

*ECCLESIOLOGY*  
**THE VISIBLE CHURCH**  
Lesson 18

**The Lord's Table**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Why do Christians put such an emphasis upon the Lord's Table? Why is eating a little piece of bread and drinking wine so important to Christians? Why is this done by most Christians with solemnity and reverence? Why can't Christians agree on the true meaning of the Lord's Table?
- B. The Lord's Table is important for all Christians but all Christians do not view it the same way. Some Christians over emphasize the Lord's Table and others don't see it as important. The only way Christians will ever get together on the essence of the Lord's Table is for all Christians to submit themselves to the Bible as their only authority and be willing to deal honestly with their different backgrounds, prejudices and traditions. This is hard to do in spiritual matters.
- C. The Lord Jesus left us with only two material, physical elements by which to worship Him: bread and wine. All physical buildings (tabernacles and temples) are gone. There are to be no icons, statues, crosses, stained glass windows, fancy architecture or anything else physical or material as aids to worship God, who is Spirit. Buildings are not wrong, but they are not to be used as aids to worship. However, Christ did leave us the bread and the wine, so this act of worship must be important in God's mind and should be important to very true Christian.

**II. THE LORD'S TABLE SHADOWED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

- A. Passover (Ex. 12:2-14). The Passover was a significant event for the children of Israel. In order for Israel to be physically delivered from bondage in Egypt, every father was commanded to make a sacrifice and put the blood on the doorpost of every Jewish home. When the death angel came to take the first-born of every family, he would pass over these homes as the Jews were protected by the blood and would pass out of Egypt to move towards the Promised Land. To remember that night the Jews observed a special Passover supper and have been observing this supper for thousands of years. The Passover is an important event for the Jews and it is directly related to the Old Mosaic Covenant.
- B. Passover Lamb—Jesus (1 Cor. 5:7). Christ is said to be the ultimate Passover Lamb who was sacrificed by God for the sins of all who would ever believe on Christ as Savior and Lord. The Passover foreshadowed the final redemption provided by Jesus Christ, the Messiah. There is a direct link between Jesus Christ and the Passover. He is the fulfillment of the Passover in His death, which delivers men out of spiritual bondage to sin.

### III. THE LORD'S TABLE ESTABLISHED BY CHRIST (Luke 22:13-20)

#### A. Passover Supper

1. Jesus established the Lord's Table while He and His disciples were partaking of the Passover Supper. The Jews had a set ritual they went through at the Passover Supper. They sang hymns, quoted Old Testament scripture and had hearty fellowship. During the supper there were times of seriousness and times of joyfulness. In the ritual, there was even time for dialogue. Somewhere at two different points of the ritual, Jesus introduced the bread and the wine.
2. Jesus made it very clear He would not partake of the bread and the wine again with His disciples "until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God" and "until the kingdom of God comes." This is an obvious reference to the Second Coming of Christ.
3. The bread represented (symbolic of) the actual body of Christ which was given for God's people as a sacrifice for sin. By the words, "This is my body," our Lord did not mean it was His actual body, because if that were so then there were two bodies of Christ present—His actual body and the body He was holding in His hand. This is speaking symbolically. Furthermore, in the same context, Jesus said, "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood." Obviously neither the cup nor the wine was the actual New Covenant but they were symbolic of or representative of the New Covenant.

#### B. Placing the New Covenant into effect

1. The cup (wine) represented or was symbolic of the New Covenant, which was well known by the Jews (Jer. 31:31-33). This New Covenant for Israel would be made when Messiah would come.
2. Imagine what these words meant to these twelve Jewish men. Messiah had come! Israel has the New Covenant established! Israel's future is secured! What the disciples did not comprehend is that the Church, the spiritual Israel of God, would partake of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant until the blood of the New Covenant would be applied to Israel as a nation at our around the second coming of Christ.

