



*A Ministry of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)*

The Lord's Supper



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The Lord's Supper service is a solemn Christian memorial of Jesus' crucifixion. Introduced by our Savior Himself on the night He was betrayed, it commemorates His death on Calvary's cross as a sacrifice for our sins so that we might live!

The Lord's Supper, also called communion, illustrates our fellowship with Christ and reminds us that we are members of the body of Christ — the church — and that our Lord is coming back again.

This booklet will examine the origin and significance of the Lord's Supper; how it symbolizes our participation in the body and blood of Christ; the importance of our fellowship with other believers; the meaning of the bread and the fruit of the vine used in its observance; and its time, frequency, and perpetual nature. In addition, we will consider the practice of footwashing and the question of who may participate in the service.

Origin of the Lord's Supper Ordinance

Matthew, Mark, and Luke report that as the time of the annual observance of the Passover approached, Jesus instructed Peter and John to make the necessary preparations for Him and the twelve disciples to eat together. That evening, as Jesus and the disciples were reclining around the table, eating what would be their last Passover meal together, Jesus did something different — something that was to be practiced by His followers for all time as a memorial of His death.

And he took bread, gave thanks and

broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27, 28).

While this institution of the Lord's Supper was coincident with the Passover, it was not intended to be merely a re-interpretation or extension of the Passover. Rather, it was a new memorial that would allow Jesus' followers to proclaim their personal belief in Him.

Consider some of the significant aspects of the Old Testament Passover:

- family participation (Exodus 12:3, 4);
- sacrifice of a lamb for the Passover meal (Deuteronomy 16:2);
- a seven-day celebration, bounded by annual sabbaths (vv. 1-8);
- unleavened bread eaten for the feast's duration (v. 8);
- among males, participation of only the circumcised (Exodus 12:48, 49);
- observance as a national event at a designated place, which, after the establishment of the temple, was Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:6).

The memorial service instituted by Jesus is different from the Passover. Most important, while the Passover looked back to Israel's deliverance from Egypt and only foreshadowed the death of Jesus, the

Lord's Supper memorial focuses entirely on Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The writer of Hebrews taught that the sacrifices and rituals of the old covenant, including those associated with the festivals of Israel, found their fulfillment in the single, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus (Hebrews 9:9-15; 10:10-12). "Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:19) fulfilled all the types foreshadowed in the Passover, and the sacrificing of animals came to an end!

In addition, Jesus gave the unleavened bread, formerly a reminder of Israel's haste in leaving Egypt, an entirely new meaning: "this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). He gave the cup from the Passover table new meaning: "This is my blood" (v. 28). "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20).

Contrary to the Passover regulations that required male circumcision and all members of a family to participate, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those whose faith in Christ has led them to commit their lives to Him. Jesus' instruction, "drink from it, all of you" (Matthew 26:27), is a directive to all believers to partake of the Lord's Supper. Unlike the Passover, which was inseparable from the history of one nation, Israel, the redemption accomplished by Jesus' death is available to believers of all nations and races (Galatians 3:28).

Unlike the Passover, the Lord's Supper is not an extended celebration lasting several days. It is, rather, a single, solemn memorial service that may be observed wherever

believers gather anywhere in the world.

While there is overlapping of the symbolism of the Passover and the Lord's Supper, the contrasts and differences are significant. Consequently, it is not accurate to think of the Christian memorial as simply a New Testament version of the Passover.

Significance of the Lord's Supper

About two decades after Jesus instituted this memorial, the apostle Paul wrote the Corinthian church about its significance.

The Lord Jesus . . . 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" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

The Lord's Supper graphically illustrates the doctrine of salvation. As we partake of the bread and fruit of the vine, we proclaim the Lord's atoning death (v. 26) and that His blood "purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). We affirm our personal faith in Him and our acceptance of His sacrifice as payment for our sins. We remember the love of God that sent Him into the world to save the lost (John 3:16); we remember the self-sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sins (Ephesians 1:7); and we remember the completed redemptive work of Christ on the cross (Hebrews 10:12, 14).

