

## Symbolism of the Lord's Supper

- **The Practice**
  - **The Original** (Matthew 26:26 – 30, Mark 14:22 – 26, Luke 22:19 – 20)
  - **For all Christians** Paul taught the Christians of Corinth to repeat it (1 Corinthians 11:17 – 34).
- **General Meaning**
  - **Remembering Jesus.** (1 Corinthians 11:24 – 25) “Do this in remembrance of Me.” The immediate context in Luke 22:19 – 20 is to remember His sacrifice. However, dividing the history of Jesus into separate categories is very difficult. Topics to remember that are necessarily connected to His sacrifice are His character, sinlessness, love, divinity, and many other interconnecting facets.
  - **Proclamation of His Return.** (1 Corinthians 11:26)
  - **Self-Examination.** (1 Corinthians 11:28)
  - **Participation in Jesus' Sacrifice** (1 Corinthians 10:18) “Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” The Lord's Supper recalls the sacrificial meals of the Mosaic system in which the one bringing the sacrifice participated with friends and family in the presence of God in a celebration of forgiveness. In John 6:31 – 58, Jesus drew the same comparison between His own flesh and blood and that of a sacrifice. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul calls Jesus “our Passover.” Jesus' sacrifice represented several types of sacrifice.
  - **Fellowship.** (1 Corinthians 10:16) Fellowship is a connection between spirits. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ?” In the Lord's Supper, our spirits are connected with both Jesus and the church.
  - **Unity.** (1 Corinthians 10:17) “For we, though many, are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one bread.”
  - **Singleness of Purpose.** (1 Corinthians 10:21) “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.” Our participation illustrates that we have only one Lord.
- **The Symbolism of the Bread**
  - **The body of Jesus.** (1 Corinthians 11:24) The best reading is “This is My body which is for you.” The same idea is in John 6:31 – 58. In addition to the sacrifice image, Jesus compares Himself to manna that maintains the spirit rather than the body. In Hebrews 10:10 – 14, the sacrifice of the body of Jesus is compared to the Mosaic sacrifices.
  - **Unleavened Bread of Sincerity and Truth.** (1 Corinthians 5:7 – 8). One of the images of the bread is that of purity, using the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a backdrop.
  - **Remembrance of Passover, Release from Slavery, Affliction, and Haste.** (Exodus 12:27, 13:8; Deuteronomy 16:3)
- **The Symbolism of the Cup**
  - **The blood of Jesus.** (1 Corinthians 11:25) “This cup is the new covenant in My blood.” (Matthew 26:28) “...which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

- **Consuming the Blood of Jesus.** (John 6:31 – 58) The Law specifically forbade the drinking of blood (Leviticus 17:10 *et al*), as did the apostles (Acts 15:29). Jesus' image of drinking His blood represents taking the character of Jesus into ourselves.
- **Sprinkled Blood.** (Hebrews 9:11 – 10:22) Jesus' blood is compared to the blood sprinkled in the Mosaic sacrifices, by which our consciences are cleansed. The image in 9:12, Jesus sprinkles His own blood for our redemption. Also included are purification and dedication.
- **Occasions**
  - The church at Corinth enacted the Lord's Supper at their assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:20 – 34) on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2).
  - In Acts 20:7, the disciples in Troas came together to break bread.
  - In 1 Corinthians 11:25, the phrase, "...as often as you drink it," is ambiguous.
  - In Jude 12, the Lord's Supper is called a Love Feast.
  - In Acts 2:42 and 20:7, the Lord's Supper is called "breaking bread."
  - In Acts 2:46 and 20:11, the meaning is a ambiguous, but perhaps only because of our present practice of a crumb and a sip.
  - In 2 Peter 2:13 is mention of a feast.
- **The question:** Did the Lord's Supper refer to just the bread and the cup, or did it encompass other activities (teaching, singing, praying).
  - If we make the assumption that the Lord's Supper described the entire meeting instead of one of its parts, then feasts and breaking bread make more sense. The Acts 2 and Acts 20 passages would no longer have two meals but one.
  - A sacrifice, which is one of the symbolisms of the Lord's Supper, was not just the killing of an animal. It began with preparation of both sacrifice and offeror, the killing and butchering, cooking and eating, and celebrating forgiveness with family and friends in the presence of God.
  - Although fellowship has mostly to do with connecting spirits, we most often do that over food. Eating together is not just the act of consuming food in the same location, but also the conversation and activity that go with it.
  - The Passover meal, which was the backdrop of the original Lord's Supper, was not just eating lamb, matzos, and salad. It included teaching history, singing, and praying.
  - Unity is demonstrated by a communal meal in which all share, not in each one enacting his own ritual for a minute or two.
  - Proclamation through a ritual cheats the meaning of proclaim. A larger meaning of the Lord's Supper would include teaching about Jesus' return.
  - Remembering Jesus becomes more productive when accompanied by teaching. Some churches add a "Lord's Supper talk" to help fill that void.
  - Singleness of purpose works better when expressed in a group rather than as a private commitment.
  - Comments by early Christian writers are few and tend toward mysticism and authority. With that caution, consider that the Didache (c.a. 120 AD) says, "When you have eaten your fill."
  - The Lord's Supper is like a good snack, not a Passover feast ("Do you not have houses in which to eat") to sustain and edify during a long meeting. The snack is dedicated with particular emphasis on the meanings of the bread and cup.