

The Lord's Supper

Part 1

Speaker	Ernest Brown
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[00:00:31] Gott, all is free, we live with love and rest, in the joy of imperfection.

With holy drops of tears and crying we contemplate thy holy castle.

[00:01:10] O, take your leave, let us both remember where we held your grace, O, take your leave.

We thank the Holy Spirit, for the people who died in your name.

Thy name we sing in high exultance, the crown of glory and of grace, [00:02:06] where every heart a voice unites it, for that is worthy of its fame.

It's not often that I have the privilege of being able to attend the Catford Lectures on two succeeding months.

But I'm glad I was able to be here in October and in particular for three things.

First of all, we were reminded [00:03:02] that the Catford Lectures are intended to be or intended to include basic Christian teaching.

In line with that, in the afternoon we had an address on the role of man and woman in creation and in the assembly.

And then in the evening we had an address on the privileges and responsibilities connected with having access into the sanctuary based on a sanctuary psalm, Psalm 73.

So, in the spirit of those three things, I felt that I should spend today going over in a straightforward, simple way practical matters related to the breaking of bread, [00:04:03] the Lord's Supper. I've read most of the relevant scriptures and because of that I read more than I normally would at the beginning of a meeting. Not with the intention of expanding them all, there won't be time for that, but just to make some basic practical remarks against the scriptures that have been read. Now, in that scripture, in Acts 2, we read that the early disciples continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in the breaking of bread and in prayers. Now, the basic concept there is the fellowship.

The apostles' doctrine regulates the fellowship.

The breaking of bread is the sweetest privilege of the fellowship. [00:05:04] Prayers sustain us in the fellowship, but they are all related to the fellowship to which we have been called, the fellowship of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And so we enter then in that Corinthian epistle which gives us basic teaching about assembly order in so many ways and we shouldn't be surprised that from chapters 10 to 14 matters of fellowship and relating to the fellowship are taken up. In particular, if in chapter 10 we have the responsibilities of those who break bread, in chapter 11 we have the privilege of breaking bread itself. Now, I feel I should just take up this matter of breaking bread, [00:06:04] the elements of it, in answer to some simple questions. First of all, why? Then when? Then what? Then how? And then with whom?

First of all, then why?

I learned a lot many years ago when a young Christian woman of a very tender age, a girl still, she asked the brethren if she could break bread, if she could remember the Lord in the breaking of bread. Two very mature brothers interviewed her to see whether she really knew why she wanted to break bread and they said to her in all simplicity, why do you feel you want to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread? [00:07:01] And her answer couldn't really be bettered and the mature brothers were happy to say afterwards when she gave that reply, what could we say? Now, this is what she said. The Lord Jesus is my saviour, I love him and I know he wants me to remember him. Now, you couldn't get a better exposition of a good answer to the question why. It is certainly the sweetest privilege and it's the normal response of every committed Christian. It's not the portion of an elite, not a question of achievement or performance, it is a question of understanding that the Lord who loves you and gave himself for you, that it is his request to you.

[00:08:02] Now, if that's the answer to the question why, again keeping it at this basic level, when is it proper to remember the Lord?

We've read the scripture. It was the common practice of the early disciples to gather together on the first day of the week.

Now, again, we cannot do better than follow the example of the early believers. Now, that scripture in Acts 20 tells us about other things that happened when they came together. But the first and the primary reason that they came together, they came together, they assembled to break bread. Now, the other matter relating to time concerning the breaking of bread is what the apostle Paul adds [00:09:01] that you don't get in the synoptic gospels where you get the record of the Lord initiating and instituting the feast. Paul adds a little rider as to time scale and as to opportunity. He says, till he come.

And in addition, he adds the point that Gentiles as well as Jews, all who've called upon the name of the Lord, we'll come back to that, are included in the request and in the invitation. When? The first day of the week. And it is an opportunity which is only available till he come. Now, time is short, but I will say this. I'm always impressed with the way scripture puts it. They came together on the first day of the week.

[00:10:01] Doesn't say they came together on the first day of each week or the first day of every week. It seems to me that what the Holy Spirit envisages in recording it in this way, in Acts 20, is this. We are not entitled to look further ahead than the week on which we are embarking by entering into the first day of the week. So, we meet together, we remember the Lord on the first day of the week in the

expectation that it's the only opportunity available to us because the coming of the Lord is imminent. Now, that's what I read into the expression, the first day of the week.

What do we do?

Oh, I'm glad we are not left to our own devices. The Lord said, take a loaf.

[00:11:04] It's on the table.

Take it and break it and pass it round.

And each of you who is responding to the Lord's request partakes from that loaf.