On the one hand, the Lord's Supper is a solemn memorial of our Savior's suffering

and dying on the cross, prompting thoughts of agony and sorrow. On the other hand, it is a celebration of our redemption and deliverance from sin, which brings us great joy!

Union with Christ

Paul understood the Lord's Supper to be an illustration of our continuing relationship with Christ.

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? (1 Corinthians 10:16, NKJV).

Every time we partake of the memorial symbols of Jesus' blood and body in the Lord's Supper, we affirm our belief in His constant fellowship with us! We are in Him and He is in us (John 14:20).

The New Testament illustrates with several metaphors what it means to be united with Christ. First, there is the vine and the branches of John 15:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (v. 5).

Paul compares believers to the temple of God:

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? . . . God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple" (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17).

Paul also writes of the church as the

body of Christ: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). In eating the bread of the communion service, we affirm our position in the church, the body of Christ, which is made up of all who are in Him.

The Lord’s Supper also reminds us that the church is the bride of Christ — that will one day, at His return, be united with Him in glory at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7, 8; Ephesians 5:25-27).

In fact, when Jesus gave the cup to His disciples, He looked ahead to the time when He would drink it with them again in the kingdom: “For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18). And Paul explicitly stated that in eating the bread and drinking the cup, we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). When we observe the Lord’s Supper in memory of Jesus’ death, we also confess our faith in His return.

Union with Fellow Believers

As we participate in the Lord’s Supper and proclaim our union with Christ, we also proclaim our union with other believers who are part of His body, the church. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Corinthians:

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf [bread] (1 Corinthians 10:17).

For just as each of us has one body with many members . . . so in Christ we,

though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (Romans 12:4, 5). And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18).

As members of the one body of Jesus Christ, each of us has a duty to be submissive to Christ our Head and to be devoted to one another in brotherly love, honoring others above ourselves, sharing with those in need, practicing hospitality, and living in harmony (Romans 12:9-16; 1 Corinthians 12:25).

Participation in the Lord's Supper reminds and encourages believers to strive for unity in their relationships with others. In fact, Jesus instructs us to repair broken relationships before we come to worship.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24).

The Lord's Supper is an effective reminder that we need to be careful to maintain good relationships with our fellow saints because all of us share in the same glorious grace and forgiveness of Christ. That is an awesome reason for participating in the bread and cup of communion with the saints of God! It is also a sober warning: If there is enmity or animosity between us and another believer, we cannot properly partake of the Lord's Supper until we have at least done our part to seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23, 24; 6:12; 18:35; Mark 11:25; Ephesians 4:26; 5:32; 1 John 4:19-21).

A Lesson in Humility

John's Gospel reports the events of Jesus' Last Supper from a different perspective than that of the other Gospels. Instead of reporting details of the sharing of the bread and the fruit of the vine, John describes how Jesus got up from the table, laid aside His clothes, wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water in a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples (John 13:4-11).

The significance of what Jesus did is explained in verses 12-15:

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

This statement echoes what Jesus had previously taught His disciples when they disputed among themselves as to which of them was considered the greatest (Luke 22:24). He said, "The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves . . . I am among you as one who serves" (vv. 26b, 27). By washing the disciples' feet, Jesus demonstrated how they were to love and serve one another without regard to rank or position (John 13:14).

One of the glories of the Christian faith is equality of all saints as recipients of God's love and saving grace through Christ's sacrifice. We are reminded of this equality when we come to the Lord's table, where there

is no rank or superiority, no rich or poor, no high bred or low born. We are all simply believers in Christ. Footwashing reinforces this beautiful truth. It reminds the saints that humility is to be a way of life. As God's servants, we are to follow Jesus' example and be willing to serve each other in the most menial ways every day of our lives.

The Church of God (Seventh Day) practices footwashing because Jesus modeled and instructed it. It is called the "ordinance of humility," and we claim the blessing promised by Jesus in practicing it.

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

. . . Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:14, 15, 17).

