**The Lord’s Supper As Worship (SR: 1Cor. 11:23-29)**

We should be informed regarding all things that we do. This builds our confidence in knowing that it is the right thing to do and it allows us to share with others that for which we passionately commit ourselves. We have previously considered two of the five acts of worship—singing and praying—and now we consider the observance of the Lord’s Supper.

**I. What Is the Lord’s Supper?**

A. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, Jesus observed the Jewish festival of Passover with His disciples. This is commonly referred to as the Last Supper.

1. The background of this festival is found in the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 12-13). The last of the ten plagues was the death of the firstborn child. In order to have their own firstborn children spared, Israel was commanded to kill a lamb and spread the blood over their doorways. If they did this, the plague would pass over them.

2. Several important features were built into this key event and the related Jewish feast, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Israelites were to have an evening feast in which they wore their sandals, prepared for the exodus from Egypt; unleavened bread, again indicating the quickness of the flight out of Egypt; bitter herbs and an assortment of other features. The Israelites were commanded to observe this annually in the spring.

3. Jesus, being Himself the fulfillment of the Passover lamb (1Cor. 5:7), modified and added a depth to this feast at His observance in the Last Supper. Jesus commanded them to make a habit of observing this memorial.

B. The disciples followed Jesus’ command and did indeed make a habit of observing this meal. When the disciples in the NT observed this, it is referred to as communion (1Cor. 10:16), the breaking of bread (although this phrase is sometimes used more broadly – Acts 2:42; 20:7), eucharist (from *eucharisteo*, “giving of thanks” which Christ did at the time of its institution – Matt. 26:26f), or the LS.

C. The Lord's Supper is a simple act, in which Christians partake of unleavened bread, and drink of the fruit of the vine. The unleavened bread indicates the undefiled yet broken body of JC. The fruit of the vine represents His blood which inaugurates the NC. Christians do so together, as they assemble for that purpose. They do so because it was instituted by the Lord Himself and its observance was commanded. They do so because in so doing they worship God.

**II. Where & When Do Christians Observe the Lord’s Supper?**

A. The Biblical Evidence

1. The Biblical evidence is that it was done on the first day of the week

a. Christians came together on the 1st day of the week to "break bread" (Acts 20:7)

b. "Breaking bread" is a reference to the Lord's Supper (1Cor. 10:16f; Acts 2:42)

2. Other indications of a weekly observance:

a. The church at Corinth was coming together to eat the Lord's Supper, though they were abusing it (cf. 1Cor. 11:17-22)

b. Instructions concerning the collection suggest their coming together was on the 1st day of the week (cf. 1Cor. 16:1f)

3. Following this approved example of Christians in the Bible, we know God approves of a weekly observance on the 1st day of the week.

B. The Historical Evidence

1. The earliest historical evidence outside the Bible confirms the day & frequency

a. The Didache (ca. 95 A.D.) indicates Christians were to come together on 1st day of week to break bread (*“And on the Lord's own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.”* Didache 14:1)

b. Justin Martyr (ca. 150 A.D.) records how Christians assembled on Sunday and partook of the Supper (*“on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place…bread and fruit of the vine are brought…Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.”* Apology I, 67)

c. *"... the early church writers from Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, to Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Cyprian, all with one consent, declare that the church observed the first day of the week. They are equally agreed that the Lord' supper was observed weekly, on the first day of the week."* (B. W. Johnson, People's NT)

2. Religious scholars confirm this was the practice

a. *"As we have already remarked, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was still held to constitute an essential part of divine worship every Sunday, as appears from Justin Martyr (A.D. 150)..."* (Augustus Neander (Lutheran), *History Of Christian Religion And Church*, Vol. I, p. 332)

b. *"This ordinance (the Lord's Supper) seems to have been administered every Lord's day; and probably no professed Christian absented themselves..."* (Thomas Scott (Presbyterian), Comm. On Acts 20:7)

c. *"This also is an important example of weekly communion as the practice of the first Christians."* (A. C. Hervey (Episcopalian), Commentary On Acts 20:7)

d. *"It is well known that the primitive Christians administered the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) every Lord's day."* (P. Doddridge (Congregationalist), Notes On Acts 20:7)

3. The overwhelming consensus of extra biblical sources supports the conclusion that the Biblical practice was to observe the Lord's Supper each first day of the week. Even so, some who would agree that when done it should be on the first day of the week are not always diligent to observe the Supper each week. Perhaps they need to be reminded of its value.

**III. How Do Christians Observe the Lord’s Supper?**

A. On each 1st day of the week, the brethren gather together to worship God. 1. Regarding the allotted time or position of this observance in worship, that is at the discretion of the local congregation. Likewise, this time may vary depending on the needs of the group but it must always be on the first day of the week. Typically, we do this after a Scripture reading, song, opening prayer, & another song have been done. This morning, b/c of the subject matter of the lesson, we have moved it to come after the sermon.