Now, there are deep things connected with that which there isn't time for today. I'm speaking of the activity itself. Taking bread and as an expression of the fellowship we are having in responding to the Lord and as a token of that fellowship to which we've been called, each of us takes part in that remembrance in that way. And then, as a distinct matter, I think this must be of great importance. The Lord said, take the bread and think of my body given.

[00:12:01] And then, as a distinct matter, the Lord said, take the cup. The cup of blessing which we bless, he said, oh yes, it's full of blessing for you. It was full of sorrow for him, but we can extol his virtues and his graces in the presence of the blessed God because there was a time when his body was given and as a distinct matter, at the same time, his blood, his precious, precious blood was shed.

How are we to do it?

Oh, thankfully, we remember the Lord with thankful spirits as we consider the length to which his love could go. But we also do it in a spirit of self-judgment. I feel that one of the least understood scriptures [00:13:03] is that which says, let a man examine himself and so let him eat.

It doesn't say, let a man or a woman examine himself and if he's pleased with the results of the examination, so let him eat, or just the reverse. If you or I thought that we were competent to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread as a result of our performance or achievement or our state of soul, we'd better get rid of that idea right away. We never would be able to break bread on the grounds of what we deserve.

But what the scripture does say is this.

You think of the Lord and what he did. [00:14:01] You think of yourself and in the light of the teaching of chapters one and two of the Corinthian epistle, you know that there's nothing in you that ever could be worthy before God and the only possible grounds for remembering the Lord in the breaking of bread is on the grounds of his worthiness and the fact that you have accepted the condemnation of God on what you are and what you've done, that that condemnation was carried out at the cross and that only because of the righteousness of God imputed to you, put to your credit on the grounds of the work of Christ could there be any blessing for you at all. We rule ourselves out of court having briefly considered ourselves that we could never be worthy on those grounds having come to the right conclusion we don't think about ourselves at all, [00:15:03] we think about the Lord.

If that's what we do and how we do it, with whom do we remember the Lord?

Well, the Corinthian epistle itself in the opening salutation says that potentially this is with all them who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ as Lord. We need to be aware that in what we might call second Timothy days, second Timothy chapter two, that there is that joint amendment to the potential and we get the word there them who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. But potentially it's those who like believers with us have taken Christ as our saviour.

[00:16:02] Now, if that's the activity I want to spend a little time now talking about practical impediments to the enjoyment of the remembrance of the Lord.

Now, I'm not going to talk about principles of reception, and I'm certainly not going to talk about principles of rejection.

But as you listen to my suggestions about things which in a practical way impede the enjoyment of the Lord's supper and prevent us giving to him what he deserves, you might well conclude that these are the reasons why some of the things that I'm going to mention [00:17:03] may well be classified or thought of if we were to try to establish principles of reception.

Now, fundamentally, they are things which dishonour the Lord. If we knowingly dishonour the Lord or allow things which dishonour the Lord, we cannot expect our remembrance of him on the first day of the week, in the breaking of the bread and the taking of the cup, we cannot expect glory for the Lord, praise to God, or blessing for us if we are knowingly involved in or allowing, condoning, things which basically are dishonouring to the Lord. And so I would say it's a very practical matter that evil doctrine, evil teaching, is dishonouring to the Lord [00:18:02] and is a practical impediment to the enjoyment of the Lord's supper and that which should flow from it. Likewise, evil practice, bad behaviour, whether evil personal behaviour or association with those whose doctrine and practice is evil, is a practical impediment to the enjoyment of the Lord's presence and responding to him in the breaking of bread.

Again, I would label as a practical impediment based against that potential circle where fellowship is to be enjoyed, those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ out of a pure heart, well, I would say sectarianism with a small s is an impediment. [00:19:02] The idea that you and I and a group of our personal friends should closet ourselves together and even if we don't say it, if we should even think the thought we are the people and nobody else is up to our standard, that is a practical impediment to remembering the Lord in the way that he would have us do. Now, we balance that against the earlier remark that evil doctrine and evil practice and association with those who are involved in such is a major impediment to the remembrance of the Lord. I would go further and say any negative thinking along the line of no and don't and looking for things to criticise rather than things to approve of again would be a practical impediment [00:20:01] to the remembrance of the Lord.

Having said all that, my personal experience which is now approaching 50 years, I suppose, is that the greater care taken in those with whom we are free to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread, in the Lord's Supper, the greater the care, the sweeter the worship.

Now, I must inject a comment here.

Notwithstanding the notice boards in certain parts of the world, the Lord's Supper is not a worship

meeting.

Now, you may like that remark, you may not. The Lord's Supper is not a worship meeting. It is the remembrance of the Lord [00:21:01] in the death that he died. Now, having said that boldly, I will also go on to say in Old Testament and New Testament the clear pattern that emerges is that worship in any dispensation, worship is the outcome of the completion of a sacrifice which is acceptable to God.

