

Philosophy of the Lord's Table

(Communion)

Christ Fellowship Bible Church

1. The **MEANING** of the Lord's Table

The blessed feast that the Lord Jesus Christ invites all believers to share in was inaugurated on the night in which Jesus was betrayed, at the Passover meal just before His crucifixion (Matt 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; cf. 1 Cor 11:23-34). While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples and told them to take it, eat it, for it is His body (Matt 26:26). Then He took the cup and gave thanks, and He gave it to His disciples, and they drank from it (Matt 26:27). The cup is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28). Thus, Christ commanded His followers to partake of this meal as a definitive reminder and a blessed communion with the Lord Himself until He eats it again in the Father's Kingdom (Matt 26:29).

The Passover elements that Christ used were the wine from the feast and the unleavened bread. It is the conviction at Christ Fellowship Bible Church that the glory of this meal and the meaning of the feast comes not from the *substance* of the elements but from the *communion* with the Lord Himself. Thus, we only use bread and grape juice as we partake of the Lord's Table together.

The Apostle Paul says that as often as Christians eat the bread and drink the cup, they proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Communion, then, pictures the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. It announces the righteousness of Jesus Christ since He is the true bread that came down from heaven and it glories in the blood of the Lamb that was shed to appease the Father's wrath. It is a perpetual remembrance for all of God's children to glory in Christ, to examine one's true spiritual condition, to resolve to live for Christ, to confess, repent, and turn from all known sin, and to delight in the finished and sufficient work of Jesus Christ for His own.

2. The **PREPARATION** for the Lord's Table

The Apostle Paul commands all believers in the very context of the Lord's Table to examine himself and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 Cor 11:27). The Lord's Table serves to provide opportunities for the Christian to look deep into his soul and see whether he is abiding in the vine, bearing fruits in keeping with repentance, loving Christ and others, mortifying sin, and proclaiming Him in the world.

In that same context, Paul says that believers should judge the body (of Christ) rightly as they partake of the Lord's Table. But the question is asked, "*how does one prepare oneself and judge Christ's body rightly?*"

If one were to come heartlessly to the Table and to simply go through the motions, this would be improper conduct in preparing for the meal. If one were to treat it lightly as if it was just 'another' item on the church's agenda or as if it were another duty to fit in the church's schedule, this would qualify as wrongly judging Christ's body. Indeed, if someone were to view it as a grace-imparting sacrament (as, for example, the Roman Catholic doctrine teaches), this would be heresy and wrongly preparing for the feast. To come with low thoughts of God, wrong thoughts of God, improper thoughts of God, or trivial thoughts of God would also show one has wrongly judged the body of Christ.

Thus, to put it positively, one must prepare himself *beforehand* to rightly prepare his heart for the Lord's Table. Some profitable and heart-searching questions that Christians might ask in preparation *ahead* of partaking in the Lord's Table could include the following:

- Do I understand the meaning of the Lord's Table?
- Whose table is this? Who is Jesus of Nazareth?
- Do I know the Son of God?
- Am I leaning on Him and His righteousness as my only hope and confidence?
- Do I love Him and demonstrate it through my obedience?
- Why did He live as he did?
- Do I know He is righteous?
- Am I trusting His righteousness alone?
- Do I love this righteous Savior?
- Why did He die on the cross?
- Do I know the meaning of His death?
- Do I lean upon a dying Savior?
- Do I love this bruised and bloodied God-man?
- Do I receive Him as he is offered in the gospel?
- Do I confess Him before men and actively seek to proclaim Him?
- Do I then come to His table to nourish—to feed upon—the grace and mercy that he has bestowed?
- Do I commune with Him regularly, joyfully, and eagerly?

For a believer to examine himself, he must understand God rightly, Christ's righteousness and His substitutionary atonement, and whether he has humbled himself, repented of his sin, turned to Christ alone, and followed Christ forsaking all else.

This then leads to confession of sin and repentance. To confess is to agree and acknowledge one's sin and to repent consists of an active turning from that sin, a hating of it, a forsaking it, and a resolute pursuit to follow Christ. This is all essentially linked to the Lord's Table.

If one has repented of sin and is trusting in Christ, then he should make certain he is following Christ. The believer should examine his pattern of life, his words that flow from his mouth (stemming from his heart), the images he looks at, the things he hears, the places he goes, the ways he spends his time, the ways in which he spends his money, his love for, knowledge of, submission to, and yearning for the Word of God. To adequately prepare for communion, the believer must diligently examine himself to make certain that he is in the faith and is walking in holiness.

3. The **SUBJECTS** of the Lord's Table

The Apostle Paul says that as often as people eat the bread and drink the cup, *they* proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor 11:26). Thus, the Lord's Table is *only* for those for whom Christ died. Jesus said that the bread is His body which is for *you* (1 Cor 11:24) and the cup is the new covenant in His blood (1 Cor 11:25). The New Covenant speaks of regeneration, the new heart, cleansing from sin, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the ability to walk in holiness and all of these marks are enjoyed by true believers alone.

There is a sense in which the Lord's Table is a very intimate *sharing* — a fellowship. This comes forth in two glorious ways. First, true believers share in the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). That is to say, only true believers can enjoy this since Christ's body was broken for them. Furthermore, the cup of blessing is a sharing in the blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). Only true believers have been washed in the blood of Christ and God's just wrath has been appeased because of Christ's death in their place. Second, true believers share with one another as an act of intimate fellowship. Those who are many are all one body, for all partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10:17). So then, true believers are the only subjects for the Lord's Table. And there is a satisfying communion and a delightful sharing in Christ and with other believers during this special meal.

