

The Lord's Supper

I. Modern Day Applications

- A. In churches of Christ it is generally referred to as the “Lord’s Supper”
- B. Others refer to it as the “eucharist”
- C. Some call it “holy communion” or just “communion”
- D. There are those that refer to it as a sacrament (there is dispute among religious groups both as to how many sacraments there are and their meaning)

II. Biblical Background: Rooted in Old Testament Theology

A. Concept of Memorial

- 1. Israelite religion was full of memorials:
 - a. Sampling of these memorials are as follows: Genesis 9:13-16 - Rainbow; Exodus 20:8-11 - Sabbath; Exodus 16:32- Omer of Manna in the Ark of Testimony; Exodus 28:7-12 - Names of the Sons of Israel on High Priest’s clothes; Joshua 4:5, 6 - Stones at the crossing of the Jordan; Joshua 24:21-28 - Stones as a witness to a vow
 - b. Purposes of these memorials
 - 1) To commemorate an act of God (Exodus 12:25-27)
 - 2) Continual reminder of God’s lovingkindness (Exodus 16:32-33)
 - 3) Instructional tool for the children (Joshua 4:6)

2. Passover Memorial

- a. 1st Passover - Exodus 12:1-14
 - 1) Unblemished lamb sacrificed and eaten with bitter herbs
 - 2) Not one bone of the lamb was to be broken
 - 3) The blood was on door post as a “sign”, God would pass

over

- b. A memorial feast was to be observed annually to commemorate this

3. Jewish Concept of Memorial

- a. Was not strictly cognitive
- b. They saw themselves as participants in the event commemorated

1) "It was the duty of the father to explain to his son what the Passover meal meant. 'And you shall tell your son on that day, It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt' (Exodus 13.8). In the full order of the Passover, here the youngest person present is to ask:

Why is this night different from other nights? For on all other nights we eat unleavened bread, but on this night only unleavened bread. On all other nights we eat any kind of herbs, but on this night only bitter herbs. On all other nights we eat meat roasted, stewed or boiled, but on this night only roasted.

In reply the father must begin at the saying in Deuteronomy 25.6: 'A wandering Aramean was my father', and, beginning with Abraham, he must tell the story down to the deliverance of the Passover."

- William Barclay *The Lord's Supper* p. 22-23 Westminster Press

2) "To a Hebrew, to remember meant to reexperience in the present the power and effect of a past event. It was a reappropriation, not merely a recollection.

...as Jews celebrated the Passover...they did not conceive it as a time simply to recall what God did for their ancestors hundreds of years before. ... It was not "our ancient ancestors" whom he delivered, but "us." -Jack Reese, *In Search of Wonder: A call to Worship Renewal*. p. 129 Howard Publishing.

3) Passover normally ended with a song & shout of praise

4. By new testament times, in addition to the lamb, unleavened bread and herbs, other elements of the supper came to have a specific meaning:

- a. A bowl of salt water - Represent tears in Egypt
- b. Charoseth, a paste made of various fruits with cinnamon sticks - To remind them of the mortar and straw they used to make the bricks in Egypt, which were withheld from them by the Egyptians
- c. Four cups of wine - To remember the four promises of Exodus 6:6.

- 1) Each was to have his own cup, and if he couldn't afford one, the Talmud specified he either pawned his coat or hired himself out to get it.
- 2) Throughout various parts of the meal, the cup was filled four times

B. Concept of Covenant

1. Basic idea of a covenant was an agreement between two parties
 - a. There were two parties to a covenant, a suzerain and a vassal
 - b. The vassal had no part in the terms of the covenant and the suzerain spelled out the terms. (Exodus 19:5-8)
2. Genesis 15:7-17; Jeremiah 34:18-19
 - a. Idea behind the word for covenant was “division” or “to cut” (note modern terminology - “to cut a deal”)
 - b. Not to keep the terms of the covenant meant to suffer the fate of these animals
 - c. This illustrates that a covenant was serious and solemn and was not entered into casually
3. Exodus 24:3-8
 - a. Covenants were made with the shedding of blood (taking of a life)
 - b. Leviticus 8:14-15 - The shedding of blood purified and consecrated
 - c. Genesis 9:4 - Significance of the blood: Life is in the blood

C. Concept of Atonement

1. Leviticus 16:15 - High priest made atonement for all the people (Lev. 5:6)
 - a. Leviticus 17:10-11 - Significance of the Blood -- life.