There has never ever been a sacrifice more acceptable to God than the death of our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. We should not then be at all surprised if the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper, leads as a matter of spiritual flow to true Christian worship.

The personal worth and the value to God [00:22:05] of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in death is the substance and the content of true spiritual worship.

But I would distinguish in my own mind between the Lord's Supper as an occasion and that to which it leads. It is spiritual flow when the consideration of the Lord in his death and the love that he showed in going into such a death for the glory of God to meet his every claim and for our blessing that this leads the soul into spiritual worship.

Indeed, in our day, the worship of the Father. Now, I have gone at a fair rate there to leave myself time for some practical considerations.

[00:23:05] Perhaps the greatest practical impediment to me in gaining what I can gain, in giving to the Lord what I can give in the Lord's Supper, perhaps the greatest impediment is lack of personal preparation.

I don't prepare what I may think or say.

I don't decide what him to give out. I don't decide on a line of ministry. But I prepare myself.

Now, how do I do that?

Overall, I would say, how I spend the rest of the week governs my response to the Lord on the first day of the week. [00:24:02] Simple but clear, isn't it? How I spend my life. I cannot in a superficial way adopt a pseudo-spiritual veneer on the first day of the week, which is not true of my spiritual condition as evidenced on the other six days of the week. How sad it would be if I thought I could switch something on on the first day of the week and then when that day was over put it away with my best suit of clothes and then live to please myself the rest of the week. Now, again, an amalgam of many years, I suppose, of personal experience, I want to make some suggestions, not in any flippant way, [00:25:02] but in a serious practical way, of things which affect my response to the Lord on the first day of the week. Having said what I have said in meaning it about the whole of the week, it is a question, isn't it, how I spend my Saturday.

How I spend my Saturday night will very much govern my spiritual state on the Lord's Day morning in the way I respond to the Lord.

So, again, on the first day of the week, what time do I get up?

Now, that's a very practical matter, isn't it? What time do I get back?

Do I begin the first day of the week saying, well, oh, I've had a hard day, I'll get up such a time which is convenient to me, and, well, if all the things I have to do [00:26:01] mean that I get to the meeting late, well, that's a pity. Or do I say, no, if I'm going to be composed for the remembrance of the Lord in the Lord's Supper, do I take account of all that I need to do before I get there, do I work backwards, and do I say, I will need to get up at such a time in order that, in a composed way, I can do what I need to do, meet my domestic responsibilities, and arrive early enough to compose myself to be ready when I get there. Again, what time do I leave home? By choice. I might get up early, meet my commitments, and then I could still leave home at a time which would get me to the meeting in a fluster. I trust I wouldn't do that. How can I really discern the Lord's voice, [00:27:03] this do, in remembrance of me, if everything, all the preliminaries of my day, are done with such an indecent haste that I'm all of a fluster when I gather together with the Lord's people? And how can I remember the Lord as he would wish me to if my mind is all full of other kinds of things? Could I give a word of exhortation to the brothers? Fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, do you do all that you can to ensure that not only you, but the womenfolk, get to the meeting in a state and a condition where they can really concentrate [00:28:03] on listening to the Lord's voice, this do, for a remembrance of me?

Again, let me say in practical terms, I'm not necessarily speaking about my home, my family, or those many houses and homes that I've stayed with amongst the brethren for many years, but isn't it a practical matter? Do I take my share of responsibility? Do I help to clean the shoes and to prepare the vegetables and do the jobs about the home that need to be done in order that the whole family get to the meeting in a time when we can be suitably composed? It's a practical thing.

I fear, when I read some books of the last century, this idea of the father in Victorian times [00:29:02] who was with his master in the study, but well and good, the rest of the household had to tiptoe, almost in fear of their lives, making sure that father wasn't disturbed. My practical response to that would be, think of the extra strain that was put upon the mother because she had to tiptoe doing everything that was left undone because father was in that Victorian study. Thankfully, I think we've got a little bit away from that. I would also say, as another practical matter, I find it very, very difficult to see any spiritual sense in the Judaistic idea of the segregation of the sexes. Scripture says, and it's a universal truth applying to all generations, God setteth the solitary in families. [00:30:04] Families are God's idea.

What a good thing that families are together and they sit together and they respond to the Lord together when they break the bread and they remember the Lord. That in that family situation, identified together, and if there's any little practical matter that needs to be attended to, it's done within the little group, the family sitting together. That's merely another practical point. Now, I've given a word to the brothers, sisters, so far ye thus far.

Again, not necessarily any home I've been in. But wouldn't it be a shame if a sister or a brother insisted on vacuuming right through the house [00:31:04] starting five minutes after the time that you should have left to get to the meeting to be in good time and composed to remember the Lord?

