (leavened bread with yeast). The feast started 50 days earlier: the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

BREAKING BREAD IN BIBLE TIMES:

Unleavened bread (matzah)	Leavened (Jewish challah)
for Passover	for Pentecost, other feasts
Broken by hand and distributed (as shown above) rather than cut by knife (as westerners do, like below)	

BREAKING BREAD AND ISRAEL’S FEASTS:

In Leviticus 23, God appointed festivals in the spring of each year as times to break bread together in feast and worship

- Feast of Unleavened Bread—inaugurated by Passover, 7 days, including FirstFruits

Passover (Pesach in Hebrew)

Firstfruits (3rd day after Passover)

- Pentecost (50 days after Passover Sabbath, Shavuot = Weeks or Harvest)

-All Jewish males were required to travel to Jerusalem for the week of unleavened bread (first 3 above), Pentecost, and 1 fall feast (Ex 23:14-17). Families were encouraged (Deut. 16:10-11, Lk 2:42-44)

PENTECOST/FEAST OF WEEKS

Also Known As Shavuot (Hebrew)

Observed on Jewish calendar: 6th of Sivan (May or June on ours)

Scripture: Leviticus 23:15–22

CHRIST FULFILLS THE LAW (EVEN ITS FEASTS)

- Jesus said He came to fulfill OT Law (Mt 5:17)
- Leviticus 23 is sometimes referred to as “God’s calendar of redeeming grace” because this chapter tells God’s redemptive plan for the world he created.
- These and other Jewish religious festivals were shadows of things to come in Christ:

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival ... These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”—Colossians 2:16–17

Pictures of things to come in Christ

Luke 24:27 *“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself ... 32 And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (NKJV)*

What Moses wrote is part of all Scriptures concerning Christ. What are some of the truths Jesus may have opened up to them concerning Himself in what Moses wrote? It was expository (expounding Scripture) Christ-centered teaching

WHAT DID MOSES WRITE ABOUT THIS FEAST?

Leviticus 23 *1 The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies ... 15 “ ‘From the day after the Sabbath [i.e., Sunday on our calendar], the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. 16 Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath [Sunday], and then present an offering ...*

Acts 2:1 (NASB) *“When the day of Pentecost had come [footnote: “Lit was being fulfilled”] ...*

NKJV: *“When the day of Pentecost had fully come ...”*

Pentecost “was being fulfilled/fully came” on a Sunday

Lev. 23:18 *“... a burnt offering to the LORD ... offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.”*

In Acts 2:3 fire comes down from God to His worshippers, showing He is pleased with them, because of Christ, and fulfilling the promise of the Spirit

In Moses' day when he wrote the Law, the Lord's presence was fire in a pillar or cloud over Israel's tabernacle and later the temple

In Acts 2:3 the presence of God in a visible fiery form is seen again but it's no longer on a place, but on a people, individual temples of God's Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19)

- The Jewish traditional dating of Pentecost (Shavuot) was at the time they believed Moses received the Law from God
- To this day on Shavuot, some Jewish homes and traditional synagogues are decorated with flowers and greenery, representing the harvest and Torah as a "tree of life"
- This is the day Israel's God sent His Spirit to believers in Messiah, the true source of life the Law can't bring

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Exodus 19:1–20:20; 32	Acts 2
Spiritual birthday of OT Israel	Spiritual birthday of NT church
Traditionally believed to have happened about 50 days after the Israelites redemption from Egypt	Believers in Jesus were gathered together on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after their redemption
Loud sounds as God descended in fire on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:16–18).	The sound of rushing wind as God descends in fire on His people
“about 3,000” people died because of their sin (Ex. 32:28).	“about 3,000” people were made spiritually alive because they believed in Jesus.
Law given to instruct the Israelites, including the Law on the Feast of Passover/Shavuot	The Spirit given to empower our obedience for all who believe in Christ, in Israel and in all nations

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Leviticus 23:22 says on Pentecost God's people were to provide for the strangers or aliens or foreigners among them in their harvest

Acts 2:4-11 records how God's Spirit provided for all to hear from foreign countries, in all their different languages:

v. 10 "... *visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes [i.e., non-Jews ethnically], Cretans and Arabs - we hear them in our own tongues, speaking of the mighty deeds of God.*"

Acts 2:18 includes poor slaves as part of God's Spirit's provision

MORE SHADOWS OF CHRIST IN PENTECOST

The Jews on Pentecost brought a sin offering (Lev 23:18-19) but Peter brings them the sacrificed and risen Christ for sin in Acts 2, the only offering that can make them right with God, and the One all the OT pointed to

The Jews gave their first fruits to God (Lev 23:20) but God made them on this day "first fruits" (James 1:18) of His salvation for all

The central message of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 is the resurrection of Christ, which the NT calls "the first fruits" of the resurrection to come for all in Christ (building on OT feast imagery of first fruits)

Leviticus 23:21 (NASB) "*On this same day [of Pentecost] you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do not laborious work ...*"

Acts 2:14-37 tells us Peter made proclamation on this day of the Christ who fulfills the OT Scriptures. This day that the OT called for a "sacred assembly" became the NT day for the assembly of the church (Sunday, or "the first day of the week," ex: Acts 20:7), and Christians in history have tried to avoid ordinary work or labor on this day and set it aside as "the Lord's Day" for worship (Rev 1:10)

It was the day the Lord rose from the dead, and the day of the week Christ built His church ON when the Spirit came at Pentecost. It was a day of proclamation in OT, and in the NT, it became a day of proclamation of the apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42) and communion, a new feast with new significance in the New Covenant.

