

The Lord's Supper

SUMMARY:

Introduction:

- The Lord's Supper (or "communion") has roots in the Jewish Passover celebration
- Just as Passover celebrated Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt, so the Lord's Supper commemorates the event that frees us from our sin: Jesus' death on the cross

Taking it seriously:

- Our attitude should be reverent.
- We are to examine ourselves before participating.

How often?

- The Bible does not specifically instruct us how often to participate in Communion.
- It is clear that we should partake regularly.
- Jesus' example was to share Passover with his 12 disciples.
- At SCCC, we share a meal and communion once a month.

Should children participate?

- Children should participate if they express love for Jesus and a desire to remember Him.
- Home Fellowship Groups will respect each family's decision.

Do we need to receive communion from "clergy?"

- No. There is no biblical precedent for requiring this.

What does communion mean?

- When we take communion, we remember our Lord Jesus' suffering for us
- The bread represents Christ's body crucified in our place.
- The cup represents Christ's blood which He shed for us.
- All Christians are invited to celebrate

Passover Roots

Jesus Himself introduced us to the Lord's Supper (also referred to as "communion" and the "Eucharist") the evening He observed Passover with His disciples just before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:17-30). Passover is a memorial which has been observed yearly by the Jewish people in gratitude to God for delivering them from four hundred years of Egyptian slavery. They eat lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs in remembrance of what God did for them (Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8). Although Israel had been freed from the physical bondage of slavery, they (as well as the Gentiles) needed to be delivered from their spiritual bondage of sin. As Jesus and his disciples were eating Passover, our Lord was preparing them for the ultimate and last Lamb that would ever have to be slain for sin...Himself! John the

Baptist declared *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29). Indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us and became our sin on the cross (1 Corinthians 5:7, 2 Corinthians 5:21). As a result of Christ giving His body and blood for our sin, *"...whosoever will call upon His name will be saved"* (Romans 10:13). Thank you, Lord!

The Jewish people have remembered and thanked God for freeing them from slavery through their regular observance of Passover. Following their example, all Christians should remember and thank Christ for freeing them from their spiritual bondage by regularly observing the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a memorial that constantly reminds the Christian of the sacrifice that Christ made in order for us to obtain eternal life and become part of His universal body, the church (1 Corinthians 10:17). Although Passover is observed once a year, the New Testament and historical evidence indicate that the early church practiced the Lord's Supper more often. The believers would gather to praise God, hear the Apostle's teaching (God's Word), pray, fellowship and share together in a meal called an agape (love) feast (Acts 2:40-47, Jude:12). As these believers fellowshiped together around a meal, they often remembered the Lord's sacrifice by receiving the bread and the cup, referred to as the Lord's Supper. These meals taken together developed community among them, enhancing their unity and experience in Christ. They participated in being the church instead of just going to church! May the church be the same today!

Taking it seriously

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, the Apostle Paul corrects the church at Corinth for their conduct at the Lord's Supper. They were being divisive and greedy, showing favoritism, and some were even getting drunk. In general, they were not taking the Lord's Supper seriously. Wow! Can the church today learn anything from this Corinthian church? They suffered the consequences of their sin and we must also judge ourselves in these areas so as not to suffer similar consequences to those outlined in 1 Corinthians 11:27-34. We are to examine ourselves, confess our sin, and come to the Lord's Supper truly discerning (or giving distinction to) our Lord's body in a worthy manner. We are not to come to communion casually or carelessly. Our Lord took our sin problem seriously by becoming our sin in order to set us free from its penalty. He has asked us to be serious about remembering His sacrifice, and also about how we remember Him. Our Lord's desire is that His church would regularly remember what He did for us and take communion with a pure and thankful heart. Is there a conviction and desire in your heart to observe this memorial for our Lord? It seems that much of the church has become indifferent to this memorial and observes communion only when it is convenient. In most churches, when a communion service is offered, only a small fraction of the church will come to partake in it. This must disappoint our Lord! Every Christian should, with conviction and desire, look forward to partaking in communion. It is so easy to be occupied with the cares, riches, and pleasures of life and forget what Christ has done for us. We all have that temptation! That is why Christians need to commit to a consistent time to remember Him (1 Corinthians 11:25). The word "remember" means "to recall to mind," and the word often means "frequent." So, we are to "frequently recall to mind" what Christ has done for us.