You sisters, all bear in mind, it's sometimes difficult enough for the brothers to take part in any coherent way, shy men that they are, without getting to the meeting all of a fluster three minutes after the time we should have all been sitting there. Sisters, we have a part. As I read the offerings in scripture, the subjective state of the Lord's people, the spiritual condition, is very often a matter of the

spiritual state of the sisters that are present. If things go well in the assembly, [00:32:02] we are happy to give the sisters the credit and say, well, of course, they provide the tone, and so they do. But if things were not to go so well, we might have to take account of the whole teaching of Old Testament and New Testament that the spiritual tone of the whole company and the matter of personal and collective response to the Lord may well be regulated by the spiritual tone of the sisters who are present.

Oh, I trust, sisters, that if the remembrance of the Lord in the Lord's Supper is not quite going as you would think it would or should, I trust you are not thinking, why doesn't somebody do something? Come in or at least give out a hymn. [00:33:01] Why doesn't such and such a brother give thanks?

We are not there to think about each other for good or for ill. Brothers and sisters, but I would particularly appeal to the sisters, and it's for this reason that we sang those two lovely hymns. For, Savior, we would contemplate thee, and again, oh, come my soul and gaze on that great grief, that crown of thorns. May I ask, sisters, that you don't even pray for the brothers, that they'll be led to do something. Think about the Lord.

Now, I think it's excellent, and it's time that we got to this point.

It's an excellent thing that in the Lord's Supper [00:34:02] that the Lord introduced and initiated, he's given us an aid to concentration. Most of us have butterfly minds, grasshopper minds, flipping from one thing to another. If I find it a difficult matter to concentrate on why I'm there, I have the bread to encourage me to think about the Lord's body. I have the wine to enable me to concentrate upon his bloodshed. Men speak of visual aids, helps to concentration. We couldn't have better than that which the Lord has given us, the bread which we break, the cup which we bless.

At any time, any of us find our thoughts wandering. Before or after the elements have been taken, it will help us to contemplate, to consider well the Lord in all his beauty, and that's what we are there for [00:35:02] if we look upon the elements, the bread and the wine.

And again, sisters, it's true, it works.

The brothers in their functioning role, as we had last month, the brothers express your response, our response on your behalf. How often a word of a hymn, a verse of scripture, a thought process that is going on in a brother or a sister's mind is given voice by somewhere else, someone else. And that occurs when we are all thinking about the Lord which is why we are there.

A word of exhortation to the brothers.

Younger brothers, join in simply, reverently, in words natural to your own vocabulary.

[00:36:06] Older brothers, and I feel for this, older brothers, time and again, encourage younger brothers to say just a few words of appreciation. I feel that younger brothers would be more likely to give a few words of simple thanksgiving if we older brothers led by example. Wouldn't it be good if just now and again a brother who may have something substantial to offer that might take some time to develop would just consider this the best way to teach us by example and in just a few simple, heartfelt words of thanksgiving give that response to the Lord and through the son to the father to demonstrate that what we encourage one another to do is indeed right.

[00:37:03] My time has gone.

I would only say this.

The sweetest privilege connected with the fellowship to which we've been called is the breaking of bread.

Every privilege brings responsibility, and I do feel that if we meet our responsibilities, if we pull our weight in the local assembly, if we show our loyalty, if we get on in a constructive, positive way with getting on with the tasks that need to be done, the tone of the fellowship will be all that sweeter. The tone of the worship that issues from the remembrance of the Lord and the breaking of bread would be all that sweeter for your practical, positive contribution. May the Lord help us to live it out. [00:38:03] Now, our closing hymn is number 436.

The result of thinking about the Lord and the death that he died comes out in hymns like this, God and Father, we adore thee, now revealed in Christ the Son. 436. God and Father, we adore thee, now revealed in Christ the Son.

Glory be to thy holy presence Through the world the King has come [00:39:02] Filled with grace we bow before thee Now and evermore we'll stay With thy holy house we rest With thy holy house we rest Glory, honor, praise, and glory To thee render unto thee [00:40:01] Life from strength and death from death In thy wonderful house we sleep For thy glory shall transcend earth In the presence of the Son Jesus Christ, our worthy Lord Let glory and health pour in all [00:41:02] Jesus, thy presence we behold thee Open, Lord, thy house below Come, let's sing of adoration Sing, let's sing of joy around In thy grace, our powers pour Share, Lord, thy joys with me [00:42:02] And with all the blessed secret Of his precious blessing to thee O God, our Father, we thank thee for thy word. We hear again the words of the Lord Jesus. Ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. We commend ourselves now to thee for the interval. Pray that when we come together again to hear thy word, we might be attentive and obedient to what thou shalt say to us. We ask it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.