

THE LORD'S SUPPER (1)

Why do we eat and drink?

A. Introduction

1. What was James Renihan writing about when he said these words: "*Lives were lost, much blood was shed and potential alliances failed.*"

The Lord's Supper. Does that surprise you?

At the time of the Reformation, eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper was a big deal. Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Swiss and English Reformers were all debating this meal.

The Lord's Supper was important.

Today it doesn't seem to have the same importance, but it should.

2. Why is it so important that we eat and drink?

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith gives a brilliant answer to this question.

"The supper of the Lord Jesus was instituted by him the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his churches, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and showing to all the world the sacrifice of himself in his death, confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe to him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other."

Why do we eat and drink?

Because Christ commands His people to.

Because Christ comforts His people when they do.

3. Christ commands His people to eat and drink.

It was at the Last Supper that Jesus commanded His followers to celebrate the Lord's Supper together by eating and drinking.

The Last Supper that Jesus shared with His disciples, at first looked like it was going to be a regular celebration of the Passover.

"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)

The Passover was a meal which looked back to God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and looked forward to the coming of the Messiah as God had promised through His prophets.

During this particular Passover meal, Jesus drops the bombshell that one of His closest friends was going to betray Him, and with those words the shadow of His coming death on the cross for the first time 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 about the death He is about to die.

"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)

He says the bread represents His body being broken in death, and the cup of wine represents the shedding of His blood for the forgiveness of sins.

So as Jesus offers His disciples the bread and the cup, He was inviting them to express their faith in His death and what it would achieve.

As well as teaching them about His death, He tells them about another time He is going to eat with them.

"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)

With these words, Jesus is saying that this meal is taste of a future feast (the Lamb's Supper) where He will eat and drink with His people, and in doing so was assuring them that they had a place at this meal.

"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 25:6-8)

One final thing Jesus told His disciples to do was to celebrate Lord's Supper by eating and drinking in remembrance of Him.

"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19)

And that's what they did.

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

So we eat and drink because Christ commands us to.

4. Christ comforts His people when they eat and drink.

It is of great benefit to us to eat and drink.

We see this when we consider what happens when we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

B. A meal where Christ reminds us of His body and blood

1. Jesus says "Do this in remembrance of me."

"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." (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

As we eat and drink Christ reminds us of something.

He's not just wanting us to recollect something, but to believe and embrace what He is reminding us about.

John Flavel wrote, "*A speculative remembrance is only to call to mind the history of such a person and his sufferings: that Christ was once put to death in the flesh. An affectionate remembrance is when*

we so call Christ and his death to our minds as to feel the powerful impressions thereof upon our hearts."

2. What is Christ reminding us about?

The breaking and eating of bread and the drinking from the cup make the words of the gospel visible.

The broken 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 of wine 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.

So as we take the bread and drink from the cup, we are saying, that we eat this bread and drink this cup because Jesus has died on the cross and saved me from my sin and the judgment of hell I deserve.

That's not all we are being reminded of.

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

We are also remembering that because of Jesus' broken body and shed blood we have a place at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

"So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matthew 22:10-13)

C. A meal where Christ is present with us and feeds us

1. It was the presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper as we eat and drink that caused so much controversy at the time of the Reformation.

It centred around the interpretation of the word 'is'.

"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." (Matthew 26:26)

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28)

There are three main views about how you interpret the word 'is'.

i) Christ is physically present.

The Roman Catholic view, known as transubstantiation, is that the bread and the wine continue to look like bread and wine, but are turned into the physical body and blood of Christ.

The Lutheran view, known as consubstantiation, is that the bread and the wine, are not transformed into Jesus' body and blood, they remain bread and wine. But Jesus' body and blood are present in, under, and along with bread and wine.

ii) Christ is spiritually present.

The bread and the wine remain bread and wine, but as we eat and drink, we receive from Christ by faith all the benefits His body and blood represent.

"...and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving." (Book of Common Prayer)

iii) Christ is not physically or spiritually present.

The bread and the wine only serve as a reminder of Christ's saving work.

2. What does the Bible say?

Certainly the Bible does teach that the bread and the wine serve as a reminder of Christ's body and blood – *"Do this in remembrance of me."*

But the Bible also teaches us that the Lord's Supper is more than a memory.

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16)

What does it mean to participate or commune in the body and blood of Christ?

"At this table, Jesus feeds us with His body and blood." (Charles Spurgeon)

It cannot mean we are fed with Christ's physical body and blood, because His physical body is no longer broken and He has finished shedding His blood.

It must mean to receive spiritually from Christ the benefits His broken body and shed blood have secured.

"Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses." (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)

So as we feed on the bread and wine with our mouths, we feed on Christ in our hearts by faith, and receive the benefits of His death afresh.

D. A meal where Christ makes many into one

1. At the Lord's Supper, Christ makes us who are many into one body.

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

He makes us into one body by marking out who is part of the church – it is those who eat and drink.

He makes us into one body by uniting those who are part of the church – by eating and drinking we affirm our commitment to all who we eat and drink with.

"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)

2. This helps us to understand why Paul was not pleased with the way the Corinthian church was celebrating the Lord's Supper.

"In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk." (1 Corinthians 11:18-21)

The problem in Corinth was that the Lord's Supper was not making the many into one.

It did not mark out who was part of the church as there were people who were part of the church that were missing out on eating and drinking.

It did not unite those who were part of the church as their actions were in fact dividing the church (most likely along economic lines).

"So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment." (1 Corinthians 11:33-34)

E. Take, Eat! Take, Drink!

1. Jesus says to His followers, "Take, Eat!" and "Take, Drink!"

Why do we eat and drink?

Christ commands us to.

"...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:20)

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

And when we eat and drink Christ comforts us.

How?

2. As we eat and drink Christ reminds us of His broken body and His shed blood.

How is this a benefit to us?

Because He is assuring us that His death on the cross and all it achieved is for us.

3. As we eat and drink Christ is present and feeds us.

How is this a benefit to us?

Because as we come to the table bruised and battered by sin, discouragement, unbelief, worries and temptations, He assures us by His Spirit, that He loves us, has forgiven us, that we will not be condemned, that His grace is sufficient, that we can't be snatched from His hand, that He will keep us from falling and present us before God without fault, and that we have a place reserved at His future feast.

4. As we eat and drink Christ makes us into one body by uniting us to other believers.

How is this a benefit to us?

Because He is assuring us that we are part of His family and have brothers and sisters who will love us, care for us, and encourage us to stand firm in the faith until He comes.