Communion: how often?

Even though our Lord was not specific in directing how often we should partake in communion, it seems obvious that the more we remember Him in this way, the more we will stay focused on the things of the Lord and not on earthly distractions. It honors Him, yet it benefits us! We have freedom as to the frequency (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.) but we do not have freedom as to the memorial itself. Jesus said "...Do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19) This is a command from our Lord, not a suggestion! Participating in communion is not an option for Christians. To never participate is disobedience and sin. We should partake on a regular basis to be faithful to the desire of our Lord.

As we study this subject, we may begin to realize that many in the church have fallen short in regularly observing this memorial unto our Lord. Let us not feel condemned, but allow the Holy Spirit to convict us. Godly sorrow will then lead us to regular participation in the Lord's Supper.

As elders, we are convicted to lead our corporate body in observing the Lord's Supper at least monthly. We have adopted the New Testament pattern of having a time of fellowship, food and remembrance of Christ. Our Home Fellowships are small groups of believers who gather to celebrate their relationship with Christ and each other, and to be equipped to impact our world for Him. The smaller group allows true fellowship and greater intimacy "one with another" and also helps us observe communion in a meaningful and contemplative way that honors God.

The New Testament example

Our Lord set the small group example for us by inviting His twelve disciples to eat with Him in the upper room as they observed Passover together in an intimate environment. As they were eating Passover together that evening, Jesus introduced to them, and to us, what we now refer to as the Lord's Supper. Jesus ministered and associated with the masses, yet He lived His life with the twelve. The early church met in homes and we believe that meeting in our homes creates an intimate environment where believers can gather to remember Him and minister to each other.

At Steele Creek Church

The first Sunday of each month at Steele Creek Church of Charlotte has been set aside as a day that we, as Christians, come together in the morning to celebrate His name and partake of His Word. In the afternoon, with our home fellowship groups, we share food, fellowship and the Lord's Supper. We are to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes for His church (1 Corinthians 11:26). This will honor our Lord and will be an encouragement to us as His body. It will also testify to the world of what Christ has done for us and that we are anticipating His return.

Should children participate?

Many parents ask “Should children participate in the Lord’s Supper with us?” Some may remember hearing as children, “No, you’re not spiritually ready yet” when it came to receiving the bread and the cup. As a result, we may have discouraged our children from participating for the same reason. Is this valid? When God commanded the Israelites to observe the Passover memorial, the men were to pick out and take lambs according to the family size (Exodus 12:4, 21). This indicates to us that the whole family, including children, were going to eat the Passover together. When the children asked their parents about the meaning of Passover, the parents were to describe how God delivered them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:26-28). As a matter of fact, the very reason for the memorial itself was to teach and remind future generations of what God did for them.

Should this Old Testament example be followed by the church today? We believe the early church did follow this pattern. They came together regularly to remember Christ’s death for them and their deliverance from the slavery of sin by having a meal together and observing the Lord’s Supper. Where were the children and what were they doing during this time? We would submit that they were right there with their parents and friends participating in the love feasts and the Lord’s Supper, just as Jewish children did during Passover. When we observe the Lord’s Supper today, we can use this opportunity to teach and declare what Christ did for us on the cross. What an opportunity for us to model and lead our children in understanding that an intimate relationship with God has been made available through the sacrifice of Christ. If a child expresses love for Jesus and desires to participate in the Lord’s Supper, then we would encourage them to participate. If they don’t show an interest, we should not force their participation, but simply model Jesus to them. As children grow, and particularly as they reach the teen years, we must help them to understand what communion represents and what it means for believers to remember the Lord in a worthy manner. They will eventually need make an individual decision to place their faith in Christ and to participate in communion, or not.

