

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Readings: Mt. 26:17-30; Mk. 14:12-26; and Lu. 22:7-20.

A detailed account of Jesus' institution of this ordinance is found in the first three Gospels as referenced above. The original observance is often referred to as "The Last Supper," because it was the final one before Jesus was crucified. That original observance was actually an observance of the passover. (Ex. 12:1-14) The Israelite families were able to eat the passover because of the death of a lamb. Today, we partake of the Lord's Supper because of the death of the Lamb. The Lord's Supper is also referred to as "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42); and "communion" (I Cor. 10:16-17). Certain denominations call it "The Eucharist," which means "giving of thanks."

Its Purpose - This ordinance commemorates, or causes us to remember, the death of Jesus - not His birth, His ministry, His resurrection, His ascension or His promised return. Some might say that in our observance, we express our Christian fellowship with the other participants. While there may be a measure of truth to this, any fellowship is incidental, or secondary, to the main focus: Christ's sacrifice. Some denominations consider communion a sacrament - meaning an act that brings redemptive grace to the participant. Clearly, this is incorrect because only saved individuals, those who have already experienced God's redemptive grace in salvation, may scripturally partake. Such individuals do not have a need for an additional dose of saving grace.

Its Observance - As in all things, Jesus is our example. We try to pattern our observance after the manner He prescribed in the Bible. The elements are unleavened bread, symbolic of purity without mixture of sin, and the fruit of the vine. The scriptures contain no instance of its observance in anything but a church capacity, so we do not administer it individually, as do some denominations, to the sick or home-bound. The scriptures also contain no instance of unbaptized individuals partaking, so we require participants be baptized first. In fact, we require participants be members of our local congregation. Notice that Jesus did not invite all the people who had been saved to join Him for the Last Supper - only the twelve, who were the first set in the church. It is to be preceded by solemn self-examination. I Cor. 11:17-34 speaks of abuses and their consequences. Also notice the integral relationship of its observance and disciplinary action in chapter five, verse eleven.

Discussion Questions

1. What makes something an ordinance? Can new ones be added? Why/why not?
2. Why do we need to "show forth" the death of Jesus? Who are we showing it to?
3. Why is baptism a prerequisite for the observance of the Lord's Supper?
4. What are the pros and cons of restricted communion?
5. Is there any real value derived from the Lord's Supper? If so, what?
6. If it is totally symbolic, are the details really that important? e.g., would Coke and crackers work just as well?