Should children partake in the Lord's Table? If, as the Scriptures clearly present, true believers are the only subjects for communion, then one should seek to ascertain whether the child is a true believer. Have they repented of sin, seen God as a just and righteous Judge, viewed themselves condemned and guilty under His wrath and anger, repented of their sin, and are they clinging to Jesus Christ by faith alone as their only hope of salvation? Some other questions that parents should ask (and follow up with the child where needed) as to whether their children should partake in the Lord's Table may include:

- Do they understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper?
- Do they trust in Christ alone for salvation from hell?
- Do they repent of known sin seeking to turn from it and follow Christ?
- Do they live obediently?
- Do they willingly submit themselves to the discipline of the church?
- Have they been baptized?

The child himself must examine himself as to why he wants to take communion. Here are some questions that he may wish to ask himself in preparation before the Lord's Table:

- Is it to please my father or mother, or any one on earth, that I desire to come to the Lord's table?
- Is it because it is the habit of many, and my friends and family come forward to partake?
- Is it because I have come to a certain time of life where I now feel ready (after camp, a certain age)?
- What are my real motives for wishing to come to the Lord's Table? Is it to thank God for saving my soul (Ps 116:12-13)? Do I come to remember Jesus (Luke 22:19)? Do I come to get near to Christ (John 13:23)? Do I come to commune and fellowship in an intimate way with Jesus Christ (1 Cor 10:16)?
- Who do I think I should come to the Lord's Table? Who should stay away?
- Do I think anyone could come or is it only reserved for those who are truly converted?
- What is it to truly be converted?
- Would I come if I knew myself to be unconverted?
- Should I come if I have had deep concern about my soul, but yet I've not come to Christ and surrendered my life to Him entirely for His service?
- Do I think I have been awakened by the Holy Spirit? Have I been brought to Christ? Am I born again? Why do I have this confidence?
- What is the meaning of the broken bread and the cup?
- What is the meaning of taking the bread and cup into my hand? Have I truly received the Lord Jesus Christ?
- What is the meaning of my feeding upon the bread and the cup? Am I truly living *in* Christ and for Christ's glory?
- Do I truly demonstrate Christlikeness by loving other believers in this church?
- Have I been baptized to publicly profess Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior and testify as to how Christ saved me?

The child's parents should diligently examine the child before he partakes in the communion meal. It may also be profitable to sit with an elder so the child can profess his faith to a shepherd in the church.

Of course, if the child is unable to examine himself because he does not have the understanding and capability to do so yet, then he must not partake in the Lord's Table.

Christ Fellowship Bible Church also sees a very important prescription in Scripture for believer's baptism following one's conversion. That is, after a person hears the gospel, trusts in Christ, one of the initial steps of obedience (as demonstrated in Acts) is believer's baptism. Then, this one time act of baptism which publicly proclaims Christ as Lord and Savior in the presence of the Church family, should be followed by the regular partaking of the Lord's Table with the Church family.

4. The **WARNING** at the Lord's Table

The Word of God issues a very grave warning to all those who come to partake at the Lord's Table. If one does not partake rightly, his sacrifice would be no different than the sacrifices of the Gentiles and theirs is a sacrifice to demons (1 Cor 10:20). It is impossible to partake at the table of the Lord and partake at the table of demons (1 Cor 10:21). So then, believers must partake in a worthy manner by rightly judging the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27). Furthermore, a man must examine himself and in so doing he can eat of the bread and the cup (1 Cor 11:28).

The Spirit of God warns that those who partake wrongly, eat and drink judgment upon themselves (1 Cor 11:29). When Paul wrote, this was the very reason that many among them (in the church) were weak, sick, and a number had died (1 Cor 11:30). Just because Christians today do not see Ananias and Saphira episodes or Nadab and Abihu judgments on Sundays at the corporate gathering does not mean that God's holiness has changed. All of God's people must be warned of the Lord's chastening discipline that comes upon those who partake wrongly.

5. The **PROCLAMATION** of the Lord's Table

The glory of the Lord's Table resides in that it proclaims the crucified, buried, and risen Christ! It proclaims the perfect Savior! It reveals the righteous substitute! It identifies all of God's elect who are present together fellowshiping together with one another and with Christ. This meal serves to proclaim!

The Scriptures say that as often as believers eat the bread and drink the cup, they proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor 11:26). The Lord's Table must continue until Christ comes and it serves as a powerful proclamation of Christ's death until that great appearing.

This blessed feast proclaims a number of biblical elements inherent to the gospel. First, it highlights man's need for a Savior. It reminds the participant and proclaims to everyone present that man's sin deserves death (the shedding of blood). Second, it remembers Christ's perfect righteousness. Christ came down from heaven as the true Bread from God. He gives life to the world. He lived the life sinners cannot live. He obeyed the Law where sinners fail. His righteousness is necessary for salvation. Third, it clings to Christ's atoning blood since it is only by the shedding of blood that sins are forgiven. God required blood sacrifice for sin and Christ died once and for all to bring men to God. Fourth, it glories in Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. Man deserves the wrath of God but Christ came and drank that bitter cup for sinners. By faith alone, man can receive the righteousness of Christ imputed to Him. This is the glorious gospel and the great exchange at Calvary that the Lord's Table heralds. Fifth, it heightens the Church's fellowship since all believers gather together to feast together upon Christ — the Bread of Life.

And sixth, it anticipates the Church's eschatological hope when Christ will return again in the future and partake of this feast yet again in the Father's Kingdom. In conclusion, the Lord's Table serves as a way to powerfully proclaim the gospel of Christ's death in the place of sinners.