

Following the Pattern

By Allen Dvorak

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the eve of His death, an emotional time with His disciples (John 13-17). He instructed them to "do this in remembrance of Me" and it is evident that the early Christians did indeed continue that practice (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:42). In fact, the disciples at Troas assembled on the first day of the week for the express purpose of observing the Supper.

7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

Paul had taught the Corinthians concerning the observance of the Lord's Supper and reiterated those instructions in the course of correcting their corruption of the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The Supper is intended to be a weekly proclamation of the Lord's death "till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Paul's instructions to the Corinthians make it obvious that the accounts in the synoptic gospels of the institution of the Supper are intended to be a pattern for our observance. His stern correction of the Corinthian practice also emphasizes the need for us to follow that pattern.

The Details of the Pattern

As already noted, Jesus intended for His disciples to eat the Supper on a regular basis. Acts 20:7 reveals both the day on which the Supper is to be eaten and the regularity of its observance (weekly). The fact that the Holy Spirit saw fit to reveal the day on which the disciples met to partake of the Supper is significant. In order to obey the Lord's command to "do this in remembrance of Me," we need information regarding when and how often to do so. The example of Acts 20:7 supplies this information.

The synoptic gospels record the institution of the Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). Jesus used unleavened bread to symbolize His body and fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:29) to represent His blood. We know the bread was unleavened because the Supper was instituted during the Passover feast and there was to be no leaven in the house during that feast (cf. Exodus 12:8, 14-20).

Jesus also identified the purpose of the Supper – it is a memorial (Luke 22:19). There is no mention, either by Jesus or His apostles, of the Supper providing forgiveness of sins.

Jesus prayed before giving the unleavened bread to the disciples. He also prayed before commanding each of the disciples to drink of the fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:27). Note the accounts of those prayers in the table below.

Bread	Fruit of the Vine
<i>Matthew 26:26 (NKJV)</i> 26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."	<i>Matthew 26:27 (NKJV)</i> 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."
<i>Mark 14:22 (NKJV)</i>	<i>Mark 14:23 (NKJV)</i>

22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."	23 Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it.
<i>Luke 22:19 (NKJV)</i> 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."	<i>Luke 22:20 (NKJV)</i> 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."
<i>1 Corinthians 11:24 (NKJV)</i> 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."	<i>1 Corinthians 11:25 (NKJV)</i> 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Every account mentions one or both of the prayers. A comparison of the accounts suggests that when Jesus "blessed" the bread, it is the same as "giving thanks" for the bread. It is also reasonable to understand that He was giving thanks for the bread and the fruit of the vine and not for things in general.

In our observance of the Supper, the one presiding at the table offers a prayer before each of the two elements of the Supper. We do that because of the example of Jesus. If a brother presiding at the table decided not to offer any prayers, would we object? If a brother presiding at the table decided to offer one prayer for both of the elements, would we object? We would object in both cases because he was not following the pattern provided in the Scriptures. Shouldn't we follow the Lord's pattern with regard to the purpose of the prayers, i.e., to give thanks for the elements themselves? Whatever else we might choose to thank the Lord for in these prayers, we should certainly at least give thanks for the elements.

Every account of the Supper's institution also mentions that Jesus broke the bread. In Paul's instructions to the Corinthians, Paul quoted the Lord, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you," thus making a connection between the breaking of the bread and the figurative "breaking" of Jesus' body on the cross (1 Corinthians 11:24; NKJV). It should be observed, however, that some manuscripts do not include the word "broken" in this passage.

Acts 20:7 provides us another detail of the pattern for the observance of the Supper. The disciples came together to observe the Supper. Did they do what they came together to do? There is no textual reason to assume that they did not.

By the time Paul met with the disciples at Troas, he had already written 1 Corinthians, the epistle in which he commanded the Christians to "wait for one another," i.e., eat together (11:33). They had not been eating together (11:21). We have both command and example for Christians eating as a congregation, but no example of individual Christians eating the Supper.

We need to follow the pattern for the Lord's Supper, but we have to recognize the details of that pattern before we are able to follow it.