

Discipleship Training Course

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- Speech marks around entire quotes and at the beginning of new paragraphs have been omitted
- Anglicised spellings have been used
- All quotes begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop
- Some weights, measures and times have been replaced with easier to understand terms given in the footnotes using square brackets
- All verse numbers, footnote numbers and symbols have been removed
- Poetry has been indented and only new sentences start with a capital letter

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Chapter 16. Communion

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1. Key Passages

The inauguration of communion is described in the gospel of Luke. From here we see that bread represents the body of Jesus and wine represents His blood. The disciples were charged to repeat this commemoration as a new ritual:

*The day of unleavened bread came, on which the Passover must be sacrificed. He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat." They said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?" He said to them, "Look, when you have entered into the city, a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him into the house which he enters. Tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' He will show you a large, furnished upper room. Make preparations there." They went, found things as He had told them, and they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, He sat down with the Twelve. He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will no longer by any means eat of it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." He received a cup, and when He had given thanks, He said, "Take this, and share it among yourselves, for I tell you, I will not drink at all again from the fruit of the vine, until the Kingdom of God comes." **He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and gave to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."** Likewise, He took the cup after supper, saying, **"This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you."***

Luke 22:7-20 (NHEB)

Jesus emphasised the need for His followers to partake of His flesh, which He described as living bread, and His blood in John's gospel:

When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they asked Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?"

Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. Don't work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For God the Father has sealed Him."

They said therefore to Him, "What must we do, that we may work the works of God?"

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

They said therefore to Him, "What then do you do for a sign, that we may see and believe you? What work do you do? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'"

Jesus therefore said to them, "Most certainly, I tell you, it wasn't Moses who gave you the bread out of heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

They said therefore to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

*Jesus said to them, "**I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to Me will not be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.** But I told you that you have seen Me, and yet you don't believe. All those whom the Father gives Me will come to Me. He who comes to Me I will in no way throw out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of My Father who sent Me, that of all He has given to Me I should lose nothing, but should raise Him up at the last day. This is the will of the One who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in Him, should have eternal life; and I will raise Him up at the last day."*

The Jews therefore murmured concerning Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down out of heaven." They said, "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then does he say, 'I have come down out of heaven?'"

Therefore Jesus answered them, "Don't murmur amongst yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'They will all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who hears from the Father and has learnt, comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God. He has seen the Father. Most certainly, I tell you, He who believes in Me has eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die. I am the Living Bread which came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

The Jews therefore contended with one another, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

*Jesus therefore said to them, "**Most certainly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you don't have life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me, and I in him.** As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father; so he who feeds on Me, he will also live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven – not as our fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread will live forever."* He said these things in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.

John 6:25-59 (WEBPB)

Finally, Paul explained to the Corinthians how to celebrate communion. He taught them the importance of sharing the same (symbolic) food and drink and examining themselves so that they had the assurance that their hearts were right before God in order not to bring judgment upon themselves. He also taught them that partaking in communion proclaims (or amplifies) the Jesus' death upon the cross until His return at the Second Coming:

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also He took the cup, 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.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:17-32 (ESVUK)

2. Old Testament origins

2.1 Melchizedek

The first root of communion in the Old Testament is Abraham's encounter with the priest Melchizedek who represented the LORD. Melchizedek brought Abraham bread and wine and blessed him:

After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

After Abram returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and all his allies, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

*And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, **brought Abram some bread and wine.** Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:*

*"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.*

*And blessed be God Most High,
who has defeated your enemies for you."*

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.

Genesis 14:17-20 (NLT)

According to Psalm 110, David prophesied that the Messiah will be an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek:

The LORD has sworn, and will not change His mind:

"You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."

Psalm 110:4

The ministry of Melchizedek is explained in detail in Hebrews 7:

Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of the Highest God. He met Abraham, who was returning from "the royal massacre," and gave him his blessing. Abraham in turn gave him a tenth of the spoils. "Melchizedek" means "King of Righteousness." "Salem" means "Peace." So, he is also "King of Peace." Melchizedek towers out of the past – without record of family ties, no account of beginning or end. In this way he is like the Son of God, one huge priestly presence dominating the landscape always.

You realize just how great Melchizedek is when you see that Father Abraham gave him a tenth of the captured treasure. Priests descended from Levi are commanded by law to collect tithes from the people, even though they are all more or less equals, priests and people,

having a common father in Abraham. But this man, a complete outsider, collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him, the one to whom the promises had been given. In acts of blessing, the lesser is blessed by the greater.

Or look at it this way: We pay our tithes to priests who die, but Abraham paid tithes to a priest who, the Scripture says, “lives.” Ultimately you could even say that since Levi descended from Abraham, who paid tithes to Melchizedek, when we pay tithes to the priestly tribe of Levi they end up with Melchizedek.

