

OUR LIFE TOGETHER

LESSON EIGHT: LIFE TOGETHER - WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE LORD'S SUPPER

Now, we discover the glory of the second sacrament: the Lord's Supper.

REMEMBER...

Sacraments are "mysteries" - we use them to enable us to understand and celebrate the "mysterious" truths of the gospel, revealed in Jesus Christ.

They are *signs and seals of God's gracious covenant with his people*. As signs, they represent God's grace for us. As seals, they confirm God's grace to us.

We do not need them to be saved. But we receive them as an act of obedience to the Savior who instituted them for us.

Now, let's learn about the Lord's Supper.

WHERE DID THE LORD'S SUPPER COME FROM?

We believe there is a fundamental unity between the New Testament practice of the sacraments, and the Old Testament roots of the sacraments.

Why do we baptize infants? Because of the connection between circumcision and baptism.

What is the significance of the Lord's Supper? We grasp this as we recall the Old Testament "sacrament" of the Passover.

In Exodus 12, the Lord is delivering his people out of slavery in Egypt. Nine plagues are done, and one remains. It is the worst: the death of all the firstborn children in Egypt.

But how will God's people, who are still in Egypt, be spared? God commands his people to choose unblemished animals and sacrifice them. Then they are to take some of the blood of the animals, and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses. The blood, says the

Lord, will be a sign. When he sees the blood, he will “pass over” those houses and spare them.

Israel obeys, and God keeps his promise. Later in the chapter, we read that this “Passover” event is to be remembered as a “lasting ordinance.”

What are the core “elements” of the Passover celebration?

* *The bread.* When Israel fled Egypt, the people fled with unleavened bread - bread without the yeast having risen - because they were fleeing in haste from the Egyptians.

* *The blood.* Israel could flee Egypt because the blood of an innocent animal had been shed, instead of Israel’s people shedding their blood for their sins.

These two elements are at the heart of what is represented and confirmed in the Passover. They are also at the heart of what is represented and confirmed in the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord’s Supper was instituted by Jesus at *the Last Supper*. In his final meal with his disciples before the cross, Jesus infused the Passover elements with new significance.

* He declared *the bread* to represent his body, broken for them.

* He declared *the cup*, holding wine that represented blood, to represent his blood, shed for them.

A substitute dies for sinners. Those sinners remember and rejoice. This is the heart of the Passover, and this is the heart of the Lord’s Supper.

WHAT DO WE DO IN THE LORD’S SUPPER?

When I was a young man, a pastor taught me to think of three things during the Lord’s Supper: Jesus on the cross in the past, Jesus on his throne in the present, and Jesus’ coming in the future. This “past-present-future” pattern gives useful direction to our minds and hearts as we participate with other believers in the sacrament.

In the Lord’s Supper...

1. *WE RENEW OUR MEMORY.*

In the gospels, as Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, he calls his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup "in remembrance of me."

In 1 Corinthians 11, as Paul reminds his readers of Jesus' purposes in the sacrament, he informs them that in the Lord's Supper, they "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

The Lord's Supper is a *season of remembrance*. We receive the bread and the cup, and we remember Jesus Christ as the sinless sacrifice for our sins. We proclaim our faith in his work, through the simple act of eating and drinking these symbols of his body and blood.

God has given us great minds, but we tend to forget things.

We forget meetings. We forget names. We forget where we laid tools.

We forget why we walked into a particular room. We forget the answers to questions on game shows. We forget what we said to this person, or that person.

We are also prone to forget the glory of the cross. It is not that we cannot recite the truths of the gospel or the sacrament, but somehow those truths get shoved to the sides of our minds, and sent far from the depths of our hearts.

We are distracted. We are overwhelmed. We forget. So God gives us this sacrament, to enable us to remember. We remember...

A substitute. Jesus took our place before the throne of God's judgment.

A sacrifice. Jesus gave up his very life, for our sins.

A satisfaction. Jesus' death quenched God's anger over our sins.

A sanctification. Jesus' body and blood make us holy before God.

Why is this important? Because of...

False guilt. We still sin. If we love Jesus, we hate this. One of Shakespeare's characters once said, "My conscience has a thousand tongues, and every tongue tells several tales, and every tale condemns me as a villain."

At the cross, Jesus removed our guilt. Our sin is real, but our redemption is here. As we sing in

“Before the Throne of God,”

When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the wrong within,

Upward I look and see him there, who made an end to all my sin.

Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free.