### IV. THE LORD'S TABLE AND THE CHURCH

#### A. Prime Mention (Acts 2:42)

1. The first mention of the Lord's Table being observed by the church is in Acts 2:42. They "devoted themselves to the breaking of bread." The term "breaking of bread" is often used in the New Testament and refers to the Lord's Table. The early church always observed the Lord's Table with a supper. This supper was called "the Agape (love) Feast." This was a supper with lots of food and drink for all, probably provided by all the people ("potluck suppers"). The actual partaking of the Lord's Table was done during the Agape Feast and was called the Eucharist. Historians are not clear on the procedure for the Eucharist during the supper. It probably varied from church to church or region to region. NOTE: The important thing to note is the Lord's Table was taken during a supper called the

Agape Feast. There were obviously times of joy, seriousness and fellowship.

2. The Agape Feast was soon corrupted by Christians because men are sinful. One of the problems was that people were not waiting for all to arrive before eating, and others were drinking too much wine and getting drunk (1 Cor. 11:17, 20-22). Historically, to avoid this corruption the Agape Feast was put on Saturday night and the Eucharist on Sunday. This just led to more debauchery. Finally, this custom passed out of existence. It was a sad day for the church when it dropped the Agape Feast where the Lord's Table was to be taken in an atmosphere of joy, excitement, fellowship as well as seriousness.

B. Proper Observance (1 Cor. 11:23-33).

1. Those who partake of the bread and wine "in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." In context, partaking in an unworthy manner was being selfish by not waiting for all to eat and getting drunk (1 Cor. 11:17-22). However, "unworthy manner" can be any known sin of which we may be guilty. When we do acts of sin, we sin against the body and blood of Christ, which speaks of His death. Christ died to deliver us from sin and when we sin, we are saying the death of Christ is not sufficient to deliver us from sin.
2. We are told that a Christian "ought to examine" himself before he partakes of the Lord's Table. He is not examining himself to see if he is in essence worthy to partake, for no one is worthy in that sense. He is to examine to see if there be any known acts of sin that have not been confessed. We all have sin but this is speaking of known acts of sin.
3. When the Christian fails to confess his known acts of sin, he is eating and drinking "judgment on himself." The judgment in context is not the judgment of hell, for no Christian ever has to fear hell because Christ died for every sin that would put a Christian in hell. This is speaking of the judgment of discipline from the Lord. We do need to fear God's discipline. The Lord brings loving discipline on His children because He desires that we should be holy and partake of righteousness in our experience.
4. When a Christian fails to confess known acts of sin before partaking of the Lord's Table, he opens himself up to possible physical weakness, sickness and even death. It says, "That is why many among you are weak, sick and a number of you have fallen asleep (died)." It is a very serious matter to partake of the Lord's Table with known, unconfessed sins. How many weaknesses, sicknesses and deaths in a congregation are due to partaking of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner?
5. The Christian is to judge himself in that he examines his life for any known sin and deals with it by confession and showing a desire to turn from it - "But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment." By confession, a Christian may avoid the discipline of God on his life.
6. When a Christian is being judged by the Lord, he is being disciplined in a loving way so that he will not be condemned with the world. The world is

condemned because it has no Savior and Lord. The Christian is disciplined by the Lord so he will not be like the world and different from it.

