



# COVENANT

## PROMISE, PROVISION & PROGRESSIVE PURPOSE

DIGGING DEEPER, BUILDING STRONGER.

#ROOTED

# THE COVENANT MEAL



# WHY THIS MATTERS...

- Jesus broke a loaf into pieces, distributed it amongst His disciples and said “*do this in remembrance of me*” – and this event has been re-enacted ever since, every week, by believers in every nation...
- The Lord’s Supper “embodies and proclaims in a single rite, the entire richness of the gospel” and is regarded as a ‘sacrament’ (= an outward, visible act imparting an inward, spiritual grace) - a *sign* (pointing to something), a *symbol* (representing something) and a *seal* (conveying something) [cf. baptism, anointing with oil, laying on of hands, foot-washing, etc]
- But there’s widespread variation in practice and misunderstanding of the biblical mode and meaning. It is too often ritualised or marginalised, rather than being properly recognised and magnified!...

# KEY TEXTS

## **Synoptic Gospels**

which all narrate the ‘last supper’ (not a biblical term):

Mt 26:17-30

Mk 14:12-26

Lk 22:7-23

## **Acts**

where Luke describes “breaking of bread”:

Ac 2:42-46

Ac 20:7-12

## **1 Corinthians**

where Paul writes about the “Lord’s table” and the “Lord’s supper”:

1Co 10:14-21

1Co 11:17-34

- Plus: Jn 6:51-58 (related teaching) and Jn 13:1-11 (occasion of last supper?)
- Plus: Allusions in the feeding miracles; Lk 24:30-35 (Emmaus Road); 1Co 5:7-11 (purity in the church) and elsewhere...

# TERMINOLOGY

- “**Lord’s table**”, “**Lord’s supper**”, “**breaking bread**” - from the NT texts.
- ‘**Communion**’ - from *koinōnía* (‘fellowship, sharing, participation’) in 1Co 10:16 [KJV: “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?”].
- ‘**Eucharist**’ - from *eucharistéō* (‘giving thanks’) in Lk 22:17,19, commonly used in the post-NT church (*Didache* 9:2-4, 10:2-6).
- ‘**Covenant Meal**’ - from the cup-sayings (Mt 26:28, Mk 14:24, Lk 22:20, 1Co 11:25).
- ‘**Mass**’ and ‘**Divine Liturgy**’ - Non-biblical terms used by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches respectively.

# || CONTEXT OF THE COVENANT MEAL?

- GENERALLY: Jewish meals, which expressed friendship and unity ('table-fellowship') and were integral to covenant-making (Ge 26:30, 31:54; 2Sa 3:20f), being eaten in God's presence (Ex 18:12, 24:11). Jesus shared meals (often with sinners) to demonstrate forgiveness (Mt 11:19, Mk 2:15, Lk 5:29ff, Jn 2:1ff) and anticipate the coming Banquet (Lk 13:29).
- SPECIFICALLY: The Passover Meal (see Ex 12), whereby:
  - On 10<sup>th</sup> Nisan family-head took an unblemished lamb for family (12:3)
  - At twilight on 14<sup>th</sup> lamb slaughtered and blood painted on doorframe (12:6-7)
  - That evening (start of 15<sup>th</sup>) a meal of lamb, herbs, unleavened bread (12:8)
- Thereafter, Passover celebrated annually on 14<sup>th</sup> Nisan (start of Feast of Unleavened Bread, Ex 12:15ff, Lev 23:4ff). Format evolved (cf Nu 9:9ff, 28:19ff, Dt 16:2)...

# PASSOVER IN JESUS'S DAY

- Comprised 4 parts:
  1. Thanksgiving (*kiddus*) by family-head, followed by 1st Cup of wine ('cup of consecration') and dish of herbs and fruit purée.
  2. Recital of Passover story (*haggādāh*) by family-head (from Dt 26:5-1), singing Ps 113-114, and drinking 2nd Cup ('cup of proclamation').
  3. Blessing and breaking unleavened bread, main meal (roast lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs), and 3rd Cup ('cup of blessing').
  4. Singing of Ps 115-118 and 4th Cup.
- Rich symbolism (sacrificed lamb reminded them of blooded doorposts; unleavened bread represented haste with which they left Egypt; bitter herbs spoke of slavery; fruit purée reminded them of the clay used to make bricks in Egypt; four cups reminded them of God's promises).
- Households 're-lived' Passover as *if they'd participated in it* - looking back to their redemption from Egypt, and looking forward to Messiah and His kingdom...

