

14: What Is The Lord's Supper?

Jesus commanded His church to continue to observe two sacraments right up to the time of His return: baptism and the Lord's Supper. In our last study we looked at baptism; in this study we will consider the Lord's Supper.

Why Do We Observe The Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper is a gathering of His people. They gather, in obedience to the command He gave on the night before His crucifixion, to remember Him, to worship Him and to join in fellowship with Him and with His people. The Lord's command is recorded in Matthew 26:17 – 30, Mark 14:12 – 26 and Luke 22: 7 – 23, but the fullest report of it is given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11.

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes”

1 Corinthians 11.23–26

Taking part in the Lord's Supper assures His people of their communion with Him and their fellow believers and that all the benefits of His death are theirs.

What Is The Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper is also called Communion (1 Corinthians 10:16), the Breaking of Bread (Acts 2:42) and the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 10:21). Each of these titles emphasises a different aspect of its significance.

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? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

1 Corinthians 10.16 – 17

In the Lord's Supper two symbols are used: bread, which is broken to symbolise His body broken on the cross, and wine, to represent His blood shed for our sins. Both are consumed by those who take part to represent their personal participation in the Lord's saving work.

In the Lord's Supper Jesus is not, as the Church of Rome supposes, offered up to His Father and no sacrifice is made for remission of sin: it is only a memorial of His once for all offering on the cross. When the Bible says that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ it is using figurative language, they are and remain only bread and wine.

“Not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another — He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.”

Hebrews 9.25–28

Those who take the bread and wine receive the benefits of what they represent by faith. Whilst the body of Christ is not physically present believers know by faith that He is present according to His promise and they are said to feed upon Him by faith.

Question: What do you understand the term “feed upon Him by faith” to mean?

How Is The Lord's Supper To Be Observed?

One of the most striking things about the first Lord's Supper is its simplicity. A group of men gathered around a table for a simple meal. Setting a pattern for them, and us, to follow Jesus gave thanks for the bread and wine, explained that they were to represent His body and blood and gave both to each of His disciples. Jesus told them that the simple act of eating bread and drinking wine was to be repeated as an act of remembrance of Him. Beyond that we are merely told that we are to behave in a fitting, orderly way (1 Corinthians 11) but we are given no formal procedure to follow.

Paul tells us that we, the church, are to continue to observe this act of remembrance right up to the time of Christ's return (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Question: How frequently do you think the Lord's Supper ought to be observed?

Who Can Participate In The Lord's Supper?

Common sense would say that those who are not abiding in Christ cannot, in sincerity, sit at His table. Furthermore we are told, in 1 Corinthians 11, that those who receive the bread and wine of Communion unworthily eat and drink judgement to themselves.

“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment.”

1 Corinthians 11 23–34

Question: What do you think is meant by “eating and drinking unworthily”? In what sense are those who do so guilty of the body and blood of the Lord? Who is responsible to decide who should participate in the Lord's Supper?

Key Words

Eucharist The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. It is not a biblical term but was applied to the Lord's Supper later in the history of the church.

Communion The word communion describes a relationship, especially one in which something is communicated or shared.

Memory Verses

☺ 1 Corinthians 11.23–26