2. After this has been decided, it is important that it be done in an orderly manner, just as with all worship unto God (1Cor. 14:33, 40). For this reason, several individuals including both men and women ensure we have supplies and that the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine are set up prior to services. These are the elements Jesus used and they are the elements Christians must use. What is used to hold these elements is at the discretion of the assembly and while some insist upon a single cup or other incidentals, these are not bound by God. Whatever is expedient to serve these elements in is authorized by God.

B. Several men are beforehand appointed to both head and serve on the table. The number of the men will vary depending on the size of the group. We usually use 3-4. They are men because this is typically viewed as a leadership role (cf. 1Tim. 2:11f). The one heading the table guides our thoughts with points of meditation and/or Scripture. Those serving will pass along the elements. After the manner of Jesus, one man will offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the bread and it will be passed around; this is followed by a prayer for the fruit of the vine & it is passed.

C. During this act of worship unto God, self-reflection is paramount. If one partakes of the elements without this reflection or with unconfessed sin, he or she brings condemnation upon themselves (Matt. 5; 1Cor. 11). It may very well be that a person feels unprepared or unfit to partake; they may and should abstain.

D. In the event that one feels unfit or is absent in the morning assembly, our group also meets in the evening and again offers the elements. Those who partook in the morning are not required to partake again. The same elements are offered, we are all gathered together for worship, and the same form is observed. This is done in order that we may wait upon one another and not incur the same condemnation as was given at Corinth. Even so, some may personally feel unable to participate in this second serving, given the collective observance of the morning. These individuals may abstain in light of their conscience.

E. We may also add to this that we offer an open communion to all. It is up to the individual worshipper to evaluate their standing before God and upon God to determine its validity. It is not up to those administering the elements.

**IV. Why Do Christians Observe the Lord’s Supper?**

A. It Is A Memorial

1. Note Paul's account as given by the Lord Himself (1Cor. 11:23-25, 29)

a. We eat the bread in memory of His body

b. We drink the cup (fruit of the vine) in memory of His blood

2. We therefore commemorate the death of Jesus on the cross (Matt. 26:28)

a. Whose death make the new covenant possible (Heb. 9:16)

b. Whose blood was shed for the remission of sins (Eph. 1:7)

3. Isn’t the memorial of the Lord’s suffering, death, & shed blood worthy of faithful observance?

B. It Is A Proclamation

1. We proclaim our faith in the efficacy of the Lord's death (1Cor. 11:26a)

a. That His death was indeed for our sins

b. If we don't believe He died for our sins, why keep the Supper?

2. We also proclaim our faith in the Lord's return (1Cor. 11:26b)

a. For it is to be done "till He comes"

b. If we don't believe He is coming, then why keep the Supper?

3. Isn’t the proclamation of JC’s redemption & return worthy of faithful observance?

C. It Is A Time For Reflection

1. Reflecting upon one's spiritual condition (1Cor. 11:28-32)

a. Examining one's self

b. Discerning the Lord's body

c. Judging ourselves so as not to be judged

2. Are we living in a manner that shows appreciation for His sacrifice?

a. By accepting the grace of God in our lives? (2Cor. 5:18-6:1)

b. By living for Jesus who died for us? (2Cor. 5:14f; Gal. 2:20)

3. Or are we living in a manner that shows disregard for His sacrifice?

a. By willful sinning (Heb. 10:26-29)

b. By refusing to repent (Heb. 6:4-6)

4. Isn’t the time for such reflection worthy of faithful observance?

D. It Is A Communion

1. It is a fellowship or sharing in the blood of Christ (1Cor. 10:16a)

a. As we partake, we commune with the blood of Christ

b. Perhaps in the sense of reinforcing blessings we enjoy through the blood of Christ

2. It is a fellowship or sharing in the body of Christ (1Cor. 10:16b)

a. As we partake, we commune with the body of Christ

b. Perhaps in the sense of reinforcing fellowship together in the body of Christ (i.e., the church), as we break bread together

3. Is the communion that we have w/ the Lord's blood & body worthy of our faithful observance?

E. As A Means Of Building Fellowship ...

1. The disciples "came together" to break bread (Acts 20:7)

2. Eating of the same bread reflects our oneness in Christ (1Cor. 10:17)

3. Thus Christians were to wait for one another (1Cor. 11:33)

4. Isn’t the fellowship we have with one another in Christ reflected in the Supper worthy of faithful observance?

The first Christians "continued steadfastly" in the observance of the Lord’s Supper just as they did in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship and prayer (Acts 2:42). They came together on the first day of the week for that very purpose (Acts 20:7). They continued coming together every first day of the week, as supported by scriptural and historical sources.

Christians today should never lose sight of the significance of the Lord's Supper. It is a memorial of the great sacrifice Jesus paid for our sins. It is a proclamation of our faith in the Lord's death and His return. It is a time for reflection and rededication of our service to the Lord. It is a communion or sharing in the body and blood of the Lord. It is a means for building fellowship with one another in the body of Christ.

Some closing thoughts for everyone to meditate upon. Thought 1: Why do you need the Lord’s Supper? Thought 2: How do you prepare yourself for participating in the observance? Thought 3: In what way does your life validate or invalidate your observance? Thought 4: Are you on fire for the LORD when you partake of His broken body & blood of covenant in worship?