

Worship Ordinance

1 Corinthians 11:23-27

Preface

Illus: The first church where I served as Pastor was Leaf Baptist Church in Leaf, Mississippi. That church had some strange “traditions.” Every other Sunday the church was Leaf Baptist Church and on the alternate Sunday it was Leaf Methodist Church. I was a college student and served as Pastor every other Sunday.

This had been the tradition of the church for many years. When I began to inquire about why things were done that way, I discovered that it stemmed from the most powerful family in the church. The man was Baptist and the lady in the house was Methodist. This was something they had desired and were determined to maintain at the expense of the congregation.

There are many things in life that we do and seldom stop to question the real reason behind them. The same can be said for the church. Sometimes it is healthy to question why “we’ve always done it that way.”

Today we will be observing the Lord’s Supper. I would like for us to take a moment and look at the real meaning of this age old practice observed by most Christian denominations.

Scripture

²³For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” ²⁵In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. ²⁷Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 1 Cor. 11:23-27

Introduction

So what’s the Lord’s Supper really about?

The practice of the Lord’s Supper is based on the acts of Christ as recorded in Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 22:18 and John 6. Perhaps it is the extensive and consistent attention given in all four gospels that adds to the importance of the Lord’s Supper. Today we read Paul’s more explanatory version as found in his first letter to the Corinthians.

The concept of the Lord’s Supper was first introduced by our Lord at His final meal before His arrest and crucifixion. Christ was in Jerusalem during the Passover celebration meal in which the Israelites commemorated their deliverance from Egypt.

Christ took the opportunity to introduce a new memorial in view of a greater deliverance about to be accomplished. This new passover would provide deliverance to all men and women who would receive this great gift from God.

Our Lord himself handed us this new ordinance or “worship procedure” if you will, for remembering the great sacrifice of His body and blood for the sins of mankind.

But today, thousands of years later we still practice what we call the Lord’s Supper. Why? What meaning and what purpose does it accomplish in our modern worship experience? I believe this question can best be answered by reflecting on the three different terms that refer to this practice.

1. Giving Thanks - Eucharist

The term Eucharist comes from the Greek word “eucharisteo” which means to “give thanks.”

There are several very strong statements surrounding the instructions of the Lord’s Supper. Our Lord had a way of taking simple things and using them to convey powerful spiritual messages. We might call them ‘object lessons’ in our day but somehow that description falls well short of His technique. He did exactly this with the bread and wine. He presented them in such a way that they were His body and His blood being given for you and me. Such simple objects to represent the suffering of the Son of God.

The bread and wine are more than just an object lesson. The bread and wine represent the body of Christ which is the essence of God’s grace. It is the thrust of His love and our existence as Christians. For without the body and blood of the Son of God, there would be no salvation!

In Matthew, He says, “For this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.” When we receive the gift of His new covenant, we realize just how great the forgiveness is. We must surely give thanks.

Giving thanks to God is at the very foundation of worship. How can we even begin to worship without first giving thanks for what He has done for us?

Illus: I am reminded of a true story. During the war in Vietnam, a young West Point graduate was sent over to lead a group of new recruits into battle. He did his job well, trying his best to keep his group from ambush and death. But one night when they had been under attack, he was unable to get one of his men to safety.

The soldier left behind had been severely wounded. From the trenches, the young lieutenant and his men could hear their fellow soldier in his pain. Eventually, the young lieutenant crawled out of hiding toward the dying man. He got him to safety but was killed before he could reach safety himself.

After the rescued man returned to the States, the lieutenant’s parents heard he was in their vicinity. Wanting to know this young man whose life was spared at such a great cost to them, they invited him to dinner. When the honored guest arrived, he was obviously drunk. He was rowdy and obnoxious. He told off-color jokes and showed no gratitude for the sacrifice of the man

who died to save him. The grieving parents did their best to make the man’s visit worthwhile, but their efforts went unrewarded.

When their guest finally left, as the dad closed the door behind him, the mother collapsed in tears and cried, “To think that our precious son had to die for somebody like that.”

Christ died for you and me. May we always have hearts full of gratitude for God’s gift of grace.

2. Becoming One - Communion

In His prayer in the Garden, Christ himself prayed for unity among believers (John 17). He prayed that we would be one with Him and the Father and that we might be one with one another.

Over and over we are told in the scriptures to love one another. At communion there is no room for hard feelings toward others. At communion, there is no separation or hierarchy. We are all one in Christ.

Communion is not the exclusive property of any Christian denomination. When we partake of communion, we are reminded of our obligation to keep the “unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3). We are reminded that we are all members of one body.

Illus: There is an old story about the Duke of Wellington who remained to take communion at his parish church. A very poor old man went up to the opposite aisle, reaching the Communion table and knelt down close to the side of the Duke. Immediately, tension and commotion interrupted the silence in the church. Someone came and touched the poor man on the shoulder, and whispered to him to move farther away, or to rise and wait until the Duke had received the bread and the wine.

But, the eagle eye and quick ear of the great commander caught the meaning of that touch and whisper. He clasped the old man’s hand and held him to prevent his rising; and in a reverential but distinct undertone, the Duke said, “Do not move; we are equal at this table.”

Communion is a place where we unite and build-up our love and unity.

3. Following His Command – The Lord’s Supper

In this case Christ uses the objects of the bread and wine to convey a powerful concept just as He did many other times in His teaching. However, here He takes it a step further and says, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Christ tells us to make this a practice and to do it in His remembrance.

Our Lord knows that we need to be reminded of His sacrifice for us and so He commands us to partake of His Supper.

It is not our place to question His command. It is our place to be obedient. Every good parent knows there are times when our children question our instructions without understanding their importance. We too must be obedient to our Lord.

We must be sincere, pure of heart and obedient.

Ordinance

Join with me as we express our thanks, our unity and do as we are commanded. Let us partake of His body and blood in spirit and truly worship. Listen with your spirit and may God’s Holy Spirit speak to you today.

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” ²⁷ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the^b covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26:26-28 NIV

Invitation

²⁷ Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

You have just participated in an act of worship that represents the most important convenient available to any of us.

Was it a real representation of your relationship with Christ?

Have you made Him Lord of your life?