We, as Christian parents, are to influence our children in a holy manner which will be accomplished as we allow Christ to live His life through us. This is our privilege and responsibility, not only with our biological children but to other children who have very little, if any, Godly influence at home. Our children’s participation with us in the Lord’s Supper does not make them Christians but it does influence them in a holy manner (1 Corinthians 7:14). Every child will have to accept or reject the faith (or lack of faith) of their parents when they reach the age of accountability. That is why it is important to lay a solid foundation for them. Therefore, because of the example of the Jewish children’s participation in Passover, Jesus’ love for children, and our privilege and responsibility to influence our children in a holy manner, we believe it is appropriate to allow our children to participate in the Lord’s Supper with us.

We understand that this subject is not specifically addressed in the Bible. If a family is convicted that their children should not participate in the Lord’s Supper, every Home Fellowship group will respect that decision. It is not to be made a matter of fellowship, but left to the discretion of individual families. (See paper on: “Our Children, Their Salvation and Our Responsibility”)

Must we receive communion from “clergy?”

Another common question is “Should we only receive communion from the lead pastor, staff, or elders?” The answer is NO. Traditionalism has led to that assumption, however no scripture indicates to us that Christians “receive” communion “from clergy”. The only qualifications that we see in scripture for giving and receiving communion is a life that has been examined for sin, a repentant heart, and a desire to honor our Lord’s body in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 11: 27,28). The early church simply gathered together to honor our Lord and to “proclaim His death until He returns” by participating in the Lord’s Supper. They were living in anticipation of our Lord’s return, often greeting each other with the term “maranatha”, which means “our Lord come”. They gathered often to remember and thank our Lord for taking away the penalty of their sin, giving them the gift of righteousness and the hope of heaven (2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 5:17). We encourage this practice today through our Home Fellowships and in our own individual families as well. Let us remember and thank Him..... and do it often!

We want to be cautious about Satan's schemes. He does not want us to partake of the Lord's Supper and will do anything he can to distract or discourage us. Let us submit ourselves to the Lord and resist the schemes of the devil (James 4:7). Let us put the first Sunday of the month on our calendars for Home Fellowship communion and keep it as a priority in our lives. We realize that for various reasons that some groups may not be able to meet every first Sunday and that is fine. We simply encourage the group to meet some time during that week, if at all possible. The goal is to be intentional, not legalistic. Of course, we should also remember Him often in our individual families.

The specific times and locations of the Lord's Supper will vary, so please check with your home fellowship leader or elder. We will also observe the Lord's Supper corporately during the year, but this will primarily take place in our Home Fellowship groups. This will enhance intimacy between us as a church and our Lord.

What does communion mean?

When we take communion, we are not only to remember our Lord Jesus’ suffering for us, but also what He has accomplished for us through the New Covenant of Grace, meeting for us the requirements of the Old Covenant of Law. He has become our righteousness and our life. It is important to understand what the bread and cup mean as we partake of them.

The bread represents Christ's body crucified in our place. It also reminds us that we were crucified with Him, and been given a new identity in Him. Our old sin nature has been put to death, and we have been raised up with a new nature which is righteous and complete in Him (Rom 5:17-6:14).

The cup represents Christ's blood which He shed for us. The Bible is very clear that blood must be shed as a sacrifice for sin to be forgiven (Heb 9:22). As we drink, we are to remember that it is only through the sacrifice of Christ that we have been forgiven for all our sins, both past and future.

When we receive the bread and cup, we do so by taking them into our body. Let this remind us that Christ is our life, living in us, and desiring to live His life through us. Galatians 2:20 says “I

have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

When we gather to partake of these two elements in a proper manner, we remember the death of the one who became the bridge between God and man. Those who have received this great salvation through Christ alone have been invited to the Lord's Supper. Why would we not want to participate and honor Him in this special manner? To God be the glory...Let us remember Him!