

CHAPTER 4 LET'S KEEP THE LORD'S SUPPER

Our Lord Jesus Christ has given the church two ordinances by which we are to remember His sacrificial death upon the cross and His vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind,. One is baptism and the other we call the communion service of the Lord's Supper.

It is a humiliating fact that this service which was intended by our Lord to be a service depicting the union and common fellowship of the saints has become the center of controversy and occasion for some of the most bitter contests among those who profess His name. In the history of the church, wars have actually been fought over the order and meaning of this service.

The Roman Catholic church believes that the two elements (the bread and fruit of the vine) are actually turned into the body and blood of Christ when the bishop prays over the elements. They permit the laity (those who are not priests) to eat of the bread but have withdrawn the privilege of drinking of the cup from them since the Middle Ages. This caused one of the bloodiest wars in Christendom, but the ruling of the church has prevailed until this day. They refer to the communion service as the Eucharist. The presiding bishop blesses the elements before they are served. This term is simply the transliteration of a Greek word which meaning "to be thankful." However, with unscriptural teaching emerging stating that the elements are changed into the actual body and the blood of Christ, it has led many outside the Catholic church to drop the term Eucharist.

When Luther broke from the Catholic Church, he attacked this false idea that the bread changed into the body of Christ and the wine changed into the blood of Christ. Luther taught that, rather than the actual body and blood of Christ being present at the Eucharist, the real and substantial presence of Christ was in the Eucharistic elements. This held by most Lutheran churches today.

Out of the protestant reformation, most of the other churches to emerge believe in the symbolic presence of Christ during the communion service. That is, they believe that the bread symbolically represents the body of Christ and the fruit of the vine symbolically represents the blood of Christ. This is the view which Baptists hold.

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Some have become disillusioned with the whole controversy and have said we are not to keep communion at all. I believe this is also wrong. Just because there are differences of opinions about the meaning of a particular practice does not mean we should throw out the practice. We need to look at our source of authority; the Bible. What does it say?

Read carefully the three accounts of the initiation of the ordinance and then the one explanation of Christ as the bread of life.

Reference Group Number 1

- A. Three Biblical accounts.
 - 1. Matthew 26:26-30
 - 2. Mark 14:22-25
 - 3. Luke 22:17-20
- B. An explanation of the body and blood of Christ
John 6:48-58 cf. vs. 63

As you read the passage in the book of John about eating and drinking the flesh of the Lord Jesus, I trust you noticed verse 63 which plainly states, "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." We do not believe, as the Roman Catholics, that after the prayer the elements turn into the very body and blood of Christ. They believe that when the priest breaks the bread, he is actually breaking the body--the arms, legs, and other members of Christ's body. They believe that when they drink the wine they are actually drinking the blood of Christ. The very thought is repelling. This is why Jesus made it clear that the words he spoke to these disciples were spiritual words. He was speaking in a figurative way.

In Luke's gospel he makes it clear that the communion service is to be retrospective. He states that as Jesus broke the bread He said, "This is my body which is given for you, this do in remembrance of me." We are to keep communion in remembrance of Christ.

Christ gave his body as a sacrifice for our sin. You may remember that when John the Baptist pointed to the approach of Christ, he declared, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The lamb of the Old Testament time was the body that was offered at the Passover feast for the sins of the people. Elsewhere in the New Testament, it speaks of Christ bearing our sins in His "body on the tree," and again, Christ "has once

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suffered for sins...being put to death in the flesh." His body was the vessel that bore the weight of the judgment of God for our sin. God gave to His Son, the Lord Jesus, a physical body through the virgin birth so that in that body He might pay the penalty for our sin. He did not sin in the flesh--that is, practice sin--but He took the penalty for our sin as a sacrificial lamb would when offered to God.

The blood of Christ, of course, was shed while He was upon the cross. His hands and His feet were pierced through with nails to fasten Him to the cross. Immediately after He yielded up the spirit and died a Roman soldier thrust his spear into the Savior's side and out came the blood and water. The shedding of Christ's blood cleanses us from sin. According to the law of the Old Testament "almost all things are...purged with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no remission," The idea of the word "remission" is a dismissal or release. Therefore, it is stating that without the shedding of blood there is no release of our sins but with the shedding of Christ's blood, we are released from the penalty of our sin and cleansed by His blood with a continuous cleansing. In Revelation 1:5, in reference to Christ, it states (in the King James Version) that He "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,." But, in the New American Standard Version of the Bible, this same verse is translated "To Him who loved us, and released us from our sins by His blood."