For God the Just is satisfied, to look on Him and pardon me.

In the Lord’s Supper, we remember the truths that set us free from false guilt.

Renewing our memory is also important because of *real pride*.

Jonathan Edwards once wrote that pride is “the worst viper that is in the heart.” How easily we begin to think we are better than others! How quickly we slip into thinking that says, “I am where I am, and I am who I am, because of something I have done.”

The gospel completely rejects this thinking. Our “boast” is not in ourselves, but in the Lord, who has given us every blessing of every kind. We sing,

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!

In the Lord’s Supper, we remember the reality of our wretchedness, and we are humbly amazed again at God’s mercy to us in Jesus.

2. WE RENEW OUR LOVE.

In John 6, Jesus speaks of feeding on him as the bread of life. We are not sure whether or not he is thinking specifically of the Lord’s Supper here, but the connection is easy to make.

In John 15, Jesus speaks of abiding in him as the vine. If we cut ourselves off from him, we are lost. But as we remain in relationship with him, we thrive.

The Lord’s Supper is not just a season of remembrance, but a *season of communing*.

In the Lord’s Supper, we think of Jesus reigning on the throne, we think of feeding on him and abiding in him by the power of the Holy Spirit, and we renew our love for him. As we sing,

More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee,

Hear Thou the prayer I make, on bended knee.

We enter worship, and we are bruised and battered from a week in this broken and brutal world. We know we have faltered, fumbled and failed. In the Lord's Supper, we not only remember Jesus' death to secure our forgiveness, but we relate to him as the One who will enable us to serve him in the days to come.

Yet we do not do this alone, do we? We express our love for Jesus by loving each other, so the sacrament renews our love not just for him, but for the believers around us.

In *The Brothers Karamozov*, a wise monk says, "Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams."

C.S. Lewis said, "There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken."

The J. Geils Band sang, "Love stinks."

How can this unlovely person love other unlovely people? By the grace of the loving Jesus. In the Lord's Supper, we renew our commitment to this. As we sing,

*Let it be said of us: We were marked by forgiveness,
We were known by our love and delighted in meekness,
We were ruled by His peace, heeding unity's call,
Joined as one body that Christ would be seen by all.*

3. WE RENEW OUR HOPE.

In Revelation 19, we are given a vision of God's throne. It is time for the wedding supper of the Lamb. The bride of Jesus - the church - is given "fine linen, bright and clean" to wear.

The Lord's Supper is a season of remembrance, a season of communing, and a *season of anticipating*. As we eat and drink the Lord's Supper today, we hope for the day of that supper.

What is this hope all about?

It is about *the hope of wrong made right.*

If your eyes and heart are open, you know much of the wrong in this world, and in your world. The book of Revelation describes God's condemning, avenging and eternal justice.

In the Lord's Supper, we declare that God cares so much about justice, that he sent his Son to suffer the pains of divine justice for us, and to secure the promise of ultimate justice.

It is about *the hope of sinners made clean.*

Right now, through faith in Jesus, we are clean in God's eyes. But we await the day when we will become all that God has saved us to be.

The image of clean clothes is a wonderful image for us. We know what it is like to pull our clothes from the dryer, and see and smell the cleanness.

That is our hope! One day, the cleanness that God has declared, will be real and revealed for all of us to see.

It is about *the hope of many made one.*

Who is invited to this supper? As we see all through Revelation, it is men and women and children of every people and language. We will worship together as one.

We taste this today as we worship. But we will have a full experience of this on that day of glory, when we will worship with all joy, all peace, and all hope.

As we sing in "On Jordan's Stormy Banks,"

When shall I reach that happy place, and be forever blest?

When shall I see my Father's face, and in his bosom rest?

I am bound...for the Promised Land!

We look back - in renewing our memory. We look around - in renewing our love for Jesus and each other. We look forward - in renewing our hope in Jesus. Past...present...future.

WHO MAY RECEIVE THE LORD'S SUPPER?

We live in an age and culture of “come one, come all.” In many ways, this is good. We should not restrict people from doing what all people should be allowed to do.

But what about the Lord's Supper? Should anyone and everyone come? At Christ Presbyterian Church, we believe the answer is no. We believe the Bible permits some people to participate, but also warns other people to refrain.

We have summarized this under five headings, which I offer in the form of questions. We believe you should participate in the Lord's Supper, only if you can say “yes” to each of these questions.

