

WORSHIP

The Avenue of Communion

(Number seven in a series of ten)

THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

As we look into the New Testament we note that we are commanded to partake of the Lord's supper. Jesus instituted this in Matthew 26: 26-29, Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:14-23. Paul also refers to this in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25. We are taught that as often as we eat the Lord's supper, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Thus there is the implication in our taking of the Lord's supper, that we believe that Jesus died according to the eternal purpose of God, that He was raised from the dead, that He ascended to heaven, that He is now King, and that some day He is coming again to call all men into judgment. It is clear also, that the eating of the Lord's supper is one purpose for our coming together on the first day of the week. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" Acts 20:7. From these verses we see the direct command from the Lord, and the example of the disciples taking it on the first day of the week.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

It is a memorial service. Luke 22:19 says, "And He took bread, and He gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.'" Memorials are natural and universal. The savage and the cultured, the poor and the rich alike, all have relics and memorials. America has her Independence Day and Memorial Day. Other countries have their holidays peculiar to their natural history. Every tombstone in every cemetery is a monument to two facts; the first being that

someone lived and was loved, and the second that someone died and is lovingly remembered.

The Lord's supper is also a memorial service or a monument. Those who partake of it have their minds carried back to that awful night in Gethsemane, to a cruel mob. They remember the morning after Jesus was taken by the soldiers and how he stood before Pilate and Herod and suffered humiliation. They remember the nails that were driven into His hands and feet, and the soldier who pierced His side. And most importantly, they remember the blood which was shed for you and me.

It is a proclamation. "For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come" (I Corinthians 11:26). Every Christian who partakes is preaching a sermon in the very act of observing the Lord's supper. No sermon, however eloquent it may be, can speak as effectively as the whole congregation in joint participation, when faithfully, solemnly, and discerningly observing this sacred meal.

ELEMENTS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The food used in the institution of the Lord's supper was the same as that used in the Passover Feast. There were two elements used in the appointment of the Lord's supper. They are:

1. The Bread (Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19). This was "unleavened bread" (Exodus 12:15,13:6,7). Unleavened bread was bread without any yeast or leavening agent. Jesus said, "This is my body." Surely we cannot think of any element that would better picture to us the purity of the body of the Son of God on the cross. Bread is grain that has been harvested, crushed, and baked. The life has been taken from it.
2. The Cup (Matthew 26:27, Mark 14:23, Luke 22:20). Jesus gave a clear definition of the cup when He called it "the fruit of the vine" (Mark 14:25), and

says, "this is my blood" (Mark 14:24). In as much as Christ is "the vine" and His disciples are "the branches" (John 15:5), certainly we cannot think of any other element that would better picture to us the blood of Christ. When Jesus said, "This is my body," and "This is my blood" He was using symbolic language. Jesus also said, "I am the Door" (John 10:9), and "I am the Way" (John 14:6). Could He have meant that He was a literal door or way? Therefore, in the same manner He referred to the unleavened bread and to the fruit of the vine only as a representation of His body and His blood. They are to us, as Christians, His body and His blood by faith.

WHO SHALL PARTAKE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER?

There is no Biblical authorization for any to observe the Lord's supper except those who are in the Lord's body, His Church, the Kingdom of God. Participation, therefore, is not for those who reject the body and blood of the Lord, those who think so little of the gospel as to reject the commands. Those who think nothing of Calvary, or minimize the atoning power of the blood of Christ and belittle the value of the church which our Lord bought with His precious blood are not in a position to partake of the bread which represents His body or the fruit of the vine which represents His blood. Let us look carefully at Acts 2:42. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." This is a clear reference to the Lord's supper. Who observed it? Those who had been baptized and were added to the church; those who were obedient to the word of God. The disciples at Troas met (Acts 20:7), to break bread. They formed the Lord's church in that city. Paul had much to say regarding the Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. As the Church of Christ and the

Kingdom of God at Corinth, they were commanded to eat the Lord's supper.

“IN REMEMBRANCE”

In leading the Corinthians to see the proper meaning and right observance of the supper, Paul reminded them that Jesus, in the instituting of it, told the disciples, "this do in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24,25). The expression "in remembrance of me," refers to "a calling to mind, a causing to remember." We are therefore shown those areas to which our minds must go if we are to properly partake. When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, there was significance in His stating, "this is my body" and "this is my blood of the New Testament, which was shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:26-28). He then ascended to the Father prior to the beginning of the kingdom, but when the saints assembled and partook of the supper, the significance of the emblems in the supper gave them "cause to remember."

DISCERNING THE BODY

As Paul discussed the Lord's supper, he made it plain that the Corinthian brethren had failed to worship properly, in that they had failed to discern the body. To "discern" is to "separate, make a distinction." In this case they failed to approach worship with a proper mind (1 Corinthians 10:16), and they partook of the elements of the supper without regard to the Lord, His death, and the benefits belonging to them because of the sacrifice. Beyond just the physical acts of "communion" (1 Corinthians 10:16), this will also involve motive, intent, mind, will, heart, and intellect.

A WORTHY MANNER

Some have refrained from participating in the communion service because of a sense of guilt or recognition of their own imperfections and have used 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 for justification. What exactly did Paul have in mind when he wrote, "Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread

and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord"?

To eat or drink unworthily is basically to come to the Lord's table in a careless, irreverent spirit, without intention or desire to commemorate the death of Christ or the sacrifice for our sins. The way in which the Corinthians ate unworthily was that they treated the Lord's table as though it were their own, making no distinction between the Lord's supper and an ordinary meal, coming together to satisfy their hunger and not to partake of the body and blood of Christ. They also refused to commune with their poorer brothers.

Failure to observe the Lord's supper in a worthy manner results in our becoming guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Paul declares we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes, but when we partake in the supper in an unworthy manner, we proclaim the death of Jesus unworthy and scorn the sacrifice of Jesus. Therefore, each one is to prove himself, examine himself, and arrive at the true knowledge of his own spiritual state of mind as he partakes of the supper.

CONCLUSION

Every Lord's day, when Christians partake of communion, they are teaching a powerful lesson of God's love. They are remembering when Jesus was crucified. This is no mere religious ritual designed to take up time. This is a communion; a sharing in the spiritual benefits and privileges provided by the body and blood of a sinless and perfect Savior. ■

▶ **FREE BIBLE STUDY**
▶ Additional copies of this tract
▶ A list of available tracts
contact the
39th Street Church of Christ
15331 East 39th Street
Independence, MO 64055-4240 USA

WORSHIP

The Avenue of Communion

(Number seven in a series of ten)

by
Bill Goring

© 1995



International Bible Studies
Tract Series