The past, present and future sin of the believer is cleansed by the blood of Christ which was shed on our behalf.

Reference Group Number 2.

1. We are to keep the communion service in remembrance of Christ.
 - a. The body of Christ was offered as a sacrifice for our sins.
 - (1) As the Lamb of God. John 1:29 and 36
 - (2) Body a sacrifice. 1 Peter 2:24 and 3:18
 - (3) He bore our sins Romans 8:3 and Hebrews 9:28
cf. Rev. 1:5
 - (4) He died on the cross John 19:30-34
 - b. The blood of Christ was shed to cleanse us from our sin.

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- (1) The blood of Christ gives us a release from the penalty of our sins. Hebrews 9:22
- (2) The blood of Christ continually cleanses us from our sins. 1 John 1:7

When we partake of the bread and fruit of the vine, we are testifying to the fact that we have received the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. We belong to Him and are one with Him. We have accepted His sacrifice on the cross on our behalf. The blood that was shed was shed for the remission of our sins. We have received Him and He is one with us.

We keep the Lord's Supper as a memorial to His death upon the cross. We call it an "ordinance." Although there are several words which are translated out of the Greek New Testament by our English word "ordinance," the word used in 1 Corinthians, chapter 11 and verse 2, literally means a "tradition"--something that is handed down. This is exactly what the Lord had instructed the disciples to do. They were to keep the communion in "remembrance" of Him. As they did this, they were starting a tradition which would be passed on from one generation of believers to another as a memorial to Him.

We believe that we are honoring Christ by keeping the communion service in memory of Him. There are others, who teach that to keep the Lord's Supper should be called a "sacrament." They mean by this term that there is a "power inherent" in the outward act of keeping communion which will communicate saving benefits to those who receive it. They feel that the keeping of the communion will help save the adherent and contribute to his future life.

First of all, I must say that this is contrary to the whole doctrine of salvation by the grace of God, without merit, which is so clearly presented in the New Testament. In Ephesians 2:8 and 9, it states that salvation is the gift of God. Then it specifically declares it is "not of works, lest any man should boast."

If you had not participated in a communion service and I had, I might be able to boast that I had contributed more to my salvation than you had. But, my friend, since salvation is a matter of God's grace, I cannot boast. There is nothing I can do to contribute to the salvation God has so freely given.

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It is also important to note that in the Greek New Testament, there is no word with even a general idea corresponding to our English word "sacrament." Furthermore, the earliest history of the church afforded no trace of the term in relation to the rites of the church. It wasn't until centuries later that the idea of sacraments gradually evolved in the teachings of the church. By the twelfth century, there as many as thirty sacraments listed which contributed to man's salvation. Later, the number was trimmed down to seven and adopted by one of the councils of the official church.

Let me emphasize once again; we reject the idea of the church keeping a sacrament which contributes to our salvation for we are saved by the grace of God alone. Therefore, we prefer to call the Lord's supper an "ordinance."

Look up these verses in Reference group Number 3

2. We are to keep the communion service as a "tradition."

a. Meaning of the "ordinance" or "tradition."

I Corinthians 11:2 cf. vs. 23-26

b. This is not a "sacrament."

(1) Not the communication of a saving benefit.

(2) Salvation is of grace alone Ephesians 2:8 & 9

2. The Biblical Background for the Rite 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

A. The keeping of the Passover. Mark 14:12-25

1. Lamb was killed on the first day of unleavened bread.

Mark 14:1112

2. Kept in "large upper room." Mark 14:15

I trust that you read 1 Corinthians 11:2 in relation to the communion service being an "ordinance" or a tradition and then you later read the entire context of this Scripture. We shall look at this passage of Scripture carefully. First, however, I want us to notice how our Lord first introduced the institution we call the Lord's Supper.

Every year, on the fourteenth of the month Nisan (which falls sometime in March or April according to our calendar year), the Jewish

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people keep a feast called the Passover. This holy feast is in commemoration of the miraculous deliverance God gave the nation of Israel some 1400 years before Christ was born. They had been slaves in the land of Egypt but, under the leadership of Moses, God delivered them one night following the slaying of the Passover lamb. The blood of this lamb was put upon the doorpost of their houses so that the angel of the Lord might pass over their house and not put to death the first-born child within the home. At the time of the confusion caused by the death of every first-born child throughout the land of Egypt, the people of Israel departed out of that land.

Faithful Jews kept this passover feast by offering the passover lamb annually until 70 A.D. Since that time, the temple site in Jerusalem has been under the domination of Gentile people. Therefore, there has been no blood sacrifice. The passover supper, however, is kept until this very day.