# THE MOST SIGNIFICANT MEAL OF ALL TIME.



The Synoptics and 1Corinthians describe the “Lord’s Supper” during Jesus’s ‘last supper’, His final Passover meal (Mk 14:12-16). He took great care to eat privately with the Twelve, then He reinterpreted the Passover elements and *instituted a new meal...*

We have two accounts: (1) Mark’s (AD 55+), which is followed by Matthew (AD 70+); and (2) Paul’s (AD 53-54), which is followed by Luke (AD 80+)...

# THE EARLIEST ACCOUNTS

<sup>22</sup>While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” <sup>23</sup>Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. <sup>24</sup>“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. <sup>25</sup>“Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

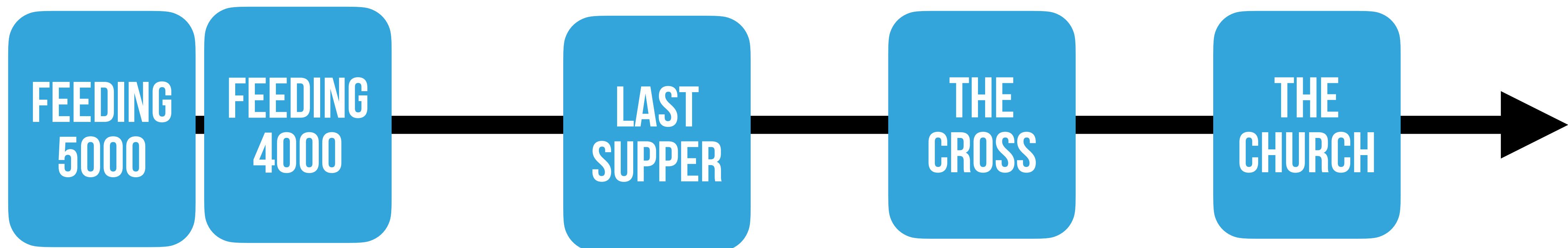
**Mark 14:22-25**

<sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup>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.” <sup>25</sup>In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” <sup>26</sup>For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26.**

# “TOOK, BLESSED, BROKE, GAVE...”

This phrase concerning the bread is used several times, first in the feeding-miracles, which foreshadow the Last Supper, which foreshadows the Cross. This in turn, indicates God's way for the church in its mission to the multitudes, and ultimately points to the final banquet when Christ returns...



*Bread taken, blessed, broken and given...*

Mt 14:19    Mt 15:36  
Mk 6:41    Mk 8:6  
Lk 9:16  
Jn 6:11

*Bread taken, blessed, broken and given...*

Mt 26:26  
Mk 14:22  
Lk 22:19

*Jesus, **the Bread of Life** taken, blessed, broken and given as a sacrifice for sin...*

**The Church** taken (chosen), blessed (filled with His Spirit), broken (filled with His compassion) and given (sent into all the world)...

# “THIS IS MY...”

22While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; **this is my body.**” 23Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24“**This is my blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. 25“Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

**Mark 14:22-25**

- “**BODY**” = *sōma* (physical body; the body as a whole; the instrument of life)
- “**BLOOD**” = *haíma* (life-blood)

SO, WHAT DO THESE TWO STATEMENTS MEAN?...

# “...BODY, BLOOD”?

How ‘present’ is Christ? Four historic views:



CATHOLICISM

**Roman Catholics**  
Bread and wine is *changed into* the substance of Christ’s body and blood by the consecrating prayer (‘transubstantiation’). There is ‘Real (bodily) Presence’.



REFORMATION ——>

**Martin Luther**  
(1483-1546)  
Christ’s body is “in, with and under” the bread; it ‘coexists’ with the physical bread and wine (‘consubstantiation’).



**John Calvin**  
(1509-1564)  
Christ is really present, but *spiritually* not bodily.



**Ulrich Zwingli**  
(1484-1531)  
No ‘real’ presence at all; simply a memorial, *signifying* Christ’s presence.



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## BREAKOUT GROUPS

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HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE  
CHRIST'S 'PRESENCE' IN THE  
COVENANT MEAL?

# I | INTERPRETING THE TEXT

- We reject a literal (Catholic) interpretation because:
  - The meal is full of *symbolism*; it's consistent for Jesus to use such language;
  - Elsewhere, He frequently used *metaphors* without intending a literal interpretation (eg: “I am the gate/vine”, etc)
  - Linguistically, a literal interpretation is unnecessary (cf. a photo: “this is me”)
  - Gordon Fee: A literal interpretation fits Greek ways of thinking, but not the (original) Jewish thought-patterns.
- However, His Presence is surely ‘very real’ and *very powerful*... even if the precise meaning remains a mystery.
- Charles Cranfield: “the supper is his *appointed tryst* with his own”... “the pledge and means of his real personal presence, though unseen”.

