

6 Churches Remember the Lord's Death

During the seventeenth century in Scotland the Covenanters, an evangelical group, faced severe persecution. They had to meet secretly.

One evening a Scottish girl was on her way to a believers' meeting. Suddenly some enemies sprang into her path. Seizing her roughly, they asked where she was going. In a flash of inspiration she bravely replied, "I'm on my way to a supper to hear my Elder Brother's will and testament read."

"That sounds harmless enough," the leader of the men replied, and let her go. Joyfully the girl hurried on to the secret meeting to partake of holy communion.

The Scottish girl referred to the Lord's table as being the supper to which she was going. Jesus was her Elder Brother. The will to be read was the new covenant the Lord made in effect by His death on the Cross.

The Plan

- A. The Lord's Table
- B. The Bread and the Cup
- C. Forms and Purposes of Holy Communion

The Goals

1. Explain the significance of the Lord's table.
2. State the importance of the emblems of communion.
3. State the purposes of the Lord's Supper or holy communion.

A. THE LORD'S TABLE

Goal 1. Explain the significance of the Lord's table.

"Mary looks radiant," Timothy beams as she takes her place beside him. She and several others have just been baptized in water. A communion service is about to begin, and she will participate for the first time.

Mary had already received teaching on the meaning of the Lord's Supper. So she joins in the singing and worship. Later, as she hears the pastor read the words of Jesus, "'This is my body given for you'" (Luke 22:19), tears fill her eyes. She understands so much better now what it means to worship. Instead of looking around as the emblem of bread is passed, she praises the Lord in her heart. The pastor continues, "'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you'" (Luke 22:20).

The believers take communion with reverence. How wonderful that the Lord should offer himself for the sins of the world! Mary feels the nearness of the Lord and hungers for more of God's Spirit.

"We need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit," she whispers to Timothy. He squeezes her hand in agreement.

In Paris, France, stands a great monument, the magnificent Arch of Triumph. Beneath the huge arch in a tomb lies “The Unknown Soldier,” representing all the soldiers who have died in battle. Every evening members of a patriotic group light a “flame of remembrance,” expressing the gratitude of a nation for its men who sacrificed their lives for their country.

Believers, too, have a memorial. The Lord’s Table, or holy communion, reminds us of the suffering and death that Jesus endured for us. The broken bread and the cup represent His body that was crucified and His blood shed for all the sin of humanity. We partake of the bread and cup of the Lord’s table to remind us of this great sacrifice of Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Taking part in holy communion symbolizes the suffering and death of Jesus. In remembering, however, we must not just sympathize with His sufferings. We should think of and accept His victory and finished work. Christ’s death was not in vain. He fulfilled the work the Father sent Him to do that He might claim a people for His own.

In addition, we must remember that the Lord’s table is a memorial. It speaks to us of how Christ “appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). The Lord’s table is not an altar upon which Christ is to be sacrificed again! When we observe the Lord’s death, we thank Him for His sacrifice that is complete. We proclaim His death until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Application

- 1** Circle the letter in front of each correct completion to the sentence. Observing the Lord’s Supper is significant because it
- a)** reminds us of Jesus and His sacrifice for us.
 - b)** reminds us of His victory over sin.
 - c)** helps us remember that He still reigns.

- 2** Circle the letter in front of each true statement.
- a)** The Lord's Supper is an altar of sacrifice for us.
 - b)** Jesus' death brought a new covenant into effect, and now we are saved by faith.
 - c)** Communion is a continuing observance until Jesus comes again.
 - d)** Everyone should take part in the Lord's Supper, even if he or she does not know what it means.
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B. THE BREAD AND THE CUP

Goal 2. State the importance of the emblems of communion.

The Bread

At the Passover supper that Jesus ate with His disciples He took a piece of bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave His disciples saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

Earlier in His ministry Jesus had spoken of himself as the "bread from heaven" and the "bread of life" (John 6:32, 35). He was the bread that God gave, the One who came from heaven and gave His life to the world. John writes of Jesus: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

That Jesus meant all this to be in a spiritual sense is clear from the reading of John 6:25–58. Some of His listeners thought the Lord meant His actual physical flesh, and they argued about it. However, one must interpret this language in the same way as one interprets the words, "I am the gate for the sheep" (John 10:7). Jesus is not a literal gate; the gate typifies Him and His work. Certain features of a gate, such as its strength and protection, represent His character and ministry.

When we eat of bread at the Lord's table, we in faith receive the life of Jesus. Just as literal bread strengthens our physical bodies, so His life gives us spiritual strength.

The Cup

After the supper Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). The fruit of the vine represents His shed blood; the cup also represents the new covenant sealed with His blood that was poured out for us (Luke 22:20).

Later that night, after the supper and His talk with the disciples, the Lord Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. There, in a place called Gethsemane, He knelt alone and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). The "cup" He drank from represents the sins of the world. This burden was far more terrible than the physical pain that He bore. His anguish was so great that His sweat fell like drops of blood to the ground.