In Mark 14:12, it states "and the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover." When they killed the passover has to do with the slaying of this passover lamb; for the Jews occupied the temple site at this time. Then it states "Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that mayest eat the passover?" You will remember that they went to a "large upper room" to keep the feast. Included in this meal were the shank bone of the lamb, a glass of water, hard-boiled eggs, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and red wine. Each of these elements had their symbolic meaning but our attention is drawn to the unleavened bread and the wine for these are the two elements Christ singled out that night with His disciples.

Although the three unleavened loaves had symbolic meaning to those keeping the passover, the Lord brought to them new meaning as He blessed the bread and broke it, He said, "This is my body." The bread represented His body. We know these loaves were unleavened for it clearly states in the Old Testament that the bread at the passover feast be unleavened.

The unleavened bread is symbolic of the nature of Christ's body. Leaven is the working of bacteria or fungus in the food which is pictured in the Scriptures as that which corrupts. Our Lord had nothing in His nature which in any way was corrupt. He was the spotless Lamb of God made like sinful man in that He possessed a body but He was victor over every temptation and thus without sin.

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We serve unleavened bread at our communion service to be symbolic of the sinless nature of Christ's body. When we eat of it, we are symbolically saying that we have accepted the sacrifice He made in His body for us. We have received Him as our Savior and we are now a member of His body.

We know that the bread is to be unleavened and to this all Christendom agrees. However, in relation to the wine which is to be served, this has been a matter of controversy.

The Jews use fermented wine at the passover feast. However, the Scriptures do not use the word wine in any of the accounts in the four Gospels nor is it used in 1 Corinthians 11. In each of the Gospels, it refers to the "fruit of the vine" and in 1 Corinthians, it simply mentions drinking of this "cup." The question then to be answered is "Which best represents the nature of Christ's atoning blood; fermented wine or grape juice?"

The idea of fermented wine would not satisfactorily represent the blood of Christ. Fermented wine is the work of bacteria in the grape juice, and this means decay of the original element. The blood of Christ was free from the sinful nature of mankind. It was blood which could well atone for all our sinful race. Therefore, we use unfermented grape juice in our communion services to portray the blood of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11:25, it states "This cup is the New Testament in my blood; this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

This brings us to yet another controversy in the church. How often should we keep the Lord's Supper? There is some evidence that the early church of the book of Acts kept the ordinance every day. In Acts 2, verse 42, it states, "they continued...in breaking bread" and again it states in verse 46, "and they continuing daily...breaking bread from house to house." As we read the phrase "breaking bread," we immediately think of the Lord's Supper. However, it does not mean that primarily. The communion service constantly followed a social gathering of the church. That is the problem which evolved out of the church at Corinth that we shall deal with later. We find in the church those who observe the supper every week. When the believers come together to worship and adore the Savior, they keep the communion service "in remembrance" of Him. Still others keep the service once a month, and some only keep it once a year. Let me simply state plainly that I do not think the frequency of the observance matters if we do it

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remembrance of Him. In both verses, 25 and 26, or 1 Corinthians 11, it states "as often as"; implying that whenever we do keep the service, do so in remembrance of Him.

Traditionally, most Baptists keep the ordinance once a month because they feel that weekly causes it to become so common place that we may lose the significance of its meaning; whereas, if we only keep it annually, we are not given enough of an opportunity to reflect upon the grace of our God in the worship service. Therefore, we keep the communion once a month and endeavor to make it a time to remember, to adore, to worship, and magnify Him who offered His body as a sacrifice for our sin and shed his blood to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Look up these reference verses. Note the word, "unworthily" used in 1 Corinthians 11:27 and 29.

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B. The unleavened bread

Leviticus 23:4-6

1. Picture of the sinless body of Christ Romans 8:3

cf. Hebrews 4:15

C. The fruit of the vine,

1. Never does the Scripture refer to "wine."

2. It simply speaks of the "cup." 1 Corinthians 11:25-26

cf. Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:20 and
1 Corinthians 10:16

D. The frequency of the observance.

1. Daily? cf. Acts 2:42 and 46

2. Every week?

3. Once a month?

4. Once in three months?

5. Annually?

6. As often as we do it, do it in remembrance of Him.

1 Corinthians 11:24 and 25

E. The abuses of the rite.

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1. Some ate and drank of it "unworthily."
I Corinthians 11:27 and 29
2. Some were not separated from worldly worship.
1 Corinthians 10:16-21
3. Some were manifesting pride and selfishness as they came.
1 Corinthians 11:20-22
4. These abusing their privilege were sickly as a result.
1 Corinthians 11:29-30

At Corinth, the people within the church had been converted right out of paganism. They had worshipped idols, and their worship was in close association with their social life. They would hold a great feast and unite with the worship of idols. Very often, the food would be meat offered to these idols. When the Christian church was established in Corinth, their heathen practices were carried over into their love feast and communion service.