# I “DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE”

The **Paul-Luke versions** include the command to REMEMBER:

- “Remembrance” is *anámnēsis* - not ‘in memory of’, but ‘an affectionate calling of the Person Himself to mind’ (Vine). Hence, Amplified: “Do this to call Me [affectionately] to remembrance.”
- A bringing of the *past* into the *present*. “The Lord’s Supper was the weekly reminder that Jesus Christ was the living Lord of all time: past, present and future. In sharing the Supper, all of time was collapsed into a moment of time...” (Thurston, *Spiritual Life*, 50).
- Remembering around the Table can be a powerful time of ‘**re-membering**’, ie: re-joining, recommitting to Christ and one another...

# IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

- John 13 describes a “supper” - confirmed as the ‘last supper’ by the prediction of Judas’s betrayal (13:2, 21ff)? - but there is *no mention of bread and wine*.\* Instead, the emphasis is on sacrifice and servanthood (illustrated in the foot washing, 13:4-15), and the “new commandment” to love one another (13:34).
- However, there are also other ‘allusions’ to the Supper elsewhere:
  - John 2 - the wedding-feast and first miracle.
  - John 6, which is just before a Passover (6:4) and where, after feeding multitudes (6:1-15) Jesus declared He is the “bread of life” (6:35,48,51), and that eating His flesh and drinking His blood gives eternal life (6:54-58).
  - John 15 - the vine (wine) narrative.

\* John typically presents his gospel material differently to the writers of the synoptics; perhaps in this case it's because his readers would already be familiar with the bread-wine events (the Synoptics were already in circulation) and John wants to bring a different, additional and complementary emphasis.

# IN THE EARLY CHURCH

## End of Gospels

Jesus shares post-resurrection MEALS with His disciples

Lk 24:30, 41-43

Jn 21:13, Ac 1:4

NB: **Lk 24:30** “took, blessed, broke, gave”.

## Acts

“BREAKING BREAD” is one of the 4 key devotions of the Jerusalem church (**Ac 2:42-46**), as part of shared meals and immediately distinct from Passover.

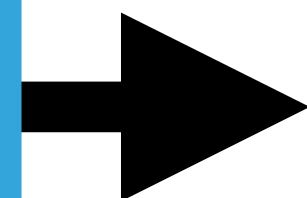
[NB: “devoted” is *proskarteréō* - ‘holding fast’ with intense persistence and constant attention].

And at Troas 25 yrs later (**Ac 20:7-11**) the meal is linked with real resurrection power!

## Epistles

Paul describes the exclusivity of the “LORD’S TABLE” at **1Co 10:14-21** and gives detailed instruction to the church concerning the “LORD’S SUPPER” at **1Co 11:17-34** in order to address several issues that had arisen...

Also refs to “love feasts” in the other churches (Jude 1:12, 2Pe 2:13)



# THE CORINTHIAN ISSUES

- In Corinth, their gatherings “do more harm than good” (11:17) because of “divisions” (schisms) (11:18) and “differences” (factions) (11:19), so that “it is not” (*by its nature*) “the Lord’s Supper” (11:20).
- **Context?** Early church ate the Supper during shared ‘agape’ meals (“love feasts”, Jude 1:12, 2Pe 2:13) where rich provided for poor and everyone ate together in homes of the wealthy...
- But in Corinth the rich ate whilst others went hungry, and some were drunk (11:21-22) - treating the *agape meal* like a party – a “monstrous violation of Christian unity”: social differences emphasised, the poor humiliated and embarrassed, and the Church of God despised (11:22).

# THE APOSTLE'S RESPONSE?...

Paul reminds them of the origins of the Supper (11:23) – detail he “received from the Lord” - and restates its original context (“the night Jesus was betrayed”, 11:23), a stark contrast to the atmosphere in Corinth.

He emphasises the need for “remembrance” (11:24-25) and “proclamation” (11:26); like Passover, it’s an ‘acted sermon’ in which everyone has a part “until he comes” (an ‘interim’ meal). And then delivers a damning verdict (note the ‘judicial language’)...

