

THE LORD'S SUPPER

By Rev. Jeremy McKeen

The Lord's Supper, or Communion, is one of the most meaningful acts of worship that has marked the Christian Church since the time of Christ. But what's so significant about eating a tiny cracker and drinking a small cup of wine or juice? And why do we do this weekly as a church?

THE SIGNIFICANCE

Communion was established by Christ on the night of His betrayal (1 Cor.11:23) and practiced regularly by the early church (Acts 2:42; 20:7) to be continued until Jesus returns (1 Cor.11:26) as 1) *a way of remembering*, 2) *a way of proclaiming*, and 3) *a way of strengthening*.

1) *A Way of Remembering*: When Jesus first instituted communion, He said, "This do in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor.11:24-25). So, what does it mean to take communion in remembrance of Christ? First, through the elements used, we remember Jesus' once for all sacrificial work on the cross (Heb.10:12). The breaking of bread is a picture of Jesus' bodily sacrifice, and the cup is a picture of His shedding of blood without which there can be no forgiveness of sins (Heb.9:22). This is not the same type of remembrance like we remember that George Washington was America's first President. This is an active awareness that the victory over sin and death has been accomplished and because of Christ's work on the cross we have peace with God. Second, by partaking of these elements at the same time together (1 Cor.11:21), we are remembering as a church that we are Christ's body and a part of a new family. The Jewish Passover was always celebrated with one's family. Likewise, we celebrate it together as part of the new family that God has created through the new birth (c.f. John 3:3). So, we eat and drink together to remember that the cross, which brings true peace between God and us, should also bring peace between one another. We remember that we should be one, even as He is one (John 17:21). Therefore, we not only renew our relationship with Christ, but also the relationships that we have with one another in the church. Third, as the church continues to practice regular communion until Christ returns, we remember Jesus' promise to come again to renew the whole earth and wipe away every tear from our eyes. We remember that His coming is a future reality and are encouraged to keep running the race by faith until we see Him face to face. The world drinks "the cup of forgetfulness" trying to erase the past. Christians drink "the cup of remembrance" knowing that our past has been forgiven and our future is secure.

2) *A Way of Proclaiming*: The Lord's Supper is also a proclamation. Paul wrote, "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). Therefore, communion is a visible proclamation of the gospel. We proclaim that Christ's death on the cross was a historical fact. We proclaim that because of our sin, Christ's death on the cross was necessary. We proclaim that through Christ's death on the cross the work of salvation is finished. And we proclaim our dependence upon Christ's death on the cross as the only means for true forgiveness and reconciliation with God and one another.

3) *A Way of Strengthening*: Some people understand the Lord's Supper to be a great means of strengthening our experience of God, but is that all? Jesus didn't think so. He implies that it is a means of knowing God more personally and growing in grace (see John 6:52-58). The Westminster Confession writes that the Lord's Supper is a means of our "spiritual nourishment and growth in Him." However, we do not believe that Christ is physically present in the meal but rather spiritually present in a unique way. The elements themselves are not transformed, but we are transformed as we receive Christ by faith through the meal. Additionally, as mentioned above, communion serves not just as a means of grace to strengthen our relationship with Christ but also to strengthen our relationships with each other.

THE FREQUENCY

So, why do we celebrate this every week? Mainly for two reasons – 1) *Our commitment to follow the pattern of the early church* and 2) *According to the significance of communion previously mentioned.*

1) *The Pattern of the Early Church*: A close reading of the New Testament reveals that the early church celebrated the "breaking of the bread" (the Lord's Supper) every time they gathered for corporate worship. We read that the early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). No one would think we were devoting ourselves to God's Word, prayer or fellowship if we only celebrated these things once a month or quarterly, but that is what's often done with communion. Therefore, we want to join the early church and also devote ourselves to the weekly breaking of bread. For we also see that the Lord's Supper was one of the main activities that marked every Sunday gathering. "On the first day of the week, when we were gathering together to break bread ..." (Acts 20:7). Also, Paul seems to suggest that the church in Corinth received communion every time they assembled together (see 1 Cor. 11:17-22). In fact, there is no Scripture that can show a weekly assembly without a suggestion to the observance of the Lord's Supper.

2) *The Significance of Communion*: Some may think that having the Lord's Supper every week (instead of monthly or quarterly) will cause it to grow old and not as meaningful. On the contrary, we believe that in light of its meaning, as we celebrate it more frequently, the tendency will be to appreciate it more, not less. Additionally, the question should not first be "how does this make me feel?" But rather, "How does God want to be worshipped?" So, let us continue to devote ourselves to pointing people to the truth of the gospel by also devoting ourselves to the weekly breaking of bread. For Jesus invites us frequently to His table for intimate fellowship, to receive Him, proclaim Him and be strengthened by Him.

"Let thy blood in mercy poured, let thy gracious body broken,
Be to me, O gracious Lord, of the boundless love the token.
Thou didst die that I might live; blessed Lord, thou cam'st to save me;
All that love of God could give, Jesus by His sorrows gave me."
Greek Hymn, Tr. by John Brownlie, 1907