- 1) When one sins, he forfeits his life. His life is atoned for by the life of another. In this case, the blood of the animal.
- 2) Leviticus 22:17-19 - Sacrifice had to be a male without defect
- b. Slaughtered at the doorway of tabernacle (Leviticus 16:7; 17:8-9)
 - 1) It was God's sanctuary (Exodus 25:8) "holy house"
 - 2) To do it in the doorway was considered doing it "before the Lord" (Leviticus 4:4; 16:7, 13; 17:5)
- c. Blood sprinkled on the mercy seat
 - 1) The mercy seat was the area on top of the ark (
 - 2) The mercy seat was representative of God's presence
 - a) Exodus 25:21-22 - It was called a "seat", and God said he would "meet with you" on the mercy seat
 - b) The room in which this was contained was called the holy of holies, and no one was to enter it except for the High priest once a year (Leviticus 16:2)
2. Atonement is closely related to the idea of restitution (Leviticus 5:16)
3. Leviticus 8:14-21 - Also note that the blood and body were considered as two offerings and were handled differently
 - a. Blood was almost always sprinkled or poured out
 - b. Flesh was burned and at times portions of it were eaten by the priests
 - c. The blood was never to be eaten, because it had the life and the life belonged to God.

D. Fellowship Meals

1. Exodus 24:9-11 - There was a covenant meal, signifying fellowship

2. The **passover meal** was to remember that God had delivered the Israelites from Egypt with a mighty hand and made them his covenant people.
3. Old Testament Priests typically ate of the sacrifices as was directed by God Paul said they enjoyed fellowship in the altar (I Cor. 10:18)
4. Having a person in your home for a meal together was a deeply significant thing in ancient times. It signified a deep hospitality and fellowship.

III. Institution of the Lord's Supper

"We celebrate life but not death. It is part of human nature to celebrate those times that bring joy and not sadness. So birthdays are more significant than the days people die. We remember Lincoln's birthday but few can name the tragic day that he died. We remember our parent's birthdays but place much less emphasis on the day they died.

The same is true of Christianity. Even though we have no evidence for the day of Jesus' birth, the church in history picked a day and the whole world celebrates the birth of Jesus. We can date with precision the day of his death according to the lunar calendar. But even so, Good Friday is much less important to us. We celebrate Easter because it is a celebration of life and place much less emphasis on the cross and the events that give Easter its meaning." - *David Wead Proclaiming the Lord's Death 'Til He Comes: In Rememberance of Me. Wineskins Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 12*

- A. Matthew 26:17-20, 26-29; Mark 14:12-17, 22-25; Luke 22:7-20 - Note that there is no mention of the Paschal lamb. Probably because Jesus was the lamb (I Corinthians 5:7)
- B. The Institution of the supper was during the passover (Matthew 26:26; Luke 22:15)
- C. Significant lessons at the institution of the Supper
 1. The bread - "This is my body, given for you..."
 - a. John 1:14; 2 John 7 - A Cardinal doctrine is Jesus came in the flesh
 - b. Hebrews 2:16-18 - Jesus was a man with all the human weaknesses
 - c. I Corinthians 10:17 - We, the church are his one body
 - d. Ephesians 2:15-16 - Brought unity and peace in his flesh

- e. Exodus 12:18-20; Leviticus 28:16-17 - The bread was unleavened

1) "Part of the Passover ritual was that on Thursday morning there was throughout every house a ceremonial search for leaven. By midday every particle of leaven had to be cleared out of the house, and by 6 p.m. on the evening of the day no leaven could be used for any purpose or for any food. This was because leaven is fermented dough, and the Jews identified fermentation with putrefaction. Leaven was therefore a symbol of evil and to clear out the leaven was symbolically to eradicate all evil." - *William Barclay The Lord's Supper* p. 19 (For leaven as the symbol of evil, cf. Matthew 16:6, 12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; I Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9)

- 2) Hebrews 4:15 - Jesus is without sin

- 2. Fruit of the Vine: "This is my blood..."

- a. The blood of the "New Covenant" was Jesus' own blood
- b. Ephesians 2:11-13 - Brought into the covenant with God by his blood
- c. Hebrews 9:11-12 - Jesus our High Priest made atonement for us
- d. Romans 3:24-25 - Blood was a propitiation (atoning sacrifice)
- e. Romans 5:9 - Justified by his blood
- f. I Peter 1:18-19 - Redeemed by his blood
- g. I John 1:7 - Continually cleansed by his blood
- h. Acts 20:28 - The church (body) was purchased with his blood
- i. Revelation 12:11 - Can overcome and be victorious because of the blood of the lamb

- 3. "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom"

- a. Mark 9:1 - Kingdom was at hand, and was to come with power
- b. Acts 2 - Spirit was poured out and gave them power - Kingdom commenced on that day with Jesus as Lord.
- c. Inference is that Jesus is "present" at this meal. It is the "Lord's

Supper" and we are at "His Table"

