



Foundations of

FAITH

The Lord's Supper Lesson 28

In London, in Trafalgar Square, there stands a monument called Nelson's Column, and in the United States of America the Washington Monument reaches high into the sky in memory of the first American President. When men desire to remember a great man or woman, they usually erect a monument of wood or stone, so that when passers-by look upon it they may all to mind the one in whose honour it is built. However, all such memorials eventually crumble or decay. Therefore, when Jesus Christ determined to leave a monument to his name, he gave one which would stand as long as the earth remains.

THE LORD'S SUPPER INSTITUTED. On the night of his betrayal to be crucified, Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples in an upper room. While eating it he took some unleavened bread, offered thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples with the words, "Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." Having done this, he took the cup containing the fruit of the vine (the grape) and, giving thanks, he then said, "This cup is the new testament (covenant) in my blood: this do you, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (I Cor. 11:24, 25) Thus there came into being that memorial which has, from the death of Christ to the present time, reminded Christians of the sacrifice made for them by their crucified Saviour.

TERMS APPLIED TO THE SUPPER. Three expressions are used in the scriptures with respect to this memorial feast. As already suggested, it is called the "**Lord's supper.**" It is appropriately so called because it was inaugurated by Jesus and is in memory

of him. In I Corinthians 10:16 it is called a "**communion**" of the body and blood of Christ because in partaking of it Christians participate with one another and with Jesus in his sufferings. It is spoken of in Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7 as the "**breaking of bread.**" While this phrase sometimes denotes a common meal, in these verses it has special reference to the feast in which bread is broken in memory of Christ.

The Lord's supper is sometimes called the Eucharist, meaning "giving of thanks". However, this expression is never applied by the inspired writers to the Lord's supper and cannot be so used with scriptural authority. It is also designated a sacrament, as are baptism and marriage. But here again, we have no scriptural sanction for the use of this word as a designation of the Lord's supper.

THE PURPOSES OF THE SUPPER. Primarily, the Lord's supper is a memorial. The words of Jesus, "Do this in remembrance of me," identify it as such. When Christians partake of the bread and fruit of the vine they should take their minds back over 1900 years to that occasion when Jesus was suspended on Calvary's cross for the sins of all mankind. To them the bread represents the torture-wracked body of the Saviour. The fruit of the vine is emblematic of his blood, shed as a perfect sin offering for the sins of each individual.

However, this communion with Christ signifies more to the Christian than a memorial. Jesus said of the cup, "This cup is the new testament in my blood." (I Cor. 11:25) The word testament may also be translated **covenant**, and this is the prime meaning in this passage. The fruit of the vine is a visible expression

of the agreement between Christ and the Christian – the covenant that if the disciple of the Lord is faithful to him, he will reward him at the end of the way with an eternal home.

As a memorial, the Lord's supper looks backward to his death. As a covenant, it declares our present, living faith. But the supper also looks to the future. Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come." (I Cor. 11:26) It is thus a **proclamation** to the world that Christ will return again to take home with him the faithful. Since it does point to the second coming of Christ, the breaking of bread is to be observed until the end of time.

The Lord's supper also serves as a symbol of the **unity** within the body of Christ. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? **For we being many are one bread, and one body:** for we are all partakers of that one bread." (I Cor. 10:16, 17) The one bread of which the Christian partakes reminds him of the one body. The one body is the one, undivided church of Jesus Christ. "And he is the head of the body, the church." (Col. 1:18) While individually Christians are many, they are unified in one church and this unity is symbolised by one bread.

WHAT THE LORD'S SUPPER IS NOT. Several erroneous ideas have become attached to the Lord's supper. One is the doctrine of **transubstantiation**. This is defined in the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent as follows: "In the Eucharist are contained truly, really, and substantially the body and blood, together with soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ." Again, "The whole substance of the bread is converted into the body, and whole substance of the wine into the blood." Thus the idea is presented that, in partaking of the bread and fruit of the vine, one eats the literal body of Christ and drinks his literal blood. The authority for this teaching is given as Matthew 26:26-28. Here Jesus, in instituting the supper, states "Take eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament." It is argued that when Jesus said "this is my body" and "this is my blood" he meant it was his literal body and blood, the actual body suspended on Calvary and the actual blood shed at the cross.

