

## THE LORD'S SUPPER (2)

### How do we eat and drink?

#### A. Introduction

1. There was a time when the Lord's Supper was hotly debated and thoroughly discussed.

James Renihan, writing about the Lord's Supper at the time of the Reformation, said that because of this meal, *"Lives were lost, much blood was shed and potential alliances failed."*

Eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper was clearly an important concern for the church in those days.

That doesn't seem to be the case today.

But why we eat and drink and how we eat and drink is something we should see as key to the life of the local church.

2. Why do we eat and drink?

*"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."* (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)

Because Christ commands His people to.

Because Christ comforts His people when they do (by reminding us of His broken body and His shed blood; by being present and feeding us; and by making us into one body by uniting us to other believers).

3. How do we eat and drink?

How should local churches celebrate the Lord's Supper?

#### B. The Venue

1. Where should the Lord's Supper be celebrated?

If one of the things Christ does at the Lord's Supper is making individual Christians into one body by uniting them to each other, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated when the whole church gathers together.

Every time the Lord's Supper is mentioned in the New Testament it assumes that the church is gathering together.

"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." (1 Corinthians 11:18)

"When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat." (1 Corinthians 11:20)

"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)

It doesn't make sense to celebrate it outside a local church gathering.

2. Are there any exceptions?

I think there is one, which is to celebrate the Lord's Supper with members who because of circumstances are unable to attend the gatherings of the church (e.g. members who are in care homes etc) to affirm that they are part of us.

This is an exceptional circumstance and Scripture seems to allow us to make exceptions in these situations.

For example, the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch (the other ordinance/sacrament given by Jesus to the church) took place apart from the gathering of the local church.

### **C. The Table**

#### 1. What should be on the Table?

Should there be a full meal or just the bread and the cup?

Whilst it is clear that the churches in the New Testament celebrated the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal, the actual instructions Jesus gave to His people to do in remembrance of Him was breaking bread and drinking from the cup.

"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)

#### 2. What type of bread should be used?

The Greek word for bread in the context of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament refers to a small round loaf of ordinary bread.

That would seem to be the best type of bread to use.

#### 3. Does it need to be wine in the cup or can it be grape juice?

"...another gets drunk." (1 Corinthians 11:21)

Wine would have been originally used by the church to celebrate the Lord's Supper. However, there does not seem to be anything to prohibit using non-alcoholic grape juice.

Interestingly, this element of the Lord's Supper is referred to as the cup rather than the wine.

#### 4. How much bread should we eat and how big a mouthful should we drink from the cup?

The Bible does not say.

But by only having a small amount now, it creates anticipation, that we will feast in the future.

It is a taste of what it is to come.

### **D. The Guest List**

#### 1. Who should eat and drink?

Believers – by eating and drinking they acknowledge that they are sinners in need of a Saviour and confess that Christ is that Saviour.

Which believers?

Closed communion – is the practice of only admitting members of that particular local church to the Lord's Supper. Visitors from other local churches are excluded.

Close communion – is the practice of only admitting believers who have been baptised as believers (by immersion usually) to the Lord’s Supper.

Open communion – is the practice of admitting all believers (whether they have been baptised as believers or not) to the Lord’s Supper.

The Bible does not prevent those who have not been baptised from taking part in the Lord’s Supper. Barring from the Lord’s Supper is an indication that someone is not considered to be a Christian.

Although there does seem to be present the 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).

## 2. Who must not eat and drink?

“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)

The unconverted – by not participating in the Lord’s Supper it should remind them that until they trust in Christ the incredible benefits of His death are not yet theirs.

The unrepentant – those under church discipline for unrepented sin are no longer welcome to participate in the Lord’s Supper until they repent.

## 3. Fencing the Table.

What does it mean to fence the table?

To fence the table is to protect people from eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

Why should we fence the table?

To protect the unconverted and unrepentant from receiving the consequences of partaking in an unworthy manner.

“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 11:29-30)

How do we fence the table?

Not by employing bouncers, but by making clear who should and should not eat and drink, and by warning the unconverted and unrepentant not to take part.

