

Basics of the Christian Faith
Lesson 9
The Lord's Supper

Origins in the Old Testament

The meal that the Lord had with his disciples on the last night of his life was, more than likely, a Jewish Passover meal (Exodus 12). The celebration of Passover was to remember the meal they ate in a hurry on the night that the destroying angel swept over Egypt and killed all first born males that did not have the lamb's blood spread on their door posts.

Exodus 12.14 – this is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord – a lasting ordinance.

The Passover meal is a reminder of their bondage (slavery) in Egypt; a reminder of the slaying of a lamb; and reminder of liberation.

Jesus refers to the words of Jeremiah 31: 31-34 when he says “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

What Can We Say about the Practice of Celebrating the Lord's Supper?

It was established by Jesus - Matthew 26.26-29; Mark 14.22-25; Luke 22.14-20; 1 Cor. 11.22-26.

Repetition is necessary – In Luke's account we have the words from Jesus, “...do this in remembrance of me.” Paul's account of the last night of Jesus also includes this command and he adds, “For *as often as you* eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11.26).

It is a form of proclamation – The Lord's Supper is a representational setting forth of the fact and meaning of Christ's death. Paul stated this clearly when he stated: “For as often as you eat this bread...*you proclaim the Lord's death* until he comes.” The act of taking the bread and the cup is a dramatization of the gospel, a graphic display of what Christ's death has accomplished.

Past - It points backward to his death as the basis of our salvation.

Present - it also declares a present truth – the vitalness of a proper frame of mind and heart. Those celebrating are to examine themselves before eating the bread and drinking the cup; any one who participates “without discerning the [Lord's] body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11.28-29).

To eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner is to be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood (v. 27).

Future – It looks forward to the Lord's second coming. Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (1 Cor. 11.26).

There is a spiritual benefit to the partaker – All Christians who participate in the Lord's Supper see it as conferring a spiritual benefit upon them. It can be a means, or at least an occasion of spiritual growth in the Lord. We do not take the Lord's Supper merely because the Lord's commands obligates us to do so. Participation actually has a beneficial effect upon those partaking. It aids in building community. It is a visible symbol of the meaning of Christ's death.

Restricted to believers – All denominations agree that the Lord's Supper is not to be administered to everybody. It is in some fashion a token of the discipleship involved in the relationship between the individual believer and the Lord. Accordingly, it must not be administered to someone who is not a disciple of the Lord.

The Last Supper was shared within the intimate gathering of those most fully committed to Christ. Remember, the group had to be purified. Judas, who was to betray Jesus, left the group in the midst of the meal.

Further restriction is borne out by Paul's statement about self-examination. It is necessary for a person to examine him/herself, so that he/she may eat and drink in a worthy manner. One must not only be a believer, but a practicing believer.

The Community Dimension – The Lord's Supper represents the Lord's body. It is also for the body, that is, the church. In 1 Cor. 10.15-17 Paul argues that since they all partake of one loaf, which is Christ's body, they are all one body. This is the background to Paul's statements in 1 Cor. 11.17-22. For members of the church to be divided into factions and to despise others who partake with them of the one loaf is an abuse and contradiction of the Lord's Supper.

Frequency of Observance

How often should we observe the Lord's Supper? Our church, for the most part does it quarterly and at our Maundy Thursday Celebration before Easter. Some traditions do it weekly or even daily. A good idea is the Lord's Supper should be observed often enough to prevent long gaps

between times of reflection upon the truths it signifies, but not too often as to make it seem commonplace or trivial.

The Lord's Supper, properly administered, is a means of inspiring the faith and love of the believer as he or she reflects again upon the wonder of the Lord's death and the fact that those who believe in him will live forever.