

The Lord's Supper

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In reference to the Lord's Supper there are a couple of terms that are consistently used which but represent different aspects. The Lord's Supper is a term that is often used to describe what happened as Jesus and His disciples reclined around the table in the upper room to partake of the Passover on the night that Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Matthew recorded that in the midst of the meal "Jesus took bread and blessed and broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins..." (Matthew 26:26). The term "Lord's Supper" is also the term that Paul used when he wrote to the church in Corinth (1Corinthians 11:20).

Communion is a term that represents another facet of the Lord's Supper. On the day that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, after eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine, He said to His disciples, "I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:29). The kingdom to which He referred is the church. It gives the idea that when we partake of the Lord's Supper Jesus is in our midst partaking with us.

Paul used the idea of communion in the first Corinthian letter to represent the union that is created by the partaking of the Lord's Supper. He wrote, "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?" (1Corinthians 10:16). The word communion denotes the idea of fellowship or sharing, to give the understanding that when we partake of the Lord's Supper we are actually in fellowship with the Lord; sharing in the sacrifice

of His body and blood as He gave Himself to die on the cross. We, in partaking of this communion, become united with Jesus Christ.

The idea of communion is also extended to include all Christians. Paul continued to write to the church in Corinth, “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” (1Corinthians 10:17). When we are partaking of the Lord’s Supper, not only are we in communion with the Lord, but we are also in communion with all Christians who are partaking of that communion. To further stress the importance of this concept of communion, consider what Jesus said in the gospel according to John. Speaking to the multitude of disciples who followed Him wherever He went, He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” (John 6:53-56). Having this understanding of the terms and events that define the important role that the Lord’s Supper plays should make us realize that the Lord’s Supper should be considered as a solemn event in the life of every Christian.

There are other important matters to consider in regard to the partaking of the Lord’s Supper. There is also some interesting Old Testament symbolism and historical information to consider in ascertaining the background and form of the Lord’s Supper. This, I believe, is the basis upon which Jesus drew in originating the Lord’s Supper. The gleanings from this information form the best evidence we have for what to think about as we are partaking, how often we should partake and many other implications of our participation in this great event.

It is not possible to separate the Lord’s Supper from the Biblical celebration of Passover. As mentioned, it was during the feast of the

Passover, on the night Jesus was betrayed, that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Jesus not only borrowed the physical elements (unleavened bread and fruit of the vine) of the Passover feast, He also borrowed on the symbolic significance of those elements.

Jesus took the unleavened bread of the feast, broke it and said, "Take, Eat; this is My body." To the children of Israel the unleavened bread symbolized God's deliverance from Egyptian captivity (Exodus 12:17-20; 13:3-10). He took the fruit of the vine (grape juice), and said, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The blood of the Passover was the blood of a lamb without spot or blemish. The children of Israel spread the blood on the lintel and doorposts of their houses as a sign so that the Lord should pass over them; but in every household in Egypt that did not have the blood the Lord struck that house killing the firstborn of man and beast (Exodus 12). Jesus gave His body and shed His blood as a sacrifice for us. He is our Passover. The apostle Paul applied this in a New Testament context. He wrote, "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1Corinthians 5:7-8). In this context, leaven (or yeast) represents sin or sinful persons who can have a bad influence in the church. In this context, therefore, the unleavened bread represents purity and truth.

Even though Jesus made a clear connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper, it should be stressed that we, as New Testament Christians, cannot partake of the Passover. The Passover was strictly a Jewish celebration; foreigners were excluded (Exodus 12:43-49). The Lord's Supper does not commemorate the deliverance from Israel, but rather the sacrifice of Christ. The Lord's Supper does not glorify the Old Testament, but rather it represents the new covenant in Christ. In instituting the Lord's

Supper, Jesus was not re-instituting the Passover. On the other hand, the symbolism cannot be ignored. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is our Passover. He was sacrificed for us. His blood cleanses us by washing away our sins. In His physical existence His body was sinless in unleavened purity. The blood of the lamb of the Passover represented the Israelite's deliverance from Egypt; but the blood of Christ represents our deliverance from sin. Luke, writing about the night that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, recorded these words of Jesus about the Passover, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:15-16). The Lord's Supper is the New Testament fulfillment of the Passover.