

The Lord's Supper – Scripture Background and Study

Introduction

The Lord's Supper, also called communion or the *eucharist* (meaning "thanksgiving" in Greek), holds deep significance for a believer and should not be underestimated. More than just a memorial to remember Jesus' death and resurrection, the Lord's Supper is also a declaration of one's continual dependence upon Christ's life and a regular reminder of His soon return.

Historical Background

Observance of the Lord's Supper began when Jesus initiated it at His **last supper** meal before His death with His disciples. The apostle Paul wrote about this event in I Corinthians 11:23-26: *"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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.' 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.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."* Thus, the Lord's Supper involves partaking of two elements, bread and grape juice (or wine) and is preceded by a blessing or prayer of thanksgiving.

The Two Elements

The Bible reveals some deep truths about the two elements of **communion**.

①... The Bread, Representing the Body of Jesus

By partaking of the bread in communion, we acknowledge that Jesus is our source of life. Indeed, He is the Bread of Life whereby we may satisfy our spiritual hunger. He said, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* (John 6:51). Bread signifies life, so when Jesus broke the unleavened bread and gave it to His disciples, He illustrated that His body (life) would be broken in order that they might have life.

But there's more: the broken body of Jesus ushered in the new covenant, signified by the temple veil tearing in two. The writer of Hebrews said, *"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body"* (Hebrews 10:19-20). This "new and living way" is by His Spirit, allowing us to approach God with a

heart made pure by the blood of Jesus. Furthermore, the resurrected body of Jesus validates the new covenant, because the same Holy Spirit that raised up Jesus from the dead is the same Spirit dwelling in the children of God (see Romans 8:11), Who will raise them, too, at the last day!

Finally, the breaking of bread with other believers signifies fellowship within the Body of Christ and unity by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:42). The Body of Christ is strengthened and Jesus is glorified when the Body serves one another in humility and shares blessings in selfless love. **"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. [Jesus]"** (I Corinthians 10:17).

② ... The Cup, Representing the Blood of Jesus

The symbol of a cup represents a measure or portion, and blood signifies suffering and death. Blood is the life of the body, but when it is poured out, death occurs (see Leviticus 17:11). The Father gave Jesus a cup of suffering to drink, requiring Him to be the sacrificial Lamb of atonement for sin and to pour out His sinless blood through a torturous death; for only the shed blood of Jesus can cleanse and make permanent atonement for all sin (see I John 1:7).

Jesus cried out in Gethsemane, **"Abba [Daddy], Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will"** (Mark 14:36). Later, Jesus said to Peter, **"Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"** (John 18:11). Jesus submitted Himself to His Father's will and drank the dark and terrible cup of wrath for our sin. **"in him God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"** (II Corinthians 5:21).

By partaking of the communion cup, we commit to follow Jesus no matter the cost. Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath for our sin, but we are to partake in His sufferings for righteousness' sake.

The Lord's Supper gives believers the opportunity to identify themselves with Jesus, Mediator of the **new covenant**, and show that they are willing to experience both His life (power) and death (suffering) in their daily walk.

Biblical Warnings

Because of the significance of identifying with Christ in communion, unbelievers and hypocrites (those who profess to be Christians but live according to the world) should not participate. Everyone else should examine his own heart prior to partaking the Lord's Supper to be certain of a pure conscience toward God. **"So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning**

against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. (I Corinthians 11:27-29).

Looking Ahead

Last but not least, the Lord's Supper is a time to anticipate the day when we will see our Lord and King face to face. He will drink of the fruit of the vine for the first time since His death, just as He said: ***" I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom"*** (Matthew 26:29).

Conclusion

The Lord's Supper is a symbol of the new covenant we have with God by Christ Jesus. This covenant is the "new and living way" whereby we follow God's law written on our hearts by the power of His Spirit. The next time you participate in the Lord's Supper, remember not only Jesus' death and resurrection, but also reflect on the deeper meaning that He is your continual source of spiritual life.

This Christian Bible teaching was written by **David Holt Boshart, Jr.** and his wife Shari Boshart. Slight modifications were made to reduce the content for our purposes at Carmel Baptist Church.

Permission is granted to use and print this **biblical teaching** for personal or group Bible study.

Instructions for Administering the Lord's Supper

1. Prepare the communion elements ahead of time. You can use any kind of cup--disposable paper cups, or small plastic or glass communion cups.
2. Gather the participants together. You may want to say a prayer something like this:

“Dear Father in Heaven, we humbly come before you to thank you for this day and for the many blessings you have bestowed upon us. Most of all, we thank you for your son, Jesus Christ, who was born on this earth and was crucified on that cruel cross so that we would all have the hope of eternal salvation. Now Father, as we partake of this bread and juice, which symbolizes the body of Christ and the blood that was shed on that cross, we pray that we do so in a manner that is both pleasing and acceptable unto you. These things we pray for in the blessed and holy name of Jesus Christ - Amen.”

3. Take the bread and recite the verses in I Corinthians 11:23-24. This dedicates the bread for the communion service.

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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.””

4. Hold up a cup of the grape juice. Recite the verses in I Corinthians 11:25-26. This dedicates the beverage for the communion service.

“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.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

5. Distribute the bread to those participating. Holding up the bread state *“This is the body of Christ, given for you.”* Then serve the beverage, saying something like, *“This is the blood of Christ, shed to cleanse you from your sins.”*
6. Allow time in the communion service for personal reflection and prayer following the distribution of the elements.