Peace/fellowship offering (Lev 23:19b) – the Christians devoted to the fellowship they had in Christ and His peace (Acts 2:42b)

Bread (Lev 23:17) and drink offering (v. 18) with wine (v. 13) – NT Christians began breaking bread and drinking the Communion cup to celebrate the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice (Acts 2:42c)

Prayer is implied as part of the "holy convocation" and worship - NT Christians were also devoted to prayer (Acts 2:42d)

Provision for poor or needy (Lev 23:22) – this Christians provided for the poor among them (Acts 2:44-45)

“In all your dwelling places” (Lev 23:21) – the early Christians not only gathered for worship in the temple but in houses (Acts 2:46)

This day in the OT was a day of giving (Deut. 16:10) - the church began to give (Acts 2:45) on this day of the week (1 Cor 16:1-2).

On this day a sacred assembly or convocation with proclamation was held, avoiding regular work/labor (Lev 23:21) – the Christian church continued that tradition on this day (Sunday, Acts 20:7), and tried to set aside “the Lord’s Day” for worship (Rev 1:10).

The OT Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) was a time of rejoicing: Deuteronomy 16:10–14: *“Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you. 11 And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you. 12 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt ... 14 Be joyful at your Feast ...”*

In v. 11, the OT place God chose for His dwelling was the temple – in the NT, the place He dwells is His church (2 Cor. 6:16, Eph 2:21). When we celebrate the NT feast of breaking bread, it's not about what we give to God, but what God has given us in Christ, who is the bread of life, and in His Spirit, in the gospel's blessings

The Pentecost feast was for rejoicing and remembering (Deut 16:11-12) – so is the Christian communion table a time for remembering Christ’s work, rejoicing with His people (Acts 2:46-47)

Pentecost was for all the OT community of faith (Deut 16:11 *you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants ... aliens*) – so was God’s Spirit and NT gospel in Acts 2:17-18:

¹⁷ *‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters ...*

¹⁸ *And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days ...* ³⁹ *For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off [includes aliens or foreigners, the promise of the Spirit to all who repent, God's grace is near] ...*

So turn in conclusion to 1 Corinthians 11 and all that theological background builds to the unity of the body of Christ that the Spirit filled and formed on the day of Pentecost. On that day Christians began celebrating a new feast, a new type of breaking of bread, not along with a drink offering or animal sacrifice, but to remember the completed sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lamb of God.

1 Corinthians 11:23 *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; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” ²⁵ In the same way 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.”*

The cup represents His blood, the bread represents His body, and it warns in v. 29, end of v. 29, you need to "*discern the body rightly.*" That doesn't mean discern that the little piece of bread or cracker *is the body of Christ*, you need to discern and be aware of the body of Christ *around you*, the church. In context of v. 18 he warns against divisions in the body, and v. 19 calls them 'factions' or 'differences.'

The more people in a church, the bigger the room, the more room for disagreements, differences, divisions there are. In our day there may be the young, restless and reformed, or older people tired of hearing about anything reformed. Or maybe hymns-only folks and some who don't like hymns much. There are parents who put their kids in school and there are parents who home-school (and factions can exist even within homeschoolers, the hard-core vs. less so). It can be differences in parenting and what programs or ministries their kids are in at church (or *not* in). There can be cliques among youth, there can be single people or others who feel excluded.

Some people feel judged or distant, some are really into doctrine, others not so much, some premil vs. amil, others run of the mill. There can be the followers of this teacher and his class (and others aren't with it) or followers of preachers outside this church, "I'm of MacArthur," "I'm definitely *not of MacArthur* because of his view on this point," or "I'm of Gary Ezzo," or "I'm of Voddie," "I'm of Piper," forming divisions, but the gospel is what is to unite us all.

Some factions mentioned earlier in 1 Corinthians were the Paul people, the Apollos people, the Peter people, and the Christ people (1:12). But then he says "*Has Christ been divided?*" In 1 Cor 1:18 the antidote to disunity is the gospel: "*the word of the cross...to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*" How is that? He says consider your gospel calling: you weren't all wise (it's not like your free will just made a wiser smarter choice than others), you weren't strong. God chose you as foolish, as weak, as lowly, as despised!

He chose you *in spite of what you would choose and do without Him, in spite of you*, and the gospel is designed that way "*so that no one may boast ...*" (you can read that in 1 Corinthians 26-30). When in communion we survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, it causes us to count all else but loss and pour contempt on all pride or boasting. The message of the cross is the power of God to extinguish mighty pride and even our mightily held preferences, parenting styles, or paradigms, factiousness, contentiousness, pettiness, and selfishness before the throne of God above where we see Christ, our "perfect, spotless righteousness."

The ground is level at the foot of the cross, sinners in need of grace with other sinners in need of grace. Let's look upward to His throne of grace, inward to our need of grace, and outward to those we are to show grace to in this church. Let's ask forgiveness from God and from each other this day as we proclaim Christ's death for our sins and for the sins of others against us. Let's pursue unity together.

We read of the first disciples in Acts 2:1 "*they were **all together in one place.***" As that church is born it says they were devoted to "*the breaking of bread ... **all who believed were together** ... day by day, attending the temple **together** and breaking bread ... they were **all together** in Solomon's Portico*" (Acts 2:42, 44, 46, 5:12 ESV). Col. 3:14 says love "*binds them **all together in perfect unity***" (NIV). So my prayer is that Christ's love at Calvary would bind us in unity.

As we come *all together to break bread* in one place, remember the unity Jesus shed blood for, that the cup represents. Consider the bread signifies Christ giving His life for a church we're to love also