

Symbolism of the Lord's Supper

- **Is it something in which Christians today should participate?**
 - (Matthew 26:26 – 30, Mark 14:22 – 26, Luke 22:19 – 20) The symbolism of the bread and the cup are given, but the writers did not mention if Jesus suggested that the symbolism be repeated.
 - Luke included, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” Only twelve men other than Jesus were present at the first presentation of the symbolism. No one recorded whether Jesus mentioned that this symbolism should be re-enacted by anyone other than the apostles.
 - Paul quoted the Luke line twice (1 Corinthians 11:24 – 25) and taught the Christians of Corinth to repeat it (1 Corinthians 11:26). Jude 12, Acts 2:42, Acts 20:7, and 2 Peter 2:13 mention the occasion as a generally accepted practice. Descriptions of congregational gatherings written in the second century describe the practice as central to the meeting.
 - However, we do not re-enact the Lord's Supper because the early church did. That would be poor logic. For example, the only descriptions of the Lord's Supper took place in an upper room. We do not reproduce that detail. Deciding which details to keep or omit would be arbitrary. Rather, we repeat the symbolisms because they have many things to teach us.
- **Symbolism of the Practice**
 - **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, consistency, love, divinity, and many other interconnecting facets.
 - **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.”
 - **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 draws 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 was illustrated by several types of Mosaic sacrifices.
 - **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.
 - **Proclamation of His Death** (1 Corinthians 11:26) Facets of Jesus' death: (1) redemption as in Romans 3:24 – 26 and Hebrews 9:15, (2) to cleanse our consciences as in Hebrews 9:14, and (3) to make peace between us and God as in Colossians 1:20.

- **Proclamation of His Return.** (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- **Self-Examination.** (1 Corinthians 11:28)
- **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 rituals of dedication and purification, by which our consciences are cleansed.
- **Frequency**
 - The church at Corinth enacted the Lord’s Supper at their assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:20 – 34), perhaps on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). However, a weekly observance is not specified, whereas “daily” is (Hebrews 2:13). More importantly, it is a group practice, rather than an individual practice.
 - In Acts 20:7, the disciples in Troas came together to break bread. This appears to be the Lord’s Supper. Their customary frequency is not noted.
 - Early church literature notes that a weekly repetition was customary.
 - In 1 Corinthians 11:25, the phrase, “...as often as you drink it,” is ambiguous. However, God is not in the habit of being unclear. If two conclusions can be drawn (using good reading comprehension), then both are true. Do it often, and remember these things every time.
- **What is the purpose?**
 - The importance of the Lord’s Supper is to impart reality to symbols of spiritual truths. Paul stressed the importance of understanding these symbols (1 Corinthians 11:29).
 - This practice is not a command as were the laws of sacrifice, but a means by which the faithful begin to understand the invisible realm of spirits.
 - This practice does not exist because we follow an example from the early church. That would be legalism, redefining a result as a goal. Converting the Lord’s Supper into a command separates us from Christ (Galatians 5:4). Causing someone to obey by command cannot save. We just make obedient lost people.
 - Everything we choose to do must be connected to faith, not ritual. The benefit of faith is seeing the universe from God’s point of view, from the vantage point of a spirit.