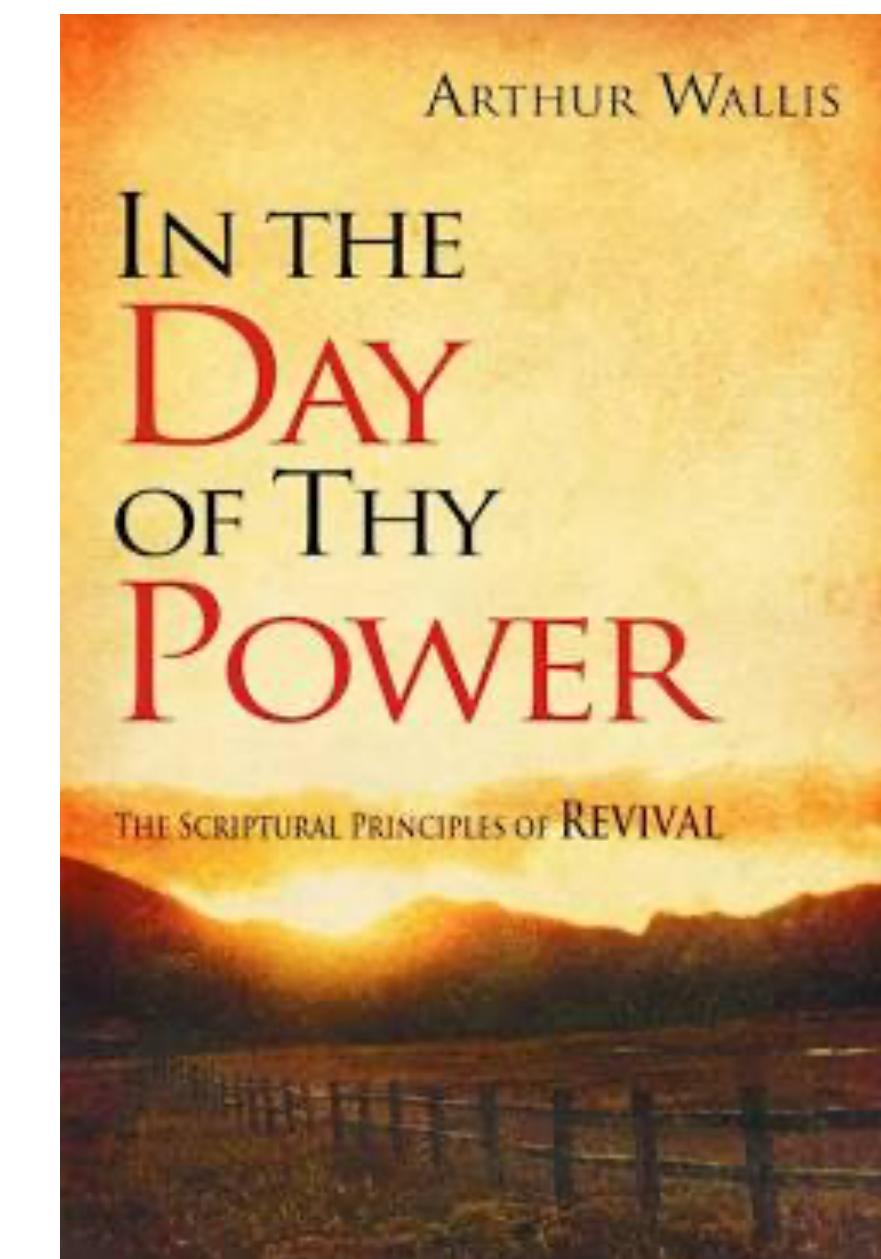
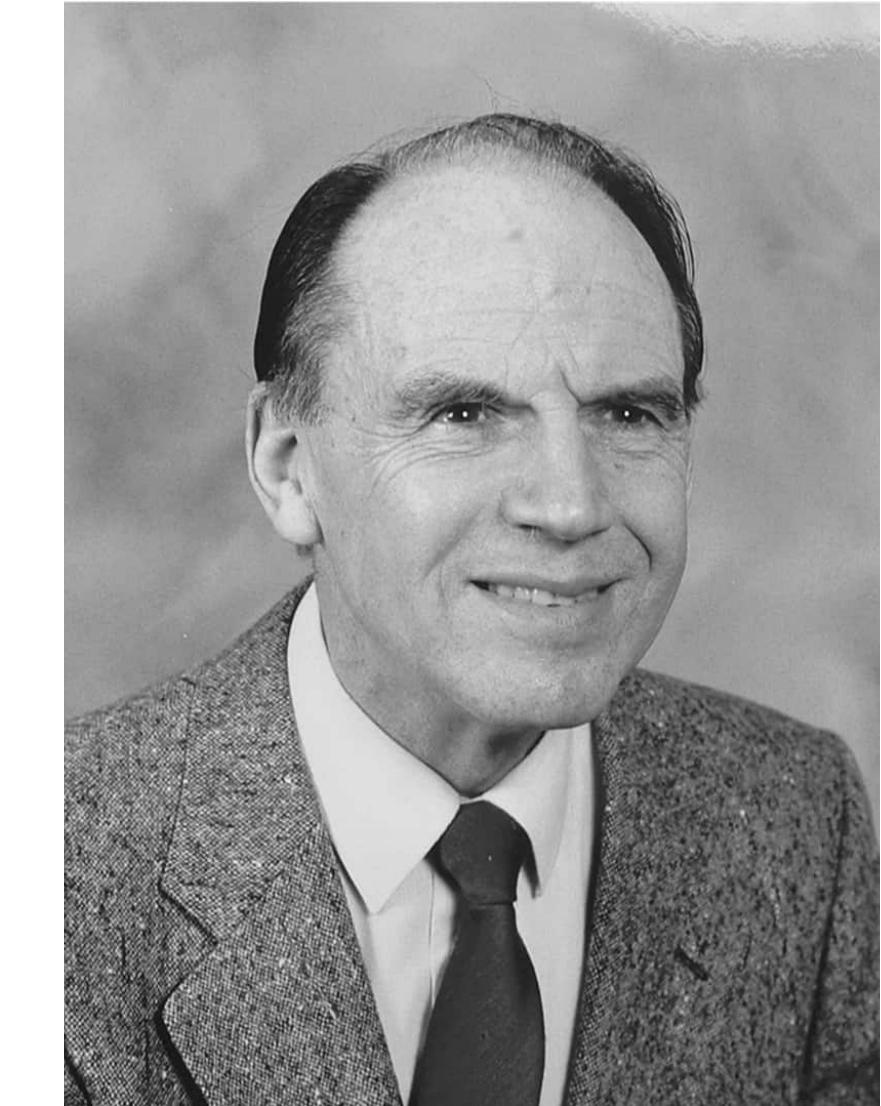
1. They have participated in an “unworthy manner” and are “guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (11:27).
2. They should “examine” themselves (11:28) lest they bring further “judgment” on themselves (11:29, 31).
3. Widespread weakness, sickness and death have resulted from their failure to “recognise (discern) the body” (11:29-31); *the Lord has judged* their actions (11:32).
4. Christ’s “body” has gathered in Corinth, but they haven’t recognised (discerned) who they really are - they must “come together to eat”, celebrating covenant (11:33).



