

## 8. The Lord's Supper as Taught by Christ and His Apostles for the 21st Century

In the 21st century, many confusing doctrines exist concerning the Lord's Supper. These confusions are about the time and number of times that the Lord's Supper to observe, about the name of the Lord's Supper, and about the nature and purpose of the Lord's Supper. Some denominations observe the Lord's Supper only on their Easter holiday or the Thursday before their Easter holiday. Other groups observe the Lord's Supper annually, semiannually, or quarterly, all arbitrary times set by the groups themselves. Some groups arbitrarily name the Lord's Supper an unscriptural name. One of the names, *Eucharist*, comes from the Roman Catholic Church; it does not come from the scriptures. *Eucharist* means gratitude or grateful. Other groups call the Lord's Supper *Holy Communion*. According to Wikipedia, It has evolved within the theologies of the various denominations into a broad variety of liturgies that range from the silent communion of the Quaker to the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the actual flesh and blood of Jesus of the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1st century, Christ and the apostles were very clear in their teaching on the Lord's Supper.

### ***The Symbolic Nature of the Flesh and Blood of Christ***

Jesus himself set the symbolism of his flesh and blood, which later he extended to the Lord's Supper. In John 6:48-58, he seized on the example of the loaves and fish and the manna eaten by the forefathers to show that to have eternal life, we must eat his flesh and drink his blood:

48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

53 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

In Matt 26:26-29, the Lord symbolized our partaking of his body and blood in the Lord's Supper:

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

The metaphoric nature is clear: this (the bread) is my body; this (fruit of the vine) is my blood of the covenant. There are those who believe that these representations (the bread and the fruit of the vine) actually become the body and blood of Christ. These people call the doctrine

*transubstantiation*. There is no supportive textual evidence here or elsewhere for this doctrine. In fact, Paul on two occasions made clear that it was not the literal body and blood. In 1 Cor 10:16, Paul used the metaphoric cup (fruit of the vine) to show our participation in the blood of Christ: "16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" If the doctrine of transubstantiation were true, the literal cup (metal, crystal, or clay) itself would be the literal blood of Christ.

Paul also locked the meaning to the metaphors of the gospels. In 1 Cor 11:23-26, stating that it was from the Lord that he had received it, Paul wrote:

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

To be literal in one part requires one to be literal in all parts; therefore the cup is the literal fruit of the vine and metaphorically the blood of Christ. Likewise, the bread is literally bread and metaphorically the body of Christ.

### ***The Lord's Supper to Be Observed on Every First Day of the Week***

Jesus had foretold that the kingdom would come with power during the lives of those living. He said in Mark 9:1: "And he said to them, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'"

With this statement, the Lord established that the kingdom would come quickly. In Matt 26:27-29, he instituted the Lord's Supper and said:

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

He was going to drink the fruit of the vine in the kingdom. He set once again the time of the coming of the kingdom with power in Acts 1:7-8:

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Peter, in Acts 2, when the power of the Holy Spirit had come, quoted Joel the prophet to show the kingdom going forward from that time. Joel 2:32 reads:

32 And everyone who calls  
on the name of the LORD will be saved;  
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem  
there will be deliverance,  
as the LORD has said,  
among the survivors  
whom the LORD calls.

From that day in Acts 2 until today, disciples devote themselves to the breaking of bread. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." The Lord is there and he drinks with them the fruit of the vine, just as he had promised. This act of worship was on the first day of every week. Acts 20:7 teaches, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight."

In the New Testament church of the 1st century, they came together as the church to partake of the Lord's Supper. 1 Cor 11:18, 20 says that they came together as the church, "In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church:

. . .20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.

In this abuse, they established that the Lord's Supper was the prime event of the coming together, which occurred on the first day of every week. Paul placed the frequency and time of this coming together on the first day of the week, in 1 Cor 16:2, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income."

### **Conclusion**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the purpose of the Lord's Supper was to remember the Lord until he comes again. Bread and the fruit of the vine are emblematic, representing the broken body of the Lord and his blood of the covenant poured out unto the remission of sins. This covenant relationship exists between the Savior and the saved in the kingdom of God. How can one take the Lord's Supper any less than on every first day of the week? Yet, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many would pervert these plain teachings of Christ and the apostles concerning the Lord's Supper.

### **Study Questions from the Scriptures**

1. John 6:48-58: Who is the bread of life? From where does the living bread come? How can this man give us his flesh to eat? What represents the flesh of Christ? What represents the blood of Christ?
2. Matt 26:26-29: What did Jesus say the bread was? What was the cup? For what is the blood of Christ poured out? When does the Lord drink the fruit of the vine anew?
3. 1 Cor 10:16: In what are we allowed participation by the cup and the bread?
4. In 1 Cor 11:23-26: Whom are the bread and the cup taken in remembrance? What is proclaimed when we eat the bread and drink the cup?
5. Mark 9:1: In what period would the kingdom of God come with power?
6. Matt 26:27-29: What would Christ do anew in the Father's kingdom?
7. Acts 1:7-8: When and where would the kingdom come with power?
8. Joel 2:32: Where did Joel say the deliverance would come?
9. Acts 2:42: Who devoted themselves to the breaking of bread?
10. Acts 20:7: On what day did they come together to break bread?
11. 1 Cor 11:18: What did the Corinthians come together as? Why were they supposed to come together?
12. 1 Cor 16:2: How often did they come together?