The cup of suffering and sin that Jesus drank has become the cup of salvation for us. May we always be full of gratitude to Him who loved us and gave His life for us.

Application

- 3** Jesus broke the bread and said that it was His
He later gave the fruit of the vine, which typifies His
- 4** The "cup" has a twofold meaning. Circle the letter in front of each correct definition.
- a)** The new covenant sealed with Jesus' blood
 - b)** The suffering Jesus went through for us
 - c)** Forgiveness of sin if we take communion

5 For the descriptions on the left write the number which represents the symbol or object described (right column).

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|----------------------------------|-------------|
| ... a Guards and protects | 1) Bread |
| ... b Leads | 2) Vine |
| ... c Disperses darkness | 3) Light |
| ... d Supports | 4) Lamb |
| ... e Quenches thirst | 5) Water |
| ... f A sacrifice | 6) Shepherd |
| ... g Spiritual life | 7) Door |

C. FORMS AND PURPOSES OF HOLY COMMUNION

Goal 3. State the purposes of the Lord's Supper or holy communion.

A variety of church practices exist with respect to the Lord's Supper. For the bread some groups use only unleavened bread. This follows the pattern of the Passover bread made without yeast or leaven. Others prefer that the bread be in one piece, either a loaf or a wafer to be broken by the leader into small pieces. Large churches may find individual-size wafers more practical.

Some churches use one or two large cups that are shared by all the participants. In this case the cup is wiped with a cloth after each person takes a sip. Other congregations make use of small individual cups. The drink is usually grape juice, but may be wine or wine mixed with water. In parts of the world where grape juice is not obtainable, juices of other fruits are substituted.

Some churches observe the Lord's Supper every Sunday as part of the morning worship. Others serve communion

the first Sunday of every month. Rural churches might have communion only once in several months—whenever a minister is able to come for a service. The Scripture says “whenever” (1 Corinthians 11:25–26), which leaves it up to the local churches to decide what is best for them.

Though some churches practice “closed communion” (restricting it to their own members), most Pentecostal churches have “open communion.” This means that all who are born-again believers are invited to participate.

Application

6 Reflect on how communion is practiced at your church. List the characteristics mentioned above that apply.

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Its Purposes

While the forms for observing holy communion vary from place to place, its purposes should be the same. They are as follows:

1. To remind us of Jesus Christ and what He did. It is a memorial feast to honor, worship, and thank Him. The Holy Spirit wants to make Christ’s sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension meaningful and real to each person.
2. To draw believers together in love and unity through fellowship with Jesus Christ. John, the apostle of love, writes: “If we walk in the light, as he [Jesus] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).
3. To point believers to the glorious hope of the future, when Christ will set up His kingdom. At the table Jesus said, “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s

kingdom” (Matthew 26:29). And Paul exhorts us at the communion table to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

4. To provide healing and restoration. The Bible teaches that each one must examine himself or herself first before eating the bread and drinking from the cup (1 Corinthians 11:28). We are to come in humility and dependence on Him. In faith we can draw from His life and strength, even for our physical bodies.

This last point is illustrated by the following story. Au-ma was a Chinese tribeswoman who had heard the gospel from missionaries. She in turn became a “Bible woman” ministering to her own people. One day while partaking of the Lord’s Supper, Au-ma felt led of the Holy Spirit to take some of the bread and juice to a poor outcast leper woman who desperately needed help. She hurried up the mountain path to the leper’s home to pray for her. Then, with a heart full of faith and love, she shared the symbols of the Lord’s body and blood. As the leper received these emblems, Jesus’ power came upon her and she was completely healed!

Application

- 7** Circle the letter in front of each true statement.
- a)** “Open” communion means that only the members of the church may partake.
 - b)** Communion is nothing but a memorial.
 - c)** The Bible does not say how often communion should be taken.
 - d)** Forms of serving communion may vary, but the purpose remains the same.
- 8** Which are purposes for celebrating the Lord’s Supper?
- a)** To remind us of the Lord’s Second Coming
 - b)** To remember the death of Christ for our sins
 - c)** To create a beautiful service
 - d)** To provide for healing
 - e)** To bring believers together in love

9 Tell what partaking of the Lord's Supper has meant to you.

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Check Your Answers

- 1** **a)** reminds us of Jesus and His sacrifice for us.
b) reminds us of His victory over sin.
c) helps us remember that He still reigns.
- 6** Your answer.
- 2** Statements **b)** and **c)** are true.
- 7** Statements **c)** and **d)** are true.
- 3** body; blood
- 8** **a)** To remind us of the Lord's Second Coming
b) To remember the death of Christ for our sins
d) To provide for healing
e) To bring believers together in love
- 4** **a)** The new covenant sealed with Jesus' blood.
b) The suffering Jesus went through for us.
- 9** Your own words. (Possible response: It has helped me not to take for granted what the Lord has done for me. It gives me new hope and courage as well.)
- 5** **a** 7) Door
b 6) Shepherd
c 3) Light
d 2) Vine
e 5) Water
f 4) Lamb
g 1) Bread