

Foundations Course - Supplement

HOLY COMMUNION

References

Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17; 11:23-26

Holy communion is one of the two sacraments instituted by Jesus, the other being believers' baptism. Baptism is a sacrament of initiation, occurring only once. Holy communion differs in that it is repeated regularly in the life of the Christian.

This sacrament is known by various names:

- Holy Communion
- the Lord's Supper *1 Corinthians 11:20*
- the Lord's Table *1 Corinthians 10:21*
- the Breaking of Bread *1 Corinthians 10:16; Acts 2:46*
- the Eucharist (Greek 'eucharistia' – thanksgiving)
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"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'."

Matthew 26:26-28

Whenever God made a covenant with his people it involved promise, commitment, faithfulness and loyalty and was usually represented by a symbol, e.g. Noah and the rainbow; Abraham and circumcision. The symbols of the New Covenant are the bread and wine.

The bread represents Jesus' broken body and the wine his outpoured blood. Every time believers gather together at the table of the Lord, they are confessing their unity and covenant relationship with the Lord and with each other.

Old Testament

The Old Testament contains some 'shadows' of the Lord's Supper that was to come:

- Abraham and Melchizedek *Genesis 14:18*
- Table of bread in Moses' tabernacle *Leviticus 24:5-9*
- Body and blood of the Passover Lamb *Exodus 12; Matthew 26:17*

The Passover was a family meal instituted to celebrate the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians. Family groups shared the meal observing the rules set down. The children were to be instructed about the Passover in every generation (*Exodus 12:26*) so that they would know that God had delivered their people. The Passover Lamb had to be perfect, all of it had to be eaten and none of its bones were to be broken. It was to be accompanied by bitter herbs, unleavened bread and wine.

Jesus is our Passover Lamb *1 Corinthians 5:7*:

- perfect (without sin) *1 Peter 1:18*
- suffering (bitter herbs) *1 Peter 2:21*
- none of his bones were to be broken *John 19:36; Psalm 34:20; 22:17*
- we must accept all of him (all of the Lamb to be eaten)
- we must keep leaven (sin, hypocrisy) out of our lives

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with his disciples at the Passover meal just prior to his crucifixion. *Matthew 26:26-29*

As in the Passover the Jews relived the experiences of their deliverance from Egypt, so Christians participate in the sacrifice of Christ by symbolically identifying themselves with it.

Past, present, future

When we participate in the Lord's Supper there are past, present and future elements to the celebration:

- Past. We remember Christ's death for us, looking back to the cross, with grief for our own sin and gratitude for our salvation.
- Present. We enjoy and draw strength from our present communion with Christ, through his Spirit, and in fellowship with other believers. We take opportunity to examine ourselves, because it would be hypocrisy to believe that we are in communion while cherishing sin in our hearts.
1 Corinthians 11:28
- Future. We anticipate the perfect enjoyment of his presence when he comes again at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. This anticipation is an encouragement to live sanctified lives.
Revelation 19:9

Paul received insight from the Lord about the celebration of communion, which he taught to the Corinthian church.

*"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me'.
In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me'. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

1 Corinthians 11:23-16

There are instructions about being in right fellowship with other believers, being sensitive to the needs of the other participants, and about the corporate nature of the Lord's Supper. Communion is not something that can be celebrated alone, but must be with the Lord and his Body. It is the meal that signifies we are in covenant with God and in covenant relationship with one another.

Attitudes to bring to communion:

- faith
- thankfulness
- forgiveness (towards one another)
- unity

"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

1 Corinthians 10:17