

The Common Meal

by G.W. North

The common meal in the early Church was a vital aspect of its life, emphasizing unity, fellowship, and steadfastness.

Scripture: Acts 2:42, Acts 2:46

Topics: "Communion", "Fellowship"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes the significance of the 'breaking of bread' as a foundational practice of the early Church, illustrating how it symbolizes both communal participation and the continuity of faith among believers. He highlights that this act is not merely a ritual but a reflection of the Church's life, where joy and fellowship are central to their gatherings. North points out that Luke's use of this phrase connects the apostles' teachings with the communal life of the saints, showcasing the balance between the extraordinary unity of the Church and the ordinary life shared in homes. This practice fosters a sense of belonging and shared experience, essential for the growth and favor of the Church in the community.

Transcript

The first of the three scriptural titles is used in Acts 2.42. It is referred to in a list of four practices in which the Church steadfastly continued from the day of Pentecost onwards. It is a most homely phrase, obviously adapted by the writer from everyday life, and is admirably suited to create just the right atmosphere for the new-born family of saints. Luke deliberately sets it in that background with divine intention, thus introducing the ideas of naturalness and continuity.

Breaking of bread is a comprehensive term indicating to the eastern mind more than the literal wording of the phrase. It embraces the idea of participation in a whole meal, a normal practice of life as Luke shows in verses 46 & 47. But in verse 42, breaking of bread is distinctively spoken of in connection with apostles, and fellowship, and prayers, and connects with these the virtues of steadfastness and continuity. Obviously this is purposely done with the object of delineating early Church practice. In verses 46 & 47 the term is linked with the idea of ordinary (or is it extraordinary?) social hospitality; with singleness of heart the saints shared a common experience and life. The whole conveys the picture of a glad, joyful company, praising God and having favour with all the people.

In those few sentences Luke has presented two aspects of the Church's life:

(1) the Church extraordinary gathered together into one; (2) the Church ordinary dispersed abroad in their homes. He has simply taken a phrase in common use, lifted it out of its normal setting and applied it in all its simplicity to what had by then become the one common meal of the Church, thereby giving it particular emphasis. By doing this he : (1) purposely changed the entire meaning of the phrase, (2) he set it in a new age-abiding context, (3) he established its vital necessity.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gw-north/the-common-meal/>

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