C. Presence of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).

1. Most Christians would not disagree too much over what has been said up to this point about the Lord's Table. However, Christians do disagree over to what extent Jesus Christ is present in the elements or at all.
  - a. Roman Catholics (transubstantiation). The bread and wine, which retain their outward appearance, actually become the body and blood of Christ through a miracle. For a Roman Catholic, the Lord's Table is very important because without it, he loses his or her salvation. There are many mystical and even magical aspects of communion for a Roman Catholic.
  - b. Lutherans (consubstantiation). Luther, who was never able to make a clean break from his Roman Catholic background, believed no miracle took place but it was just as though it did. Therefore, Christ's body and blood are physically present in, under and around the bread and the wine. There are also many mystical aspects for a Lutheran concerning the Lord's Table.
  - c. Baptists (memorial). This view was set forth in the Reformation by Zwingli. The bread and the wine are merely symbols or memorials of Christ's death for the Christian. There is absolutely no mystical aspect to the Table for a Baptist or any person who holds to the Zwinglian view.
  - d. Presbyterians (spiritual presence).
    - (1) This view was set forth by John Calvin who taught that Christ is really present at the Lord's Table. The bread and the wine are symbols but the presence of Christ is spiritual not physical. A Presbyterian holds that Christ is mystically present at the Table (not in the bread and wine) in a spiritual sense.
    - (2) The real issue is how does one interpret 1 Corinthians 10:16: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation (fellowship, communion) in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" Obviously, Christians somehow participate in the body and blood of Christ when partaking of the bread and wine. This is a participation, a communion, a fellowship by faith. This is certainly more than a mere memorial and less than transubstantiation and consubstantiation. There seems to be a real presence of Christ in a spiritual sense but that presence is related to the Christian's faith.
    - (3) What is the point? Christ is spiritually present at the Table and Christ is more real to the believer's faith when partaking of the Lord's Table than any other time because it is during this time that by faith we are eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual sense (John 6:53-56). There is a mystical sense of Christ's presence not in the physical elements but at the Table with His people.

- (4) The spiritual presence view of the Lord's Table lends itself more readily to being a means of grace than does the memorial view. This grace imparted through Communion is sanctifying grace, not saving grace.

## V. THE LORD'S TABLE AND THE SECOND ADVENT

- A. When Jesus established the Lord's Table, He made it clear He would not participate in the Table again with His people "until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:17) which is an obvious reference to His Second Coming.
- B. The Apostle Paul taught that Christians are to partake of the Lord's Table as a witness of Christ's death to the world until He comes again: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

## VI. THE LORD'S TABLE AND CHILDREN

- A. Many Christians believe that children are not allowed to take the Lord's Table until they can make a credible profession of faith in Christ before the elders and understand the spiritual concepts of the Table. Others believe in paedocommunion (children participating in communion as infants because of the covenant. Those who are not paedocommunionists say a child must be able "to examine himself" and "judge" himself before partaking (1 Cor. 11:28, 31).
- B. Covenant children of Christian parents should be allowed to partake of the Table when they are true believers in Christ and it is primarily parents who make that decision. When parents sense their child is a believer and understands the spiritual realities of the Lord's Table, then they should give testimony before the elders of the church.
- C. Parents who allow children to partake ought to remember to partake unworthily brings discipline for a child as well as an adult. Furthermore, if a child is allowed to partake but later shows no evidence of salvation, parents ought to remove the privilege of the Table from their children.

## VII. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. The Bible does not say specifically how often the Lord's Table should be observed. It says, "Do this, whenever you drink it" (1 Cor. 11:25). At first, the early church observed the Table everyday (Acts 2:46) and later as the church grew, it was observed every week (Acts 20:7). However, there is no command to observe the Lord's Table weekly, although I would prefer it that way myself, providing we still went to church for four and five hours as did the early church.
- B. Observing of the Lord's Table does not always have to be done in a solemn and somber way. The Passover and the Agape Feast were both suppers where there was joy and laughter. Yet, the Table is always to be taken with respect for the Sovereign Christ.
- C. Satan hates for Christians to partake of the Lord's Table because Christ is spiritually present and is very real to the believer's faith. Therefore, there is much spiritual warfare going on around the Table. This is why sometimes

when partaking of the Lord's Table distracting thoughts may flash through the mind. There may be other distracting thoughts. Satan and his demons do not want us to participate in the body and blood of Christ by faith.

- D. There are Christians who say that the Lord's Table is to be administered by one ordained and taken only in an official fathering of the church. Historically this has been the predominant position, but the Bible itself is silent on the matter. So as to whether anyone can administer the Lord's Table and it can be observed anywhere Christians are gathered, this would be up to the conscience of the Christian and to the church tradition one holds.