

The Meaning Of The Lord's Supper

Introduction. Down through the ages, men have written volumes on the deeper, spiritual meaning of various aspects of the church and its practices. One particular practice that has collected numerous writings is the Lord's Supper. So much is written, but while the subject is simple, the meaning is deep.

The Lord told us all we need to know about the Lord's Supper in a very few words (cp. John 21:25). In fact, Matthew devotes only a few words to the origin of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29).

Of what the Lord told us about the Lord's Supper, what are we to think of it? What is the deeper, spiritual meaning of this simple observance? We need to observe what the Lord's Supper is and is not.

I. The Lord's Supper Is Not

A. A Passover meal.

1. The Lord instituted His Supper the night of the Passover feast, but it was not founded on the Passover meal. It was a new, separate spiritual meal with a different purpose and meaning.
 - a) The Passover was given by God through Moses. The Lord's Supper was given by Christ.
 - b) The Passover was given to the Jews. The Lord's Supper was given to Christ's disciples.
 - c) The elements of the Passover were a roasted lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Exodus 12:3-11). The elements of the Lord's Supper were bread and the fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26-29).
 - d) The Passover meal was to be observed once a year, eaten dressed in traveling clothes, and in haste. The Lord's Supper was to be observed "as often as the disciples came together" on Sunday (Acts 20:7).
 - e) The Passover was a remembrance of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and the passing over of the angel of death. The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ.
2. The Lord's Supper is not the Passover as Christ is our Passover.
 - a) The Passover is a shadow or type of Christ, not a shadow or type of the Lord's Supper. Before the Passover began, the leaven was to be purged out of the house. Paul urged the Corinthians to purge a sinning member (leaven) out of the congregation so that they could serve (keep the feast) Christ (our Passover) with sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).
 - b) The meaning of the Passover to the Jews and its meaning to Christians as explained by Paul indicates that the Lord's Supper is not the Passover or based on the Passover.

B. A common meal.

1. Some denominations have declared that they were having the Lord's Supper by eating a regular meal or pizza and Pepsi.
2. Paul specifically denounced the practice of some Christians who tried to turn the Lord's Supper into a common meal instead of observing a spiritual meal (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).

- C. A sacrament.
 - 1. The simple meaning of the word is something sacred, but most religious groups have attached other meanings to this word.
 - a) Catholicism defines a sacrament as a sensible sign, instituted by Christ, to signify and produce grace.
 - b) The Catholic Church identifies seven “sacraments” — Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist (or the Lord’s Supper), Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.
 - c) Because they say Jesus must have instituted them directly, Protestants claim there are only two sacraments — baptism and communion.
 - 2. The Lord’s Supper is not a sacrament.
 - a) It is never described by Jesus or His apostles as either something sacred or a means of dispensing God’s grace.
 - b) It is a spiritual meal given by the Lord and to be observed by His disciples. Those who keep the meal as the Lord gave it are obedient and faithful.
- D. A Holy Eucharist.
 - 1. “Eucharist” comes from the Greek and means “thanksgiving.” Some call the Lord’s Supper a “Holy Thanksgiving” because the Lord “gave thanks” before He gave the bread and the fruit of the vine to His disciples (Matthew 26:27; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).
 - 2. While we should likewise give thanks for what the Lord has given to us — the bread and cup — our prayer before is the thanksgiving, not the meal itself.
- E. A Mass.
 - 1. Catholicism identifies the Lord’s Supper as “Mass.”
 - a) By the 400s, Mass had become the central act of the Catholic Church’s service. The name now identifies the entire religious service.
 - (1) The term means “dismissed,” probably derived from the practice of dismissing those not yet initiated into the mystery of the Eucharist.
 - (2) Too many Christians have followed suite and made the Lord’s Supper into the primary element of our worship.
 - b) Mass includes the Eucharist as a re-sacrifice of Christ by the offering of the elements to the worshipers through the process of transubstantiation.
 - c) In other words, the Supper elements are changed into the actual body and blood of Christ and every time Mass is given, Christ is offered and sacrificed again.
 - 2. This term, language, and doctrine is foreign to the Bible. Several terms are used to describe the Lord’s Supper but “Mass” is not one of them.
 - 3. The partaking of the Lord’s Supper does not involve the transubstantiation of the elements nor the re-sacrifice of Christ. The scriptures plainly tell us that Jesus was “once offered” (Hebrews 9:28).

II. The Lord’s Supper Is

- A. The Lord’s.
 - 1. Just as the Lord’s church belongs to the Lord, the Lord’s Supper belongs to the Lord — not you, me, or even to the church.

2. The Lord instituted it, the Lord chose the elements of it, the Lord chose the frequency of it, the Lord gave us it, and the Lord gave us the purpose and meaning of it.
 3. Since the Lord's Supper belongs to Him and Him alone, no man has the right to remove or alter any portion of it (cp. Colossians 3:17).
 4. Paul condemned the Christians who claimed to be partaking of the Lord's Supper, but did what they wanted rather than what the Lord wanted (1 Corinthians 11:20).
- B. An examination.
1. The Lord's Supper requires an examination by the Christian partaking it (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).
 2. When we do not properly partake of the Lord's Supper by absence or by abuse, our actions denounce rather than proclaim the Lord. We become guilty of not properly recognizing the death and sacrifice of Christ, and we condemn ourselves.
 3. Therefore, before we partake of the Lord's Supper, a self-examination is done. This doesn't mean we skip it if we think we're "unworthy" because of sin. It simply means we change our heart before we observe it.
- C. A fellowship.
1. "Fellowship" also means "communion" (1 Corinthians 10:16-21).
 - a) Paul urged the Corinthians to be unified. He described the cup as the fellowship of the blood of Christ and the bread as the fellowship of the body of Christ.
 - b) Paul urged that as we are unified in all partaking of one bread and one body of Christ, we should be unified with one another.
 2. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are sharing together; we are in fellowship in remembering our Lord and His sacrifice.
- D. A memorial.
1. The Lord's words state the simple purpose of the Lord's Supper: "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26).
 2. What a contrast the Lord's words, meaning, and purpose are to the complex jargon and theology of Catholicism and denominationalism.
 3. We are to take the bread and the fruit of the vine to remember our Lord. Specifically, my mind should linger on His sacrifice on the cross where His blood was shed and His body offered. I should reflect on His great love that He had for me while I was still in sin.
- E. A proclamation.
1. When we take it we are declaring or proclaiming the Lord's death (1 Corinthians 11:26). A partaker both commits himself and confesses his faith.
 2. To Christians who take it as the Lord intended, they are remembering the Lord; to the world, they are proclaiming His death and return. It is an acted sermon of the death which it commemorates.

Conclusion. There is no deep, mysterious meaning to the Lord's Supper; the purpose is simple. When we partake of the Lord's Supper as the Lord intends, the

meaning will be deep and profound as we think on His great love for us that brought Him from heaven to earth, from life to death on the cross.

I am deeply indebted to Wayne Greeson for the use of his material.