If the priesthood of Levi and Aaron, which provided the framework for the giving of the law, could really make people perfect, there wouldn’t have been need for a new priesthood like that of Melchizedek. But since it didn’t get the job done, there was a change of priesthood, which brought with it a radical new kind of law. There is no way of understanding this in terms of the old Levitical priesthood, which is why there is nothing in Jesus’ family tree connecting Him with that priestly line.

But the Melchizedek story provides a perfect analogy: Jesus, a priest like Melchizedek, not by genealogical descent but by the sheer force of resurrection life – He lives! – “priest forever in the royal order of Melchizedek.” The former way of doing things, a system of commandments that never worked out the way it was supposed to, was set aside; the law brought nothing to maturity. Another way – Jesus! – a way that does work, that brings us right into the presence of God, is put in its place.

The old priesthood of Aaron perpetuated itself automatically, father to son, without explicit confirmation by God. But then God intervened and called this new, permanent priesthood into being with an added promise:

*God gave His word;
He won’t take it back:
“You’re the permanent priest.”*

This makes Jesus the guarantee of a far better way between us and God – one that really works! A new covenant.

Earlier there were a lot of priests, for they died and had to be replaced. But Jesus’ priesthood is permanent. He’s there from now to eternity to save everyone who comes to God through Him, always on the job to speak up for them.

So now we have a High Priest who perfectly fits our needs: completely holy, uncompromised by sin, with authority extending as high as God’s presence in heaven itself. *Unlike the other high priests, He doesn’t have to offer sacrifices for His own sins every day before He can get around to us and our sins. He’s done it, once and for all: offered up Himself as the sacrifice. The law appoints as high priests men who are never able to get the job done right. But this intervening command of God, which came later, appoints the Son, who is absolutely, eternally perfect.*

Hebrews 7 (MSG)

2.2 The Passover

The second root of communion found in the Old Testament is the Passover meal. This was inaugurated when Israel was about to leave Egypt and commemorated their protection from the angel that destroyed the firstborn of Egypt. The blood from the lamb that they ate was sprinkled on their doorposts as a sign for the angel to pass over them and not to destroy them.

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month shall be to you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth day of this month, they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household; and if the household is too little for a lamb, then he and his neighbour next to his house shall take one according

to the number of the souls. You shall make your count for the lamb according to what everyone can eat. Your lamb shall be without defect, a male a year old. You shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at evening. They shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two door posts and on the lintel, on the houses in which they shall eat it. They shall eat the meat in that night, roasted with fire, and unleavened bread. They shall eat it with bitter herbs. Don't eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted with fire; with its head, its legs and its inner parts. You shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; but that which remains of it until the morning you shall burn with fire. This is how you shall eat it: with your belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's Passover. For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and animal. I will execute judgements against all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood shall be to you for a token on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day shall be a memorial for you. You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD. You shall keep it as a feast throughout your generations by an ordinance forever.

Exodus 12:1-14 (WEBPB)

In Hebrews 11, this act is remembered for the Israelites' exercising of faith.

By faith (simple trust and confidence in God) he instituted and carried out the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood [on the doorposts], so that the destroyer of the firstborn (the angel) might not touch those [of the children of Israel].

Hebrews 11:28 (AMPC)

In the same way we need to exercise faith when we take communion and proclaim God's protection over our lives.

2.3 Covenant meals

The third root of communion found in the Old Testament is the eating of a meal when two parties make a covenant. This is first seen in the covenant between Isaac and Abimelek:

Now Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army. Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me? You hated me and sent me away from you."

They replied, "We have clearly seen how the LORD has been with you. We think there should be an oath between two parties – between us and you. Let us make a covenant with you: You will not harm us, just as we have not harmed you but have only done what was good to you, sending you away in peace. You are now blessed by the LORD."

So he prepared a banquet for them, and they ate and drank. They got up early in the morning and swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left him in peace.

Genesis 26:26-31 (HCSB)

Secondly, Jacob and Laban ate a covenant meal when they made a covenant:

Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. He took his relatives with him, and pursued him seven days' journey. He overtook him in the mountain of Gilead. God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Be careful that you don't speak to Jacob either good or bad."

...

Laban answered Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine! What can I do today to these my

daughters, or to their children whom they have borne? Now come, let's make a covenant, you and I. Let it be for a witness between me and you."

Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. Jacob said to his relatives, "Gather stones." They took stones, and made a heap. They ate there by the heap. Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. Laban said, "This heap is witness between me and you today." Therefore it was named Galeed and Mizpah, for he said, "The LORD watch between me and you, when we are absent one from another. If you afflict my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, no man is with us; behold, God is witness between me and you." Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap, and see the pillar, which I have set between me and you. May this heap be a witness, and the pillar be a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." Then Jacob swore by the Fear of his father, Isaac. Jacob offered a sacrifice in the mountain, and called his relatives to eat bread. They ate bread, and stayed all night in the mountain. Early in the morning, Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them. Laban departed and returned to his place.

