



What Is the Lord's Supper?

"Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink." (1 Corinthians 11:25b, NLT)

If you are a new Christian, you may be surprised to walk into your church one Sunday and see a table with the contents covered by a tablecloth. Underneath the tablecloth are tiny pieces of bread and small glasses of grape juice or wine. You may wonder, "What is that? What does it mean? What am I supposed to do?" In the last evening with his disciples, Jesus explained its meaning. (Mark 14:22-26) The Apostle Paul later gave instructions on how you are to act and the attitude you should have when you take the Lord's Supper. (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

Jesus himself established this ordinance or religious ceremony to remind believers of his death, burial and resurrection. It is called the Lord's Supper because it calls to remembrance the Jewish Passover Feast (explained below). Because it is a time of communion with God and other believers, some call it Holy Communion. Others call it the Eucharist, which means thanksgiving.

The Historic Event

You can best understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper if you understand the historical event of the Passover Feast in the Old Testament. When Jesus died on the cross, he fulfilled all the beautiful symbolism pictured by the Passover meal.

The Israelites had been slaves of the Egyptian Pharaoh for four hundred years. The new kings did not know about Joseph. No one remembered how he saved Egypt from a famine. God sent Moses to deliver his people from slavery, but Pharaoh, in spite of a number of terrible plagues, refused to let them go. (Read Exodus 7-11) As God prepared to send the last plague, killing all the firstborn, he commanded each Israelite man to kill a **perfect lamb** for his family and to put its blood on the top and both sides of the door of his home. That night the death angel of the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, including the livestock, but he "passed over" every bloodstained door. Not one Israelite died! (Think about how God has set you free from the slavery of sin and "passed over" you in judgment!) After the death plague, Pharaoh let God's people go. God commanded the people to celebrate this Passover Feast every year so that they would not forget how he delivered them from slavery. (Read Exodus 12:1-29)

The True Passover Lamb

Fast-forward over 1500 years. Jesus and his disciples gathered to celebrate the annual Passover Feast. However, this time would be different. Although he had not yet died, Jesus revealed to his disciples that **he is the real, perfect Passover Lamb!** Interestingly, John the Baptist, the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus, had already recognized Jesus as the real Passover Lamb. He had pointed to Jesus and said, “*Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29, NLT) After Jesus died, Paul confirmed to the Corinthians, “*Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us.*” (1 Corinthians 5:7b, NLT) What does this mean? Jesus explained on that special evening how he is the Passover Lamb. (1 Corinthians 11:23b-26, NLT)

On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant [agreement] between God and you, sealed by the shedding of my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it. For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.

The broken pieces of bread represent the body of Jesus that was broken on the cross. The cup of wine represents his blood poured out as he died. Before Jesus died, people had to approach God through a priest and make an animal blood sacrifice for forgiveness of sin. God had said, “*Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.*” (Hebrews 9:22b, NLT) The old Covenant or agreement pointed to the new Covenant when Jesus would be the final sacrifice – the perfect Lamb of God sacrificed on a cross. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross for the punishment of your sins, God forgave your sins once for all when you believed in him as your Lord and Savior. Now, instead of going through a priest and making an animal sacrifice for your sins, you can go directly to God in faith with confidence. In the Old Covenant, there were rules and regulations the people could never keep. Now Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, lives in you and gives you the power to obey.

Jesus is your Passover Lamb! Your Deliverer! No wonder Jesus said twice, “Do this in remembrance of me.” There are many ways you can remember him. You might remember his healing the sick, raising the dead, teaching the crowds or stilling the storm. However, Jesus said, “I want you to remember me this way.” As you take the Lord’s Supper, treasure this picture deep into your heart. You are announcing his death until he returns.

Unity in the Lord’s Supper

Paul reminded the Corinthians that celebrating the Lord’s Supper together unifies believers. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, NLT he said:

When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the benefits of the blood of Christ? And when we break the loaf of bread, aren't we sharing in the benefits of the body of Christ? And we all eat from one loaf, showing that we are one body.

The Presence of Jesus

The Lord's Supper is often called the Holy Communion because during this meal it is believed Jesus is present with his people in a special way. Disagreements have occurred about **how** Christ is present with you during communion. Some believe that by a miracle of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine actually become the blood and body of Christ. Some believe the Lord is supernaturally present with the bread and wine. Some believe communion is essentially a remembrance. (Read carefully Luke 22:7-20. What do you think? You might want to discuss this with your pastor or priest.

Danger in observing carelessly

The first believers usually met in homes and shared their meals with great joy and generosity before they celebrated the Lord's Supper. (Acts 2:46) In Corinth some people ate without sharing, causing some to go hungry. Some even got drunk! Paul warned them that anyone eating in such a careless manner *"is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord.... That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died."* (1 Corinthians 11:27b, 30, NLT) It is a warning today to guard against letting the Lord's Supper become just a casual ritual.

Celebrating in a pleasing manner

How can you celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way in which you will honor the Lord and receive a blessing? Come reverently with an attitude of worship. Anticipate his presence with you. Prepare your heart. Do you hold any bitterness, anger or unforgiveness toward anyone? Is there anyone you are not getting along with (disunity) – parents, teachers or friend? Confess any known sin. Receive forgiveness with thanksgiving.

When you walk in church and see preparations for the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, check your heart attitude. As you take the bread broken for you, with thanksgiving remember his broken body, in which he personally carried away your sins so that you can be dead to sin and live for what is right. (1 Peter 2:24) As you take the drink, thank him for pouring out his blood, which made it possible for God to forgive your sins. Offer him praise and thanksgiving for dying in your place, forgiving your sins and giving you eternal life (his life). Remember, he **is** your true Passover Lamb! Rejoice!

Attitude Check:

- What attitude changes do you need to make concerning the Lord's Supper?

Explore:

- Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Write in your journal how you plan to prepare and observe the Lord's Supper.

Talking with God:

- Thank you, Jesus, my Passover Lamb. Remind me to thank you every day of my life. I praise your name!