

# Foundational Principles of the Christian Faith

## Chapter 5

### Communion

Communion, or the Lord's supper as it is also called, was instituted by Christ while celebrating the Passover with the disciples on the night He was betrayed (CP Mt 26:17-29 [Mk 14:12-25 and Lu 22:7-20 also refers]). The Passover itself was a type of which Christ was the anti-type. (Anti-type is the person or thing represented or foreshadowed by an earlier type or symbol.) The Passover was instituted by God and celebrated by the Jews to commemorate their deliverance from the death angel in Egypt before the Exodus. It recalls how God caused the death angel to pass over the Hebrew houses when the sign of the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the door posts was evident. By this sign the death angel knew which houses to spare or pass over when slaying all the first born of Egypt (CP Ex 12:1-14; 21-28).

We need to know about the Passover for a better understanding of what the Lord's Supper means. There is rich prophetic symbolism here that points forward to our redemption through the blood of Christ. The **Passover** was a "**shadow of things to come**"; the unblemished lamb sacrificed for its blood prefigured Christ's death on the cross. As the lamb was a substitute sacrifice for the first born of the Jews so Christ was the substitute sacrifice for sinners (CP Jn 1:29; 1Cor 5:7; 1Pe 1:2, 18-20; Rev 5:6-10). The eating of the lamb represented the Jews identifying with the lamb's death, a death that saved them from physical death. Similarly, partaking of the Lord's Supper represents our participation in the death of Christ, a death that saves us from spiritual death (CP 1Cor 10:16-17; 11:23-26). The sprinkling of the blood on the door posts was done in obedient faith. This response of faith brought about redemption through the blood. Salvation through Christ's blood is likewise obtained through the obedience of faith and as the blood sprinkled on the door posts saved all the first born Jews so Christ's bloodshed on the cross saves all repentant sinners (CP Eph 1:7; Hebr

9:11-15, 22; 10:19-20; 13:20; 1Jn 2:2; Rev 1:5). There was to be no bones broken in the sacrificial lamb. This also was typologically fulfilled in Christ when He was crucified (CP Ex 12:46; Psa 34:20; Jn 19:34-36). It is also significant that only unleavened bread could be eaten with the Passover lamb. In scripture, leaven is used metaphorically to refer to sin and evil. It is a fermenting agent used in bread making to make the dough rise, symbolising the pervasive character of evil, spreading through and corrupting the mass. The New Testament establishes a link between unleavened bread and Christians purging themselves of sin and evil and all other corrupting influences that interfere with their Christian walk (CP 1Cor 5:1-8). Here Paul compares leaven with the process by which sin and evil spreads and corrupts Christians. All that disgraces a Christian and detracts from his holy newness of life is an example of the leaven of sin. The symbol of unleavened bread for New Testament Christians is to be undefiled - without sin - before God. As the Old Testament feast of unleavened bread represented the Jew's separation from the corruption symbolised by Egypt, New Testament Christians must likewise be separated from the corruption and evil of the world (CP 2Cor 6:14-18; Jas 4:4; 1Jn 2:15-17). We must repudiate all sin and be totally consecrated to the service of God or we will be cut off from the covenant promises like the Jews who ate leavened bread were to be cut off from the congregation (CP Ex 12:15-19). This does not teach that only unleavened bread can be partaken of in Communion, which some Christians believe. They think that because only unleavened bread could be eaten with the Passover lamb, and that as Christ is our "Passover Lamb" and it was unleavened bread He broke which He said represented His body when He instituted the Lord's Supper, then the implication is that the Lord's Supper should also only be partaken of with unleavened bread. That may