In his teaching, Jesus made frequent use of the metaphor, a comparison in which the likeness is

implied rather than specifically stated. When he said in John 10:9 "I am the door" and in John 15:5 "I am the vine," he obviously was using this form of speech. Likewise, when he said, "This is my body," it is apparent that he was employing a metaphor since he stood before the disciples in the flesh. And when he said, "This is my blood," he could not have meant his literal blood since it was still coursing through his veins. Moreover, as already noticed, the emblems were to serve as a memorial to Christ. A memorial stands for something, but is never the real thing itself. Were the bread and fruit of the vine the literal body and blood of our Saviour, they could not be taken in remembrance of him, since they would then be the actual body and blood of Jesus. Therefore, the doctrine of transubstantiation violates the purpose which the Lord's supper is to serve.

As an outgrowth of transubstantiation there came the teaching of the **Sacrifice of the Mass**. This is the theory that a priest repeats the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross each time that Mass is said. But the idea of a continual repetition of the death of Christ contradicts the plain teaching of the Hebrew letter. "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did **once**, when he offered up himself." (Heb. 7:26, 27) Since the sacrifice of Jesus was perfect, it need not be repeated.

Another theory is that in partaking of the Lord's supper **one receives the remission of sins**. This concept is drawn from the statement, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28) It is concluded that the fruit of the vine is for the remission of sins. However, in this verse the antecedent of "remission of sins" is "blood", not the cup. The forgiveness of sins is procured by the shed blood of Christ, not by drinking the fruit of the vine.

WHO SHOULD PARTAKE? The Lord's supper was never intended for the sinner. Only for the child of God is it a memorial of the death of Jesus, only for the child of God is this communion a symbol of the divine covenant: only for him is it a proclamation of faith in the return of the Son of God; only to the Christian is the bread a sign of the unity of the one body. For the non-Christian the Lord's supper is meaningless. It should be partaken of only by the disciple of Christ.

THE MANNER OF PARTAKING. “Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an **unworthy manner**, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body.” (I Cor. 11:27-29 – A.S.V.) This condemnation for partaking in an unworthy manner should cause us to meditate seriously upon our method of observance. To partake in a worthy manner, one must centre his mind upon Christ and his death. If, instead, he allows his mind to wander to the material things about him, he is guilty of the body and blood of Christ. Too often Christians may eat the Lord’s supper in a mechanical fashion, allowing it to degenerate into a mere ritual. This is displeasing to God.

WHEN TO COMMUNE. “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to

break bread, Paul preached unto them ...” (Acts 20:7) The stated purpose of this assembly was to partake of the Lord’s supper, not to hear Paul preach. Observe that this occurred on the first day of the week, or Sunday. The use of the definite article “the” implies that the early Christians observed the Lord’s supper **every** first day of the week, just as the command, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” meant to each devout Jew that he should observe 52 Sabbaths a year. Church historians of various faiths concur that the practice of early Christians was to eat the Lord’s supper weekly. The observance of the memorial feast on a monthly or quarterly basis is of human origin. To be infallibly safe the Christian should partake of it **every** Lord’s day in memory of his blessed Saviour. Surely if he loves him he will not consider this a burden.

TEST ON LESSON 28

Read the following passages which describe the institution of the Lord’s supper – Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; I Corinthians 11:23-25. In the blanks after the following quotations write the name of the book in which the exact statement is to be found:

1. “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them.”
2. “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”
3. “And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them.”
4. “After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped.”
5. “Drink ye all of it.”
6. “And they all drank of it.”
7. “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”
8. “This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many.”
9. “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Complete the following statements:

1. Three scriptural expressions applied to the memorial feast are ,
..... and
2. Two terms often applied to this feast which are without scriptural sanction are
..... and
3. Four things signified to the Christian in the Lord's supper are ,
..... , and
4. Three erroneous teachings regarding the Lord's supper are ,
..... and

Write true or false after the following statements:

1. The Lord's supper is intended only for Christians.
2. The manner in which we partake of the Lord's supper is unimportant.
3. In Acts 20:7 we are told that the disciples gathered to hear Paul preach.
4. To follow the example of the early Christians we must partake of the Lord's supper every first day of the week.

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Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – Luke, 1 Corinthians, Mark, 1 Corinthians, Matthew, Mark, Matthew, Mark, Matthew.

Section 2 –

1. Lord's Supper, Communion, Breaking of Bread.
2. Eucharist, Sacrament.
3. Memorial, Covenant, Proclamation, Unity.
4. Transubstantiation, Sacrifice of the Mass, Remission of sins received in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Section 3 – T, F, F, T.

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