

THE LORD'S SUPPER ///

While baptism is a one-time initiatory rite, symbolizing and sealing our entrance in to Christ and his church, the Lord's Supper is connected with ongoing covenant renewal, therefore churches observe it repeatedly. The Lord Supper emphasizes the communion we have with Christ and our fellowship with one another in the body of Christ.

Various designations have been used for the Lord's Supper by different congregations, which is understandable since the act is referred to in a variety of ways throughout the New Testament.

These designations include;

- a. Breaking of Bread- (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16)
- b. Communion- (1 Corinthians 10:16)
- c. Eucharist- (From the Greek word meaning "giving thanks", cf. Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Corinthians 11:24)
- d. The Lord's Supper- (1 Corinthians 11:20)
- e. The Lord's Table- (1 Corinthians 10:21)

The designation "communion" emphasizes the fellowship we have with God and with each other through Christ. The designations "Breaking of Bread, The Lord's Supper, or Table" emphasize the example of fellowship Jesus set at the Last Supper Passover meal he had with his disciples.

UNDERSTANDING THE LORD'S SUPPER ///

The Gospel accounts show Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper during an observance of Passover with his disciples (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-30). Therefore, it is important to understand the historical context of the Passover to grasp the significance of the Lord's Supper.

The Passover was a celebration of God's redemption of Israel from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Part of this redemption event involved the death of the firstborn in all the houses of Egypt, when the Israelites spread the blood of a lamb on their doorposts and the Lord spared them from death. (Exodus 12) While the Exodus was a non-repeatable event, the Passover celebration preserved its significance in the history of Israel for future generations.

In the new covenant we identify Christ as "our Passover lamb" who offered his body as a sacrifice to deliver us from slavery to sin (1 Corinthians 5:7). While the Passover was a celebration of God's covenant with Israel, the Lord's Supper celebrates the "new covenant" established with the church by the blood of Christ (Luke 22:20).

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE LORD'S SUPPER ///

Some denominations believe that as the minister consecrates the bread and wine an actual metaphysical change takes place in the elements. In other words, the substance of the bread and wine are actually changed into Christ's flesh and blood. Therefore, those who partake in the Supper literally take the physical body and blood of Christ into themselves.

This view fails to recognize the finality and completeness of Christ's sacrifice once and for all time. (Hebrews 9:25-28) In essence, the view summarized above perpetuates the idea that Christ's sacrifice is continued or repeated in every Supper. Moreover, this view fails to recognize the symbolic

language often used by Christ when speaking of himself. (For examples see John 15:1; John 6:41)

We believe that the sacrifice for sin was finished and completed in Christ. (John 19:30, Hebrews 1:3) The elements of bread and wine used in this “freedom meal” signify (are symbols of) Christ’s body and his blood. The Lord’s Supper is done “in remembrance”, as a memorial to our beloved savior Jesus Christ. The words “this is my body” and “this is my blood” are to be understood figuratively, thus the elements are representative.

Jesus is not literally present in the elements of The Lord’s Supper, but is present in relationship with the Christian’s partaking of the elements through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Remember that Jesus promised to be with his followers everywhere and through all time. (Matthew 28:20; John 14:23, 15:4-7) He has also promised to be in the presence of believers when they gather together. (Matthew 18:20)

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LORD’S SUPPER? ///

One of the ways the Lord’s Supper has been described is renewal (*Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches, John Hammett*);

a. Renewal to Christ

1 Corinthians 11:24 gives the command “do this in remembrance of me.” The word remembrance (anamnesis) is a very powerful word. This word gives the idea of a vivid remembrance that is so powerful that it affects one deeply in the moment. As we genuinely, and biblically, remember we cannot help but renew our love and worship of Christ.

The Holy Spirit also uses this occasion to nourish us spiritually as we come in faith. Faithful, believing remembrance has as its goal the renewing of our relationship with Christ.

b. Renewal of our commitment to his church

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 shows the important link between the Lord’s Supper and the unity of the body. The Lord’s Supper should be the supreme occasion when the body (the church) renews its love and unity for one another.

c. Renewal of our commitment to Christ’s mission

In the Lord’s Supper the church proclaims the Lord’s death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). The very thought of his coming should remind us that our time on earth is limited. In looking to the future the Lord’s Supper is a rehearsal and foretaste of the marriage feast of the lamb (Revelation 19:9).

The renewal called for by the Lord’s Supper looks back to the past in remembrance, looks around in the present to the fellowship we experience with Christ and the body of believers, and looks ahead to the consummation when Christ returns.

WHO SHOULD PARTAKE OF THE LORD’S SUPPER? ///

At our church we practice what is called “open communion”. This means that everyone who can profess to have a gospel faith in Jesus Christ can partake in the Lord’s Supper.

HOW SHOULD ONE PREPARE FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER? ///

An important prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper is self examination. 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 clearly warns those who do not take the Lord's Supper with serious attention.

What does it mean to eat or drink in an "unworthy manner?" (1 Corinthians 11:27) Paul is reminding the believers consider all of their relationships within the body of Christ and evaluate if they are portraying unity or disunity. Examining oneself means that each member of the body ought to assess whether their relationships are reflecting the character of the Lord for whom we represent. Jesus proclaimed a general warning that would apply here in Matthew 5:23-24.

As part of Christ's body how should one prepare for the Lord's Supper?

In faith and repentance;

- a. Examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-28)
- b. Confess and repent of our sin (1 John 1:9)
- c. Seek reconciliation with others in the body (1 Corinthians 10:17)
- d. Remind ourselves of, and reflect on the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:8)
- e. Rejoice in the future consummation of redemptive history (Matthew 26:29, Revelation 19:9)

To avoid approaching the Lord's Supper legalistically it is important to remember that it is by "grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:8) Too often believers mistakenly think that they should not partake in the Lord Supper if they are struggling with sin.

In reality, no one is worthy of partaking of the Lord's Supper "in and of themselves." This is the point. In the Lord's Supper we are reminded again and again that Christ died for sinners, and therefore we must come to fellowship at the table in faith and repentance. (1 Corinthians 11:27)

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE PARTAKE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER? ///

Scripture does not tell us how often we should partake in the Lord's Supper, Jesus simply proclaimed "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26) We partake of the Lord's Supper quarterly.