**...THE COMMUNITY-MAKING & COVENANT-KEEPING POWER OF THE  
LORD'S SUPPER IS SO REAL - AND JESUS IS SO PRESENT - THAT  
CARELESS DISREGARD HAS THE MOST SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES.**

# || HIS TABLE & HIS SPIRIT

- Acts 2 shows us a direct and profound link between the *outpoured Spirit* and devotion to the *Covenant Meal* (Ac 2:42, 26).
- And in numerous documented ‘revivals’ it seems **the Spirit directs the Church back to the centrality of the Table, as a focal-point for meeting Jesus** (Jn 16:13-14). Eg: Glasgow (1742), Cane Ridge, (1801), South India (1860-65), Brownsville/Pensacola (1995-2000). [See Arthur Wallis, *In the Day of Thy Power: The Scriptural Principles of Revival* (1956; reprint 2010) for more details].
- Similarly, major ‘revivals’ in the OT were also characterised by a widespread return to the keeping of the Passover: under Hezekiah (2Ch 30), Josiah (2Ki 23:21-23) and Ezra (Ezra 6).



# ITS MEANING THEN & NOW?

## PRESENCE!

Not bodily, but *very real*, personal and powerful. He's the Host; we eat with Him and He appropriates the blessings of His Presence...

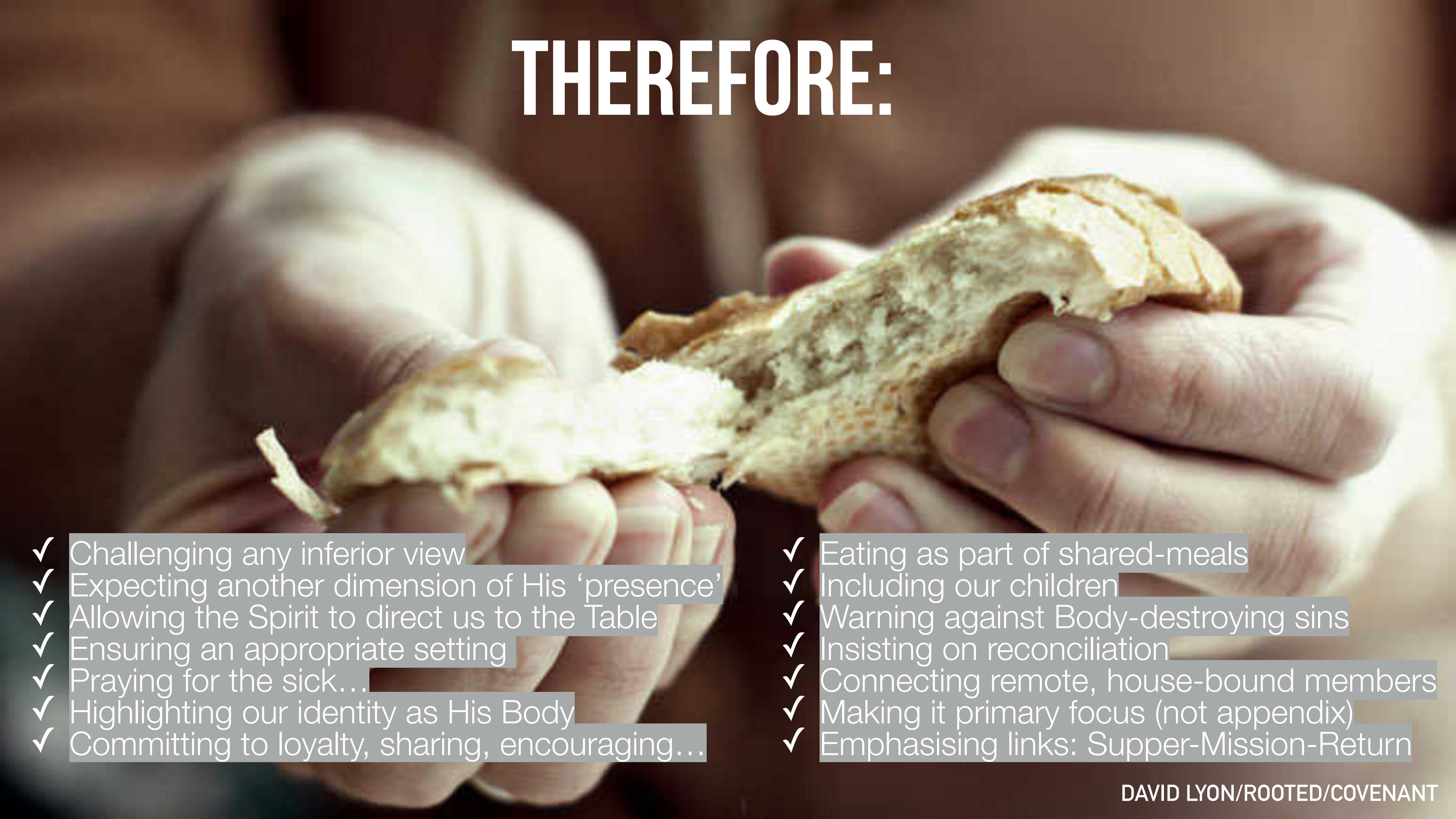
## PARTICIPATION!

With Christ (a share in Him that is exclusive) and one another (fellowship that transcends differences; engenders respect, preference, honour)...

## PROCLAMATION!

Calling Christ to mind; an acted sermon proclaiming His death, resurrection, ascension, outpouring, commission and return...

# THEREFORE:



- ✓ Challenging any inferior view
- ✓ Expecting another dimension of His 'presence'
- ✓ Allowing the Spirit to direct us to the Table
- ✓ Ensuring an appropriate setting
- ✓ Praying for the sick...
- ✓ Highlighting our identity as His Body
- ✓ Committing to loyalty, sharing, encouraging...

- ✓ Eating as part of shared-meals
- ✓ Including our children
- ✓ Warning against Body-destroying sins
- ✓ Insisting on reconciliation
- ✓ Connecting remote, house-bound members
- ✓ Making it primary focus (not appendix)
- ✓ Emphasising links: Supper-Mission-Return



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## FURTHER STUDY

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READ ARTHUR WALLIS'S  
CLASSIC BOOK:  
"IN THE DAY OF THY POWER"