

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Men have always wanted future generations to remember the things they have done. They make statues, paintings, and monuments of important events in their lives. They hope these will remind people in years to come of what they have accomplished.

Our Lord Jesus Christ does not want us to forget Him. He wants us always to remember He died for our sins. He has given us the written record of His life and will, the New Testament. He has also given us an act of worship by which we remember His death for our sins. It is a simple meal of unleavened bread and grape juice.

The accounts of the Lord's supper are found in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:19,20, Acts 2:42; 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; 11:20-34. These accounts are not difficult to understand. However, many people have misunderstood them. Some of the misunderstandings are: (1) What should the Lord's memorial be called? (2) What elements should be used in it? (3) What is its meaning? (4) How often should it be observed? (5) Who is entitled to participate in it? (6) How should one participate in it? Let us see what the Bible says about these questions.

What is it called? Some call the Lord's supper "the Mass." Others refer to it as "the Eucharist." But what does the Bible call it? Often it is simply referred to as "**the breaking of bread**" (Acts 2:42; 20:7). It is also called "**communion**" for it is a sharing in the body and blood of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16). It is called "**the table of the Lord**" (1 Corinthians 10:21). It is also called "**the Lord's supper**" because the Lord is the One who gave it (1 Corinthians 11:20).

What elements should be used? Jesus gave the supper during the Jewish Feast of Passover (Matthew 26:19 ff). Unleavened bread (without yeast) and the fruit of the vine (grape juice) were used in the Passover (Exodus 12, 13). These were the elements Jesus used. The unleavened bread represents His body which never committed sin. The grape juice represents His blood which was shed on the cross for our sins. We know it is right to use the same elements Jesus used.

What does it mean? Jesus said of the unleavened bread, "**This is My body which is broken for you**" (1 Corinthians 11:24). He also said of the cup (meaning, of course, the fruit of the vine contained in the cup, not the cup itself), "**This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins**" (Matthew 26:28). Roman Catholics claim that the bread and grape juice actually become the body and blood of Jesus when they are blessed. This is called "transubstantiation." The Bible never refers to "transubstantiation." Did Jesus really mean that bread and grape juice become His actual flesh and blood? No, the very idea is absurd! When Jesus spoke these words, He was still alive. He was in His body. His blood was flowing through His veins. Jesus was simply using a common figure of speech called a "metaphor." This means He was saying that the bread represented His body and the fruit of the vine represented His blood. The Lord's supper is a "memorial," not a "sacrifice." The sacrifice of Christ was made when He died on the cross, once and for all time (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12, 25-28). It cannot be made over and over again as the Roman Catholic doctrine implies. Unleavened bread and grape juice simply remind us that Jesus gave His body and shed His blood for our sins (Isaiah 53; 1 Peter 2:24).

When should it be eaten and how often? The only day mentioned in the Word of God for eating the Lord's supper is the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The first

day of the week is Sunday, the day Jesus Christ arose from the dead (Luke 24:1). It is the day the church began for Pentecost came on the first day of the week (Leviticus 23:1-17; Acts 2). It is the day Christians met to worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10). Since every week has a first day, then the Lord's supper should be eaten every first day of every week. The command, "**Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy**" (Exodus 20:8), meant that the Jews were to remember every sabbath day. In the same way, the example of eating the Lord's supper on the first day of the week teaches us to do it every first day of every week.

Who should eat it? The purpose of the Lord's supper is to remember His death until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26). If one has not accepted the Lord's sacrifice for sins by obeying the Gospel, then he should not eat the Lord's supper. It has no meaning for him. There is only one way one can accept Christ's sacrifice. He must hear the Gospel of Christ, believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, repent of all his past sins, confess his faith in Christ before men, and be buried in baptism for the remission of sins (Romans 10:17; John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32,33; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4). Only those who have obeyed the Gospel should eat the Lord's supper.

How should one eat? One should come to the Lord's table with reverence and thoughtfulness. The saints at Corinth had made a mockery of the Lord's supper. They had mixed it with a common meal. Some ate too much. Some had nothing to eat. They missed the whole point of this memorial. This is why Paul told them to eat at home (1 Corinthians 11:20-22). We must not eat "unworthily" or in "**an unworthy manner.**" None is worthy of the Lord's sacrifice for sins (Ephesians 2:8). However, one's unworthiness is not the meaning here. It is the way we eat the Lord's supper. If we eat it in a careless way, and do not think about its meaning, we are "**guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.**" Each one must "**examine himself**" to be sure he is thinking about the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

When Christians eat the Lord's supper, they are reminded of the price paid for their salvation (2 Corinthians 5:21). Faithful followers of Jesus do not neglect this important act of worship. They assemble every first day of every week to "**proclaim the Lord's death till He comes**" (1 Corinthians 11:26).