D. "We see the bread as a body that is still and lifeless. The pale color reminds us of death. We see the fruit of the vine within a cup separated from the body. Body and blood separated become symbolic of death. When I lift the emblems to my lips, I acknowledge that Christ died for me and that I am cleansed by what he did on the cross." - *David Wead Proclaiming the Lord's Death 'Til He Comes: In Remembrance of Me. Wineskins Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 13*

IV. Significance of the Lord's Supper

A. I Corinthians 11:20 - It is the "Lord's" Supper

B. It is a looking to the past

1. It is called a Remembrance - I Corinthians 11:24-25
2. A remembrance brings the past to the present (see notes on Memorial)

C. It is a looking and celebration of the present

1. Fellowship/ Participation/ Communion - I Corinthians 10:16 (to be united with)
2. Note Jesus' words: "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom"
3. Note what Jesus is to us as Christians:
 - a. I Corinthians 1:30
 - b. I Timothy 2:5
 - c. I John 2:1

D. It is a looking to the future

1. It is called a Proclamation/ Anticipation - I Corinthians 11:26
 - a. Some idea of "acting out" sermons
 - b. Examples in the Old Testament are Jeremiah 28; Ezekiel 4-5
2. Anticipation of the ultimate Messianic Banquet

- a. Isaiah 25:6-9
- b. Luke 13:28-29
- c. Revelation 19:7-9

E. It is a looking outward

- a. I Corinthians 10:17; 11:17-22
- b. The Lord's Supper in an expression of our fellowship in Christ
- c. It is possible to be worse off eating the Lord's Supper (I Cor 11:17, 30)
- d. The Corinthian problem concerning the Lord's supper was:
 - 1) It was an expression of selfishness rather than fellowship
 - 2) Those that had nothing to bring to the supper were shamed
 - 3) The purpose of Jesus' sacrifice was to unite in Christ, yet this was not remembered or expressed in the supper

F. It is a looking inward

- a. I Corinthians 11:27-29
 - 1) Examine self before eating
 - a) In order to eat in a worthy manner (notice he did not say that if you are "unworthy", and partake ... but rather if you partake in an unworthy "manner")
 - b) In order to assure that you judge the "body" rightly
 - Is this the body of Christ?
 - Is this the body of Christ...the brethren?
 - 2) Are to wait for one another
 - a) This is calling for common Christian courtesy
 - b) It also allows us to express our unity in Christ

- c) This is a community act, intended to bring us into deeper fellowship with Christ and his body, the brethren
- b. Have to examine our relationship with God and each other
 - 1) Matthew 5:23-24 - Remember that this applies to ALL of worship
 - 2) Fellowship broken with the brethren is fellowship broken with God and vice versa (see notes on fellowship). In other words, you cannot commune with God and not commune with your brother.
 - 3) God hates worship, love and devotion to Him if it is not reflective of our love to his children. (See notes of theology of worship)

V. Suggestions to help make the Lord's Supper for meaningful for us

- A. Plan for communion the night before. Remember it is a thanksgiving.
- B. Give the Lord's Supper a place of prominence in your worship
- C. Take the time to explain the meaning and the reason we take the Lord's Supper.

VI. Questions and Issues related to the Lord's Supper

A. One Cup or many cups for the Lord's Supper?

- 1. The one cup position is summed up as follows:
 - a. There is only the mention of a single "cup" in the references to the Lord's Supper
 - b. The use of multiple cups was an innovation added to church practice in the last hundred years. (Note: Multiple Cups was adopted due to a severe epidemic)
 - c. There are three elements in the Lord's Supper:

- 1) The unleavened bread, which represents Christ's Body
- 2) The Blood, which represents Christ's blood
- 3) The Cup (singular), which represent the Covenant.
Jesus said the cup was the new covenant. And there is not many, but one covenant, hence, only one cup.

2. Evidence to the contrary:

- a. Luke 22:17 - Luke says to "divide" the juice among themselves
- b. A "cup" never had anything to do with a covenant, but blood did. Jesus was referencing the contents of the cup, not the cup itself, when he said that cup was the new covenant and told them to drink "the cup".
- c. The Passover Haggadah says that each participant was to have his own cup, and it was to be filled four times during the Passover. Note that it was a single cup, which is in perfect harmony with Luke 22:17.
- d. Luke 22:20 literally says: "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood"
 - 1) Jesus did not pour out a cup, but his own blood
 - 2) Mark 14:24 agrees with this
 - 3) The symbolism is in the contents of the cup, not the cup itself

B. What about the frequency of observance?

1. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he said nothing about its repetition and frequency
2. I Corinthians 11:17ff - Paul had he "received from the Lord"
 - a. It is to be continued
 - b. However, there is no reference to frequency except "as often as you do it..."
 - c. How often is often? Results widely differ today:

- 1) Some do it on Thursday night
- 2) Some do it Monthly
- 3) Some do it every Sunday
- 4) Some do it annually

d. Acts 20:7 - Only passage that describes when - On the first day

- 1) Acts 2:42, 46 - Likely a common meal (was a difference between what they did in the temple and in the home)
- 2) Acts 20:7, 11. One is the Lord's Supper and the other a common meal. Greek indicates in verse 7 - "for the purpose of breaking bread"

e. Conclusion: When there is a first day, we partake of Communion

3. "Our religious friends have sometimes maintained that observing the Lord's Supper every Sunday may produce such familiarity as to make it lose its meaning. We do many other things with frequency and regularity that do not produce complacency. I kiss my wife and tell her I love her every day. I enjoy it, and she tells me that she does not grow tired of it, even though it is frequent. Our keeping of the weekly memorial Supper of Christ need not become any more commonplace." - *Don R. Carroll* Gospel Advocate, June 1989 p. 22

4. Asking the question: Do I have to partake **every** Sunday?

- a. Just asking the question shows a spiritual problem already
- b. Can you imagine a Jew asking "how many Sabbaths out of the year must I keep holy?" or "Must I observe every Passover?"
- c. Must ask yourself whether you view this as a burdensome command or a wonderful privilege to sit at the table of your Lord.

5. There is evidence in history that Communion was on every first day.

C. Alcoholic or Non-alcoholic fruit of the vine?

- 1. Keep in mind that there was no instruction in the Old Testament concerning the wine.

2. The reference “fruit of the vine” applies equally to fermented or unfermented.
3. Grapes were harvested in September, and the Passover is in April. Grapes usually fermented quickly since this was before the days of pasteurization which was centuries away.
4. The Talmud restricts the wine for the Kiddush (first cup in the Passover) to regular red wine mixed with three parts water.
5. Keep in mind that their wine was different than today's. They did not ferment it on purpose, and naturally fermented wine does not have as high an alcohol content as many of our modern wines.

D. Closed or Open Communion?

1. Should non-Christians be allowed to partake of communion?
 - a. The meaning of the supper would not apply to the guest
 - b. It is a wonderful opportunity to explain or “proclaim” our faith to the unbelievers (whether they partake or not)
2. Should dis-fellowshipped Christians be allowed to partake?
- Remember the things the supper signifies, to answer this question

E. What about the women passing the communion trays?

1. Is it scriptural for a woman to pass a communion tray? (without leading a prayer?)
2. “It is neither scriptural nor unscriptural, but nonscriptural, since we have no New Testament model on which to base our practice. Problems with doing it are probably based upon the tradition of a leadership role dating from Constantine's time. It can be argued that it is a serving role, not a leadership role, entirely consistent with using either male or female servants.” Eldred Echols, The Most Excellent Way: Overcoming Chronic Issues that Divide the Church. p. 157
3. On the other hand, those that have begun this practice have done so in a reckless way not considering the conscience of the brethren.

VII. Various interpretations of the Lord's Supper

A. Catholic View (Elements “are” the Lord’s body and blood)

1. Transubstantiation: Elements transformed into literal body & blood of Jesus
2. Mass (each time the sacrament of communion is observed is another sacrifice of Christ for forgiveness of sins)
3. Sacerdotalism - A qualified ordained priest must transform the elements
 - a. In later times the cup was typically withheld from the laity due to danger of spilling the blood of Christ and having it trampled under
 - b. Priest would be the only one to drink because he could act on behalf of the rest of the congregation in taking it.
 - c. They believed Christ is wholly there in both elements, so nothing further would be gained by also taking the blood.

B. Lutheran View (elements “contain” the body and blood)

- a. Consubstantiation (note: This term not used by Luther himself) - Rejected that the molecules were literally transformed, but instead that Christ was literally present in the elements themselves.
- b. Also rejected “Mass” as a “sacrifice”, but believed in Jesus’ sacrifice at the cross “once for all”
- c. Rejected Sacerdotalism
- d. His Illustration: Iron poker in the fire which is not changed but contains the fire.
- e. Note: Luther’s view on the benefits of the Supper were not altogether clear and at times contradicted himself
 - 1) Receive forgiveness and confirmation of faith in the supper but not from the elements, but by receiving the word by faith.
 - 2) If that were true, then what is the point of Jesus being

“present” in the elements themselves?

- 3) At other times he seems to say that the benefit comes from eating the body of Christ.

C. Calvinistic View (elements “contain spiritually” the body and blood of Christ)

1. Believed Christ is present, but not physically or bodily
2. He pointed out the Christ is at the right hand of the Father and does not come down to us during the Lord's Supper
3. His Illustration: The Sun remains in the heavens yet the warmth and light are felt on the earth.

D. Zwinglian View (The elements “represent” the body and blood of the Lord)

Believed the Lord's supper to be strictly a remembrance and commemoration.