



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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August 20, 2020

Dear Beloved in Christ Jesus and Saints of God,

It was a blessed Lord's Day with you last week. Not only did we worship again morning and evening, but when we came together for evening worship, we also communed at the Lord's Table for the first time in almost six months.

This Lord's Day was also special, in its own way, due to the lack of air conditioning! Thank you for enduring the heat and mild discomfort without complaining. By way of update on that situation: we should have air conditioning this Lord's Day. The problem was caused because two of the outside units kicked in during the week, but the compressors were unable to vent and overheated. Thankfully those units had safety monitors installed, which prevented permanent damage. They are up and running. The third unit had its motor burn out, which is currently slated to be replaced this week. All in all: the church that sweats together stays together ... or something like that!

We had some questions come up this Lord's Day regarding our observance of the Supper and the type of bread we use. Some have expressed concern that while we now, in obedience to Jesus' command, use wine, but we have not switched to unleavened bread. It is a good question, it's a faithful question, and it is a question that deserves serious consideration. After all, since Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at Passover when the only bread available would have been unleavened, shouldn't we follow that pattern just as we have with wine?

I want to try to set people's consciences at ease regarding the bread we use for the Lord's Table: indeed either leavened or unleavened bread may be used in obedience to Christ's commands here. Let me try to explain why from church history, the nature of the covenant, and the biblical text.

I. Historical Considerations

There is not a great deal of evidence regarding what sort of bread was used during the days of the Apostles and diversity of practice gradually developed in the Church throughout her history. The first difference that developed was between the Eastern Christian Church (e.g. Byzantine or Greek Orthodox) and the Western Christian Church (e.g. Latin or Roman Catholic). The Eastern church used leavened bread, while the Roman Church eventually adopted unleavened bread.

During the time of the Reformation in the West, Reformed and Protestant churches typically began using leavened bread rather than the unleavened bread preferred by the Romish Church. The Church of England, however, continued to use unleavened bread.

As you can see, the Church has historically used both types of bread, so we must be careful not to consider one sort of bread more appropriate than the other.

II. Covenantal/Theological Considerations

A. Passover Bread

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as the covenant meal of the New Testament, He did so at Passover, and the bread at Passover was certainly unleavened. That Passover was, in fact, the final Passover meal until the Kingdom of God comes in its fullness.

As such, it is important to remember that the Lord's Supper is *not* a reenactment of the Passover meal, which was the covenant meal of the *Old* Covenant. Passover is finished until Christ comes, so it would be inappropriate for Christians to seek to go back to observe an Old Covenant ordinance.

Likewise, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was an Old Covenant observance that is in no way binding on New Covenant believers, especially Gentile congregations (see Acts 15:28-29, Gal. 5:3-4).

Jesus' command was for His disciples to observe a covenant meal of bread and wine in remembrance of Him and His death in our place until He returns. The meal is a sign and seal of God's loyalty to His people that extends not only to this life, but to eternity as Jesus will return to dwell with His saints.

B. Leaven in Scripture

Another concern regarding the use of leavened bread is that often leaven is used to illustrate the way sin works in the lives of believers. The Saviour, for example, warns against the leaven of the Pharisees. This was an illustration or analogy of how the corrupting influence of their doctrine spreads. Likewise, in the Feast of Unleavened Bread Israel was to remember their speedy departure from Egypt and to leave behind all the sinful influences of Egypt, the “leaven” of Egypt.

However, leaven itself is *not* sinful. The Holy Spirit commands worshipers to bring *leavened* bread as a sacrifice in the Temple (cf. Lev. 7:13, Lev. 23:16-17). Christ also describes the Kingdom of God in terms of leaven:

He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” (Matthew 13:33)

So it is clear from the Scripture that leaven is neither good nor bad, sinful nor holy in itself. Leaven can be used to illustrate both the way sin works or to illustrate the way the Kingdom of God will take over the world.

III. Biblical Considerations

By far the most important factor in how we come together to commune at the Lord’s Table is the words the Holy Spirit used to describe both the institution of the Lord’s Supper as well as the observance of it during the days of the Apostolic Church.

While there is clear evidence the Apostolic Church used some sort of wine with communion (see 1 Cor. 11), there is no evidence the Apostolic Church utilized unleavened communion bread. In fact, to the contrary, in his account (written for a Gentile audience), Luke seems to go out of his way to make sure we do not get the impression only unleavened bread could be used to observe the Lord’s Supper.

In Luke 22:1, he uses the Greek word for *unleavened bread* (*azymōn*) to describe the feast. However when Luke (22:19) describes Jesus taking bread, breaking it, and giving it to the disciples, he does not say unleavened bread, but in fact the word for regular *normal bread* (*arton*), and specifically a round (risen) loaf of bread. This is also the word Matthew uses to describe the five loaves with which Jesus fed 5000 Hebrew men (Matt 14:17) and 4000 Gentiles (Matt. 15:34).

Additionally, whenever the New Testament uses the Greek word for *unleavened bread*, it is always referring to something *other than* the bread of the Lord’s Table. Whenever the Bible refers to the bread of the Lord’s Supper, the Holy Spirit always uses the word for common, ordinary (leavened) bread.

Indeed it is certain Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper using leavened bread, but the Greek used by the Holy Spirit through the Prophets makes it very clear that whether the bread that accompanies the wine in the Supper is leavened or unleavened is a matter of indifference. The Bible shows the church during the days of the Apostles clearly used whatever bread and wine were available.

I hope this helps to ease the consciences of those who are concerned to observe the Lord’s supper in keeping with Christ’s commands. The Saviour did not dictate what sort of bread is to be used with the wine at the New Covenant meal. But the important thing is that we do this in remembrance of Him: both His saving work and His promise to return.

I am thankful that those who were concerned about the elements of the supper have not allowed their questions to become sources of division, but have patiently and faithfully brought these questions to the Session for us to address in a biblical, thoughtful manner that will hopefully promote both unity and love within the body of Christ here at the corner of Harker and LaFayette.

Your servant for Christ’s sake,



Ryan Biese,
Pastor