

Basic Bible Doctrine Study Series – Session 4

Communion – The Lord’s Supper

As we discussed in our study on baptism, Baptists usually use the term “ordinance” rather than “sacrament” when referring to either baptism and Communion or the Lord’s Supper. Even if the term “sacrament” is used, it is never intended to imply that either of these two is necessary for a person to be saved. We consistently declare that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are symbols and are not necessary for salvation but they are nonetheless a significant part of our practice and worship.

The Different Views

1. **Transubstantiation** – This view was adopted as doctrine of the Catholic Church in 1059. The elements of communion...the bread and wine...are consecrated by the priest and literally change to the body and blood of Christ. Christ is truly and substantially present in the elements of the Lord’s Supper.

"Christ...commanded that his bloody sacrifice on the Cross should be daily renewed by an unbloody sacrifice of his body and blood in the Mass under the simple elements of bread and wine." (The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 10, Pg. 13, Article: "Mass, Sacrifice of")

"In the celebration of the Holy Mass, the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. It is called transubstantiation, for in the Sacrament of the Eucharist the substance of bread and wine do not remain, but the entire substance of bread is changed into the body of Christ, and the entire substance of wine is changed into his blood, the species or outward semblance of bread and wine alone remaining." (The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, pg. 277, Article: "Consecration")

The Catholic Church teaches that communion is a LITERAL EATING AND DRINKING OF THE LITERAL FLESH AND BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST.

2. **Consubstantiation** – This view was founded by Martin Luther and is still held by the Lutheran Church today. The elements of communion do not change into the presence of Christ but he is actually present “in, with and under” the elements. While Martin Luther rejected any change in the substance of the elements he still believed that Christ’s body was present in the Lord’s Supper and that His body is received by all who partake. He made this statement, “On this we take our stand, and we also believe and teach that in the Supper we eat and take to ourselves Christ’s body truly and physically.” He also taught that the benefits of the Lord’s Supper were present to the individual regardless of whether or not they had faith.
3. **Reformed** – This view was founded by John Calvin and is held by the Presbyterian Church. Christ is not present literally in the elements, but he is spiritually present. Those who receive the elements with faith can receive the actual body and blood of Christ through the power of

the Holy Spirit which works through the sacrament. For Presbyterians this divinely initiated meal is one of two sacraments of the church, instituted by God and commended by Christ. We are following in the tradition of the early church when we affirm three primal material elements of life--water, bread and wine--as the primary symbols of offering life to God. Through the sacraments God seals believers in redemption, God renews our identity as God marks us for service.

Calvin explained it this way, ""The rule which the pious ought always to observe is, whenever they see the symbols instituted by the Lord, to think and feel surely persuaded that the truth of the thing signified is also present. For why does the Lord put the symbol of his body into your hands, but just to assure you that you truly partake of him? If this is true let us feel as much assured that the visible sign is given us in seal of an invisible gift as that his body itself is given to us."

4. **Memorial** – This view is held by Baptists as well as many other groups. There is a denial of any form of physical presence of Christ in the elements of communion. The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ's suffering and a reminder of His power to overcome sin and death. Participants are reminded of the benefits of redemption and salvation.

The Baptist Faith and Message states, "The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming."

This, of course, is our view and where we will spend the remainder of our study time.

The Baptist View

Because the Lord's Supper is symbolic, using the correct elements in the Lord's Supper with a biblical understanding of them is important. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at his last meal with his disciples as part of the Jewish Passover. Unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine were part of the meal. Jesus indicated that the bread was symbolic of his body and the fruit of the vine symbolic of his blood. The unleavened bread symbolizes the purity of Christ, for he was without sin (Hebrews 4:15) and thus his body was an unblemished sacrifice for our sins. The juice from crushed grapes symbolizes the blood that Christ shed for us.

Let's take a look and try to understand the meaning of communion by comparing it to its Old Testament background. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Lord's Supper was instituted at the time of the Passover. The Passover was a celebration of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. A lamb was killed and the blood placed on the doorpost marking them to be passed over when God brought judgment to Egypt (Exodus 12:13). Jesus is our Passover Lamb. John 1:29 tells us, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the

world!" The fact that Jesus chose to die during the Passover is significant. His blood is a guarantee to us that we will escape the judgment of God and the Lord's Supper is a continual reminder of that fact.

There is a link between Christ's shed blood and our salvation covenant. The shedding of blood is essential and necessary for atonement. According to Hebrews 9:22, "...the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." We are brought into a right relationship with God through the substitutionary shed blood of Jesus. The blood of Christ establishes and seals our salvation covenant. Matthew 26:28, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Forgiveness once and for all flows from His death and the Lord's Supper is a continual reminder of the covenant He made with us.

Communion is an act of worship and a call to remembrance. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a special time of thanksgiving for the church. This is a great reason to observe it frequently. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." When we partake in the Lord's Supper we are reminded of God's rich mercy in our salvation...reminded of the infinite love of our Savior in giving Himself for us. In John 15:13 He said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

The Lord's Supper is a communion with our fellow believers and is to be shared by Christians...members of the body of Christ. By partaking in communion together as a church, we are reminded that we are members of one body and should be united together.

Romans 12:5 "So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

1 Corinthians 12:12 "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ."

The Lord's Supper is also a continual reminder that He is coming again. 1 Corinthians 11:26, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." In Matthew 26:29 Jesus said this, "I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Communion offers us the opportunity to not only look back at what He did for us at Calvary but also the opportunity to look forward to His glorious return. The Lord's Supper is a perpetual testimony to us. Jesus died for our sins, was raised from the dead and is now able to sustain His people until He returns.

Few Christians seriously prepare themselves for communion. The Bible makes it clear that adequate preparation is needed before partaking in the Lord's Supper. Paul had to address this with the church in Corinth. He wrote this in 1 Corinthians 11:27-31, "So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment."

So how should we prepare ourselves?

1. By realizing the seriousness of communion. Just like baptism, communion is a very serious observance in the life of a Christian and should not be taken lightly.
2. By considering the severity of our sin. Jesus suffered and died because of our sin.
3. By examining ourselves for unconfessed sin. Sin always has a negative effect upon Christians. It is to this group that Paul referred to as being unworthy to partake of the Lord's Supper. The greatest preparation we can make is to confess our sin and repent of it.