If you still have your Bible opened to 1 Corinthians, look at chapter 10, verses 16-21. The apostle asks "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?" Then in verse 21 it simply states: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons; you cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table, and of the table of demons." As you read on down to chapter 11, verses 20-22, we realize they were taking their own supper and eating it without sharing with those who had little or nothing. Those who were rich were not sharing with the poor. The apostle rebukes them for their selfishness and greed and then reminds them to eat at home so that as they come together to remember the Lord, they would do so in His honor. Gluttony and drunkenness had replaced devotion and spiritual refreshment.

This leads us to the word "unworthily." Some have felt this means there must be sinless perfection of the participants of the communion service. They have found it hard to reconcile the fact that we are saved by grace and are still sinful creatures with this term "unworthily." Who, they ask, is worthy to partake of this service in his own right?

The Lord does not have the worthiness of the person under consideration but the worthiness of the manner of coming to the Lord's supper. The reason we receive Christ is because we cannot save ourselves.

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Thus, we have judged ourselves as unworthy in our person. Therefore, we keep the elements with a sense of thanksgiving and awe.

These Corinthian believers were not coming with that attitude. They were coming with a careless attitude of selfishness and pride. If we come in this manner, we shall be "guilty" for we eat and drink judgment to ourselves. This is the reason for sickness among the believers at Corinth, and even death had occurred because of this. Therefore we are to examine ourselves. If the Holy Spirit reveals any sin in our life, we should confess it and forsake it while at the service. If there is some sin in our life which we are unwilling to forsake or we have an attitude of pride or selfishness toward another believer which we will not confess, then we should not partake of the elements. However, let it be pointed out that the Lord did not give us this instruction to keep us from participating in the service but so that we might examine ourselves to remove anything which would hinder our relationship to Him or the rest of the body of believers.

There are those who believe that the communion service should be for baptized members of the local church only. They would make baptism and membership in the local church a pre-requisite to the communion service. I believe both baptism and church membership are important, however, I fail to find scriptural evidence that these must precede communion. Therefore, in our fellowship of churches, most churches allow each person to examine himself before the Lord to determine whether he is eating or drinking of the body and blood of Christ worthily.

Take this Self-check Quiz

1. The bread we eat at the communion service is symbolic of the _____.
2. The fruit of the vine we drink is symbolic of _____.
3. Does the communion service communicate any saving benefits to the participant? ____.
4. Did Jesus give new meaning to the bread and the wine? _____
5. Does the unleavened bread symbolize the sinless body of our Lord Jesus Christ? _____.

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6. Some of the Corinthians had come to the Lord's Supper "unworthily." What should they have done in relation to themselves?

7. Can eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper unworthily cause physical illness and death? _____.

(Ask your facilitator for the answers to this Self Check)

The communion service is not only to be retrospective; that is, in remembrance of what Christ has done for us. It should also be prospective; that is, looking forward until we shall eat and drink with our Lord. In 1 Corinthians 11:26; it states that as we do keep the service, we are showing the Lord's death "till He comes." You see, our Lord is coming for us some day. This is the great hope of the church. In Matthew's gospel, the Lord states that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He drinks it with us in His Father's kingdom. In Mark's gospel, he emphasizes the same truth.

There is a day coming when there shall be an end of sin, or pain, and of death. Our Lord is coming to reign in righteousness, justice and peace. Therefore, the communion service can be kept in anticipation of this great hope. We can meet then with a reverent gladness and joy. Not only are we forgiven of our sins of the past because we have received Christ, but we are going to reign with Him in righteousness.

Pray now: "Heavenly Father, I want to thank you for Jesus Christ and His atoning death. Thank you for such a meaningful commemoration of your body which was offered for me and your blood which was shed to give me forgiveness. May I never partake of this wonderful service lightly or irreverently. I look forward to that day when I can eat and drink with You in the coming kingdom you shall establish upon this earth. I thank you now. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Be sure to look up Reference Group Number 5

- F. The rite is prospective.
1. Matthew 26:29
 2. Mark 14:25
 3. 1 Corinthians 11:26