1. HAVE I PUBLICLY PROFESSED FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR AND LORD?

In Romans 10:9-10, Paul declares that *if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

The *profession* of our hearts should find *expression* on our lips. As we have seen, only God knows the true state of our hearts, and the truth of the testimony of our lips. But we believe the Lord's Supper is only for those who have expressed such a profession.

We believe this profession should be public, and we believe this will normally be done as you unite with a church in membership.

We do not require you to make that profession *here* before you participate, but we hope you have made this profession *somewhere* before you participate.

2. HAVE I BEEN BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST?

In Acts 2, after Peter's listeners are convicted of their need of Jesus, he calls them to “repent and be baptized.”

We believe baptism is the “initiatory” sacrament. Like an initiation ceremony to a service club or fraternal organization, the sacrament of baptism signifies your entry into the fellowship.

The Lord's Supper, then, is the "confirmatory" sacrament. It is a public act of renewing your commitment. You are saying, "Yes, I am still part of this!"

If this is the pattern in the Bible, then you should be baptized before you participate in the Lord's Supper. You do not need to be baptized in our church. We accept baptisms that have been done in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

3. AM I TAKING THE SACRAMENT IN A SPIRIT OF UNITY?

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is reminding the Corinthians about the nature of the Lord's Supper. We are not sure of all the details of the situation in Corinth, but it seems the believers there were running off into factions, and separating from each other, even within the church itself, for the sacrament. So Paul writes against taking the sacrament in an "unworthy manner."

In Matthew 5, Jesus speaks of anger and fighting. He essentially says, "Resolve your conflicts with each other, before you worship God!"

In Romans 12, Paul offers words that are a great guide for all of life: "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Some will choose war with you - sadly, even in the church. But, Paul asks, have you done everything you can do, to secure peace?

Here are good questions to ponder:

* If I have sinned against another believer, have I sought to receive forgiveness?

* If I have been sinned against, have I sought to offer forgiveness?

This is especially important with the people in the body where you are taking the sacrament. We receive the sacrament as a body, and we honor Jesus only when we receive it in a spirit of unity.

4. DO I UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE SACRAMENT?

Also in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes of receiving the sacrament "without recognizing" the body and blood of Jesus. Again, we are not fully sure about what was happening in Corinth. But if these

believers were dividing from each other and getting drunk at the sacrament (as Paul mentions), they were clearly missing something about the intention of this sacrament.

Do you “get it”? If you do not, you should not participate. This is why we do not permit young children to participate, until we have heard their profession of faith. We believe the sacrament is for those who have a basic understanding of the sacrament.

5. AM I FREE OF BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

In Matthew 18, Jesus provides a simple description of the basic practice of church discipline. We will discuss that issue in the next lesson. But for now, let’s remember that even though churches do not do it often anymore, churches do sometimes ask their members to refrain from taking part in this sacrament.

Usually, this is done because you have some unresolved sin issue with the church where you are a member. If this is your situation, please do not participate until the issue is resolved.

With all of these questions, please remember that...

* You are called to examine yourself. We do not know everything about your heart or your life. We offer you the biblical standard, but ultimately you must “do business” with God.

* We are called to help you examine yourself. The elders of the church are prepared and called to lead people as they ponder these issues. Please come to us for guidance!

HOW SHOULD WE RECEIVE THE LORD’S SUPPER?

First, we should receive it *humbly*.

The Lord’s Supper humbles us. Here we see the greatness of our sin before God, and the greatness of its cost to God.

But we must not wait until we have a “perfect week” to participate. If we did that, none of us

would ever eat or drink!

A minister once saw a woman trembling before him as she came to the front of the church for the sacrament. He comforted her by saying, "Here, take it. It's for sinners."

We humbly admit this, and as we eat and drink, we look to Jesus to make us worthy.

Second, we should receive it *joyfully*.

The Lord's Supper is not a "rumpus" (as our friend C.S. Lewis would say). It is a time of worship before the holy God of all.

But it is a celebration. We renew our memory. We renew our love. We renew our hope. In this and through this, we rejoice!

FINALLY...

At Christ Presbyterian Church, we offer the Lord's Supper weekly. This is unusual. We believe this was likely the practice in the New Testament church, and we believe this is profitable.

Why? The Reformers wrote of the sacraments as "means of grace." In a mysterious way, we believe God's Spirit works through the sacraments.

It is not magic. It is not manipulation. It is a mystery. We do not tell God what to do, when to do it, or how to do it. But as we take part in the Lord's Supper, we trust in God to transform our hearts, our lives, and his world, by his grace.