

# 16 The Church - The Lord's Supper

## Introduction

When we go to a memorial of a friend that we have just lost, what is involved? There will typically be stories about this person from friends and family. They may remember certain quirks about this person. There may be funny stories told from all those who shared life with him. There will be laughing and there will be crying. It is a time of remembrance.

A similar kind of reflection occurs when going to a war memorial. Whether you are staring at thousands of crosses or staring at a list of names on a monument, we instinctively begin to contemplate their lives. We may think about the war as we knew it. We may think about the freedom that we now enjoy and its link to the lives of the people listed on the memorial. We may think of particular battles and imagine what it would have been like to be there. We think about the acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. As we think and imagine and reflect, seldom are we unmoved.

Does what happens here at church during our observance of the Lord's Supper approach the kind of dedication and thoughtful reflection that we put into other memorials?

It used to be that people were killed over minor issues regarding the Lord's Supper. A person's view of the Lord's Supper may well cost them their lives. But today we have gone too far the other direction. One preacher commented.

"It would do us well to admit that if their age was marked by brutality, ours is marked by superficiality. They may have weighed things differently than we would, but it may be that we have lost the capacity to feel weighty truth at all.<sup>1</sup>"

I fear the accuracy of that statement. We may well have lost the capacity to feel weighty truth at all. I pray that God would move us to be a more thoughtful and contemplative people as we observe the Lord's Supper.

## What Is It?

### Its Names

The Lord's Supper is known by a few different names. Flying at the 10,000' level, we consider Communion to be one of the [ordinances](#) - that is, one of the practices that Christ specifically ordained for his church to observe. So at a very basic level, the Lord's supper is something that Jesus specifically ordained for the church to observe.

**Luke 22:19** And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

**1 Cor 11:25** Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

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1. John Piper, Why We Eat The Lord's Supper (Part 1), accessed 5/11/10 available from [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2003/138\\_Why\\_We\\_Eat\\_the\\_Lords\\_Supper\\_Part\\_1/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2003/138_Why_We_Eat_the_Lords_Supper_Part_1/)

In more liturgical circles these are known as [sacraments](#). This is derived from a Latin term meaning holy or sacred. This term recognizes the holiness of the Lord's Supper, this was something set apart. In the same way that a vessel was set apart for use in the temple in the OT, so also these elements are set aside for God's use in this meal. In that sense, they are sacred. More specifically, this ordinance is known as the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, or Communion. I'll just briefly examine each of these names in that order.

[First, it is called The Lord's Supper](#) because this was a Passover meal that Jesus infused with new significance. The Passover was a meal that the Jews did once per year to remember the Exodus. It was their last night in Egypt. God was sending His final plague on the land that night. The angel of death would soon arrive and slay the firstborn male in every household. Those whose house was covered by the blood of the lamb would be spared - that is the angel of death would pass over those homes and not visit. After that night Pharaoh let Israel go. God brought them to the foot of the mountain and constituted them as a nation and then set them in the promised land. Therefore each year the Jews would have this meal to remember the Exodus. The eldest male of each house hold (usually the father) would give the meaning of each of the elements of the meal. The lamb, the bitter herbs, the wine, the unleavened bread. This was the meal that Jesus was having with his disciples. As the head of this group, Jesus would have given the meaning of the elements. But this night Jesus probably shocked all of his disciples (who have done this meal many times before) by giving a new interpretation to the bread and the wine! No longer was this to be a Passover meal, The Lord had given it new significance and so it is known as the Lord's Supper.

[Second, it is called the Eucharist](#) in some circles because Jesus says in **Matt 26:27** "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you." The Greek term for "give thanks" here is *eucharisteō*. So Eucharist simply means "give thanks."

**Romans 1:18, 21** says:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth...21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Did you catch that? The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven because they did not give thanks to him. That is a strange statement isn't it? We normally don't think of thanklessness as one of those sins that merits much wrath. Imagine that you are at the zoo above the wolf exhibit. A little girl, with far more curiosity than sense is up on the railing peering into the exhibit when she loses her footing and falls in. Although in a zoo, these wolves are still wild and they eagerly surround her anticipating an easy meal.

The lead wolf lunges when all of a sudden a man from above jumps into the enclosure onto the alpha wolf. The others also lunge for the girl, but this man, desperate to save her, places his body between her and the wolves. He fights them with all his strength. They finally see this fight as not worth the prize and they leave. The man climbs out with the girl in his arms. His clothes are torn. He is bleeding all over. He hands her to her mom with one arm since his other arm was broken by the powerful bite of one of the wolves. The mom coldly takes her child and walks away without a word of thanks as if no great thing has happened. All the world would cry out in anger and in repulsion against such a heartless parent that does not give so much as a word of thanks to this man who risked his life to save her daughter.