Time of the Lord's Supper

Jesus instructed His disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) and "do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). This implies that the Lord's Supper service is a memorial that should be repeated. Paul's instruction to the Corinthians requires its repeated observance: "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The Bible contains no explicit instructions concerning the time and frequency of the Lord's Supper. We note, however, that

the Supper was instituted in the evening at the time of Hebrew Passover in the early spring. First Corinthians 11:23 puts it this way, “the Lord Jesus, on the same night he was betrayed, took bread. . . .” This was during the early evening hours on the night before He was arrested, tried, and crucified (Mark 14:12 — 15:37).

Respecting this historical origin, the Church of God (Seventh Day) chooses to hold our communion service annually just after sunset beginning the date of the Passover, Nisan 14 by the Hebrew calendar. (This date will vary from late March to late April on our calendars.) We do not insist on an exclusive date for the Lord’s Supper. The vital point is that the Church observes this memorial *together, in the Spirit of Christ*, at its proper season.

Who Should Participate?

The communion service is for Christ’s disciples. It is for those who have repented of their sins, confessed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, and surrendered their lives to Him and been baptized in His name. Participating in the annual memorial of Christ’s death reaffirms what a believer publicly proclaimed when they were baptized.

Paul encouraged participants to examine themselves prior to partaking of the Lord’s Supper: “Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). The reason for this self-examination is stated in verses 27, 29:

Whoever eats the bread and drinks the

cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord . . . For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Paul's insistence on self-examination must be viewed in the context of the Corinthian church's misconduct in "love feasts," a common meal that they apparently ate along with the Lord's Supper. These were like our present-day potluck or fellowship meals in which everyone brings food to share with the whole congregation. However, during their meals the Corinthians failed to show Christian love in several ways. There were divisions among them. They showed partiality, ate and drank excessively, and disregarded the needs of others. Their over-indulgent behavior humiliated the poor (vv. 18-22).

These selfish behaviors made the church unworthy to eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord (v. 27): "When you come together it is not the Lord's Supper you eat" (v. 20). What did the apostle mean? He meant it is impossible to appropriately participate in the Lord's Supper while engaging in these sinful activities. Their unworthy conduct was "sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27). Paul reproved the Corinthians for their conduct (v. 22) because it violated the Christian ethics of love, forgiveness, consideration for the poor, preference for others, and liberality toward those in need.

Thus, any disrespectful approach to the Lord's table may result in sinning against

the body and blood of Christ. Proper self-examination tests our attitudes and conduct by biblical standards so we can repent, make corrections, and participate without condemnation (vv. 28, 29). Paul's explanation for the remedy for unworthiness was "But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment" (v. 31).

This instruction was not intended to keep earnest believers away from the communion table by requiring perfection in thought, word, and deed. Rather, it was intended to encourage believers to examine their hearts and, where needed, amend their behavior in preparation for this important, solemn, commemorative service. In our self-examination and the correction of our behavior, we may claim the grace of God for worthiness to participate in the Lord's Supper. It is only by His grace that we are ever fully worthy to eat the bread and drink the cup of communion.

Summary

Jesus instituted the ordinance of the Lord's Supper on the eve of His death. It recalls the great self-sacrifice He made to obtain salvation for us. The emblems of the service are the bread and the cup — symbols of His sacrificed body and shed blood. Since the bread Jesus used in instituting this memorial came from the Passover table, it was most certainly unleavened, and that is what the Church of God (Seventh Day) uses in our communion service. The cup Jesus shared is described only as containing "the

fruit of the vine" (Mark 14:25); hence, our practice is to use grape juice as a symbol of His blood.

We hold this service annually and follow Jesus' example by including footwashing as a practice of Christian humility.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic communion with Christ and with His body, the church. In examining ourselves, we should test our conduct and attitudes by biblical standards and make corrections prior to participating at the Lord's table.

We are blessed whenever we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord's Supper, because we are reminded of Jesus' love for us, and of the precious gift of life we have received from His sacrifice on the cross!

Dates for the Lord's Supper Service

These dates (after sunset) for the Lord's Supper service on our calendar correspond to the beginning of the fourteenth day of Nisan on the Hebrew calendar:

2021: Friday evening, March 26

2022: Thursday evening, April 14

2023: Tuesday evening, April 4

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