

THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (7)

The Lord's Supper

A. Introduction

1. The Lord Jesus, the head of the church, instructs each local church to appoint a plurality of qualified men to be elders.
2. The elders are to feed, know, lead, protect, care for, and love the flock under their care so that as a local church we display God's glory to the world around us.
3. The primary way the elders are to do this is by ensuring that the gospel is preached and the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper) are administered correctly.
4. Preaching the Gospel both CREATES the church and TRANSFORMS the church.
5. Baptism is a sign and a seal of the gospel pointing and confirming what Jesus has done for a believer (forgiveness, being washed clean, new life, a new identity and entry into the church).

B. The Meaning of the Lord's Supper

1. The Lord's Supper, like baptism, is a 'visible' word – it is both a sign and a seal.

A sign that points us to Jesus' death on the cross.

A seal that confirms that the truths of His death are as real for us as the bread we eat and cup we drink.

"an outward sign by which the Lord assures us inwardly of his loving promises." (John Calvin)

2. The Lord's Supper began with the Last Supper that Jesus shared with His disciples.

Initially it looked like it was going to be a regular celebration of the Passover – a meal which looked back to God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and which looked forward to the coming of the Messiah as God had promised through the prophets.

"On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover? So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there. The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover." (Mark 14:12-16)

During the Passover meal, Jesus drops the bombshell that one of His closest friends was going to betray Him and with those words the shadow of the cross appears over the meal.

"When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me— one who is eating with me." (Mark 14:17-18)

Jesus then uses the meal to teach His disciples that He was going die as "a ransom for many".

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take it; this is my body. Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, he said to them." (Mark 14:22-24)

Jesus tells the disciples that He was going to die.

Jesus tells the disciples that His death was for them.

Jesus invites His disciples to express their faith in what His death would achieved.

3. Jesus commands His followers to observe this meal to remember His saving work for them.

"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 11:23-26)

This is what the early church did.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

4. Participation in the Lord's Supper is a sign of continuing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"The Lord's Supper [is] an ordinance that is to be observed repeatedly throughout our Christian lives, as a sign of continuing fellowship with Christ." (Wayne Grudem)

"Participation in the Lord's Supper is a continuing symbolic act of unity and fellowship in Christ that identifies us as those who are continuing members of the church in good standing." (Mark Dever)

C. Rightly Administering the Lord's Supper

1. WHO

Who should eat and drink?

Baptised Believers – as a way of affirming our faith in Christ.

Unbaptised Believers? – The Bible does not prevent those who have not been baptised from taking part in the Lord's Supper, although there does seem to be an order of being baptised (a sign of beginning the Christian life) and then taking part in the Lord's Supper (a sign of continuing in the Christian life).

Children? – *"children are welcome to participate in the Lord's Supper... when they can understand its significance... when they are able to give a credible profession of faith in Christ... and when they consciously intend to follow the Lord in obedience."* (David Michael)

Who must not eat and drink?

Unbelievers – *"whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord."* (1 Corinthians 11:27)

Believers under Church Discipline – *"Properly administered communion (i.e. communion given only to members in good standing of evangelical churches) helps to ensure that those who are under church discipline for unrepented sin do not scandalize the church or eat and drink judgment to themselves by partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:29)."* (Mark Dever)

2. HOW

How do we participate in the Lord's Supper? What should we be thinking about as we watch the bread being broken, as we see the cup, as we wait to be served and as we eat and drink?ⁱ

Look up

Remember God's mercy and grace in sending His Son to die on the cross for our sin.

Look back

"Do this in remembrance of me."

"We must remember him [Jesus] because he is the most valuable Person in the universe. We must remember His death because it is the most important death in history." (John Piper)

The bread reminds us that Jesus' body died in our place – so that God's wrath at our sin could be satisfied and so we could have an intimate relationship with God.

The cup reminds us that Jesus shed His blood for us so that we can be completely forgiven of our sin and be part of God's people.

Look forward

The Lord's Supper reminds us that Jesus is alive, that He rose from the dead, that He is in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, and that one day He is going to come again.

"I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:25)

"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Look in

"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 11:27-30)

The danger of participating in an unworthy manner: eating and drinking in an unworthy manner means taking the Lord's Supper without understanding that the bread and the cup point to Jesus' death and without the right response to His death, which is repentance and faith.

The need for self-examination: where we reflect on our relationship with the Lord asking the Holy Spirit to expose our own sins, so we can confess them and find forgiveness at the cross before reaffirming our commitment to follow Jesus.

Look around

Eating and drinking in an unworthy manner also means failing to recognise our relationship with other believers.

The Lord's Supper reminds us that we are sitting around the table as a family.

Look out

The Lord's Supper is a way of preaching the gospel. It confronts every person present with the question: "Are you right with God?"

3. WHAT

The Lord's Supper can be celebrated within the context of a larger meal or as part of a worship service that is symbolic of the original supper.

There needs to be time for praising God, for remembering Jesus' death, and for examination.

There needs to be an invitation to eat and drink and a warning given about eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

There needs to be a change in mood from quietness and solemnity as we examine ourselves and remember His death to joy and celebration as by faith we hear Jesus says to us "You are forgiven."

4. WHEN

Regularly (for some local churches this means once a month, for others it means weekly).

D. Take, Eat! Take, Drink!

1. Jesus says to His followers "Take, eat!" and "Take, drink!"

This is a meal we are being invited to participate in.

2. Participation affirms our faith in Christ.

As we take the bread and the cup, we are expressing our faith and trust and thankfulness for what Christ has done.

As we take the bread and the cup, we are acknowledging that our sins individually were responsible for Jesus' death and are trusting that His death has secured our forgiveness and a future hope of a place in the new creation.

3. Participation spiritually feeds us.

As we eat and drink, it's as if Jesus is saying to us "I love you, I died for you, I was punished for your sin, you are now forgiven, you are righteous in God's sight, you will not be condemned, a place has been reserved for you at the marriage supper of the Lamb."

4. Participation affirms our unity as believers.

We eat and drink as a family – Jesus by His death has broken down the barriers that divide us.

"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."
(1 Corinthians 10:17)

ⁱ Michael Green, *Sharing Your Faith with Friends and Family: Talking about Jesus without Offending*