I think that helps give a sense of what Paul is talking about in Romans when says that although

they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. When we come to the Lord's table we need to be profoundly thankful for the salvation that He has purchased for us.

**Third, the term Communion** comes from **1 Corinthians 10:16-17**:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, there is a participation in Christ or a fellowship in him. We visibly align ourselves with Christ when we partake in the Lord's Supper. What's more, this passage mentions the unity that we have with one another as we observe this ordinance. We who are many are one body. So we have fellowship with one another in this meal. We are genuinely united with one another in Christ.

Some people have tried to sell little communion travel cases that have the wafers, the wine, and a tiny silver cup. The idea is that if someone is traveling, they can pull out this little communion travel kit in the airport and have their own private communion while they are waiting for their plane. Sometimes I swear that the marketing side of Christianity knows no limits because that gimmick misses entirely what communion is about. It is about a corporate people, who were saved as a collective body, remembering the salvation that God worked on their behalf in real time and space. Completely absent from Israel's celebration of Passover was the decidedly more selfish and individual notion that "God came down to save me from Egypt." God came to save *Israel* from Egypt. Yes, Israel was composed of individuals, but everywhere in scripture, the Exodus is referred to as the redemption of *Israel* as a nation.

When the Jews celebrated the Passover there was a great sense of national pride. There was a heightened sense of ethnic pride. God did not come for only you for a people to pursue, you cannot love God and not love the church. Communion is a collective remembrance of what God did for us. We commune with one another in Christ, that is what communion is about.

This is not just intellectual consent regarding what Jesus did. This is a participation in Christ. In what sense are we participating if we never feel the weight of what He did? If we cannot still hear the ringing of the nails as they pounded them through His flesh, then are we really communing with him? If in our mind's eye we cannot still see the blood stained cross then our remembrance of this event is rather distant than intimate.

## **Its Nature**

The Lord's Supper was an actual meal. It was not soup crackers and thimbles of grape juice. It also used real wine. There is a bitter sweet aspect to wine that is just missing in grape juice. It is a powerful drink that you feel the heat of as you drink. This observance of the Lord's Supper was virtually unchanged through all of history. But during the temperance movement of last century, the wine was changed to grape juice. It took hold and the church, largely, has not returned to the bread and wine.

“This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

With his death, Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant. A new age dawned. Communion is a consonantal meal. Jesus said that the cup is the new covenant in his blood.

## **Remembering Christ**

### **His Person**

The Lord's Supper is a time of remembrance. I fear that we do not remember as we ought. The next time we eat of the Lord's Supper, I think we ought to actually spend time remembering Jesus. Remember the authority and power of Jesus. Demons shriek in terror and plead for mercy. With one word he sends the demons fleeing. Remember the compassion of Jesus as he healed person after person. Remember Jesus the preacher. He taught everywhere he went. When too many people would gather just to see him perform some miracle without regard to his teaching, he would sneak away during the night to find a new people to whom to preach to.

Remember the boldness of Jesus. He was not afraid of men. He spoke with absolute clarity and conviction without fear of man. He presumed to forgive sins, which God alone can do. He presumed to be Lord of the Sabbath, something only God can claim. He presumed himself to be kind riding on the donkey and receiving a king's welcome from the people.

Remember the approachableness of Jesus. Children would come to sit with him, and the woman with the alabaster flask was unafraid to make a fool of herself for his sake. Remember the fiery words that he spoke to the Pharisees. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence." Remember the dedication of Jesus. How he would stay late into the night ministering to people and then leave early the next morning before the sun arose to spend time in prayer. Remember how he would preach for days to the crowds. Often he was without sleep and without food.

Remember Jesus.

### **His Work**

Remember his work. Remember the arrest in the garden. Remember the midnight trial before the Sanhedrin. Remember the beating he received and how they mocked him. Remember how everyone fled. Remember the early morning trial in the halls of Pilate and how he caved to political pressure. Remember the blows that he received during the scourging. Whips with metal slugs and bone fragments tied into the leather are brought repeatedly across his back. Remember the soldiers further abuse of him. The mocking, the crown of thorns. Remember the long walk to Golgotha and how he fell under the weight of his cross. Remember the nails driven into his hands and the words of comfort he spoke to the thief.

Contemplate the horrors of that death, and how that was merely a taste of the wrath he experienced at the hands of the Father when he bore the punishment of our sins in his body. He drank the cup of wrath down to the bitter dregs in order that we may never taste of wrath.

## **His Second Coming**

Remember Christ. But as you do, do not forget to remember that he was raised from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is alive! We do not remember him as a powerful but faint memory from a long time ago. He is alive and he is coming again. This meal that we eat will one day take place in his presence again. He promised his disciples "I will not eat of the fruit of the vine until I drink it anew in my Father's kingdom. When he comes again we will eat and drink with him.