*“Q: Who are to come to the table of the Lord? A: Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. But hypocrites and those who do not repent eat and drink judgment upon themselves.” (Heidelberg Catechism Q81)*

## E. The Meal

### 1. Who should preside over the meal?

Elders are appointed to lead the church, and part of their leadership is ensure that the Lord’s Supper is administered correctly.

### 2. How do we approach the Table?

“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.” (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Thomas Haweis offers these four directions:

*"Examine your repentance. Consider whether you have really repented of your former sins and purposed to lead a new life. You can help determine repentance by considering whether you have a sorrow for sin, a hatred of sin, a general forsaking of sin, and whether there are clear evidences of change in your heart and life. Have you confessed known sin? Are you genuinely sorry for how your sin has offended God? Is there evidence that God has been transforming you by his power?"*

*Examine your faith. Consider whether you have a dead faith or a living faith—a mere speculative assent to the truth or a lively, genuine, energetic trust in God. This is the kind of faith that directs you to Christ as your propitiation and that lays hold of his strength as the only power that can cleanse and pardon you. Where is your trust? How often are you pondering the great truths of the gospel?"*

*Examine your gratitude. Consider whether you are thankful for the precious privileges which are yours in Christ. If you are aware of the depth of your sin and the heights of God's mercy, you must be filled with gratitude. Are you quick to give thanks when you pray? Are you quick to give thanks to God for his grace and mercy? Do you thank God for his most precious gift of his Son?"*

*Examine your love. Consider whether you are "in charity with all men." The Christian faith is a faith of love toward God that works itself out in love for one another. Are you harbouring hatred or malice toward another person? Are you expressing love in acts of kindness and charity? Are you especially showing love to fellow believers?"*

### 3. How do we serve the bread and the cup?

This is a meal that we eat and drink together and as we do Christ makes the many into one, and this should be reflected by how we serve it.

Two common practices that do not reflect this are:

- i) Walking up to the table to eat and drink on your own.
- ii) Intinction, which is the practice of dipping the bread into the wine and then eating.

We should eat and then drink together which will mean waiting until everyone is served.

### 4. What should we be thinking about as we eat and drink?

We should be remembering Jesus' death in our place to save us and all the benefits His broken body and shed blood have secured.

"In remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25)

We should be remembering Jesus' feast and the place we have at this future meal.

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

We should be remembering Jesus' family who we are eating and drinking with.

"So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other." (1 Corinthians 11:33)

### 5. What should the atmosphere be as we eat and drink?

What is being proclaimed at the Lord's Supper is the gospel which is good news!

The focus then should be on celebrating and giving thanks to God for His amazing and gracious rescue of us from our sins.

*"that glad, joyous occasion when our memories are refreshed and when our gratitude is enlarged as we meditate upon the things that Christ did for us as represented in this supper." (M.E. Dodd)*

*"At the Holy Table, above all, let there be praise." (J.I. Packer)*

6. How often should we eat and drink?

The evidence of Scripture lends support to both an annual celebration (like the Passover) and a weekly celebration (New Testament churches).

“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.” (Acts 20:7)

“When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat.” (1 Corinthians 11:20)

At the time of the Reformation it took place quarterly – usually once in the autumn, at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

As there is no explicit command, twice a month seems a good compromise (annually and quarterly is probably not frequent enough).

## **F. The Liturgy**

1. The church has historically divided its worship into two major segments: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Upper Room.

The Liturgy of the Word is the part of the service that climaxes with the preaching of God’s Word.

The Liturgy of the Upper Room is the part of the service that includes eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper.

Although we don’t use these terms, this has certainly been our practice as a local church.

2. Based on the answers to the questions above, what might/should the Liturgy of the Upper Room or the part of the service where we share the Lord’s Supper look like?

Preparation

Explanation of the Lord’s Supper

Fencing of the Table

Invitation to Eat and Drink

Give thanks for the Bread

Break and then Distribute the Bread

Eat the Bread

Give thanks for the Cup

Distribute the Cup

Drink the Cup

Hymn of Thanksgiving

3. Whatever the precise liturgy that is used for the Lord’s Supper, the result should always be that God’s people are comforted by Christ as they eat and drink in obedience to the command of Christ.