Genesis 31:22-24, 43-55 (WEBPB)

Thirdly, the consummation of the covenant on Mount Sinai was sealed when Moses, the priests and the seventy elders of Israel ate a covenant meal with the LORD:

Then the LORD instructed Moses: "Come up here to me, and bring along Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of Israel's elders. All of you must worship from a distance. Only Moses is allowed to come near to the LORD. The others must not come near, and none of the other people are allowed to climb up the mountain with him."

Then Moses went down to the people and repeated all the instructions and regulations the LORD had given him. All the people answered with one voice, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded."

Then Moses carefully wrote down all the LORD's instructions. Early the next morning Moses got up and built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He also set up twelve pillars, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent some of the young Israelite men to present burnt offerings and to sacrifice bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. Moses drained half the blood from these animals into basins. The other half he splattered against the altar.

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. Again they all responded, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded. We will obey."

Then Moses took the blood from the basins and splattered it over the people, declaring, "Look, this blood confirms the covenant the LORD has made with you in giving you these instructions."

Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel climbed up the mountain. There they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there seemed to be a surface of brilliant blue lapis lazuli, as clear as the sky itself. And though these nobles of Israel gazed upon God, He did not destroy them. In fact, they ate a covenant meal, eating and drinking in His presence!

Exodus 24:1-11 (NLT)

Finally, David's proclamation in Psalm 23 appears to relate to taking a covenant meal with the LORD:

***You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.***

You anoint my head with oil.

My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the LORD's house forever.

Psalms 23:5-6 (WEBPB)

2.4 The priests' share of offerings

The fourth root of communion in the Old Testament is the provision for the priests to eat a share of the offerings made at the altar:

The LORD gave these further instructions to Aaron: "I Myself have put you in charge of all the holy offerings that are brought to Me by the people of Israel. I have given all these consecrated offerings to you and your sons as your permanent share. You are allotted the portion of the most holy offerings that is not burned on the fire. This portion of all the most holy offerings – including the grain offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings – will be most holy, and it belongs to you and your sons. You must eat it as a most holy offering. All the males may eat of it, and you must treat it as most holy.

All the sacred offerings and special offerings presented to Me when the Israelites lift them up before the altar also belong to you. I have given them to you and to your sons and daughters as your permanent share. Any member of your family who is ceremonially clean may eat of these offerings.

I also give you the harvest gifts brought by the people as offerings to the LORD – the best of the olive oil, new wine, and grain. All the first crops of their land that the people present to the LORD belong to you. Any member of your family who is ceremonially clean may eat this food.

Everything in Israel that is specially set apart for the LORD also belongs to you.

The firstborn of every mother, whether human or animal, that is offered to the LORD will be yours. But you must always redeem your firstborn sons and the firstborn of ceremonially unclean animals. Redeem them when they are one month old. The redemption price is five pieces of silver (as measured by the weight of the sanctuary shekel, which equals twenty gerahs).

*However, you may not redeem the firstborn of cattle, sheep, or goats. They are holy and have been set apart for the LORD. Sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. The meat of these animals will be yours, just like the breast and right thigh that are presented by lifting them up as a special offering before the altar. **Yes, I am giving you all these holy offerings that the people of Israel bring to the LORD. They are for you and your sons and daughters, to be eaten as your permanent share. This is an eternal and unbreakable covenant between the LORD and you, and it also applies to your descendants.**"*

Numbers 18:8-19 (NLT)

This provision for the priests was alluded to by the writer to the Hebrews when describing the provision that God has made for all New Covenant believers as priests through communion:

*Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. **We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.***

Hebrews 13:9-10 (NASB1995)

3. Communion in the New Testament

The practice of taking communion is seen in two passages in the book of Acts where it is described as **breaking bread**:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, **to the breaking of bread** and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. **They broke bread in their homes** and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Acts 2:42-47 (NIVUK)

***On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.** Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.*

Acts 20:7 (NVUK)

Finally, Paul taught the Corinthians not to partake of idol feasts because they are a covenant meal with demons. He explained that partaking of a covenant meal is a participation in the altar upon which the offering is sacrificed. Therefore taking communion is a participation in the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross:

*Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I am speaking as to wise people. Judge for yourselves what I say. **The cup of blessing that we give thanks for, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all of us share that one bread.** Look at the people of Israel. Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in what is offered on the altar? What am I saying then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I do say that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to participate with demons! You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot share in the Lord's table and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?*

1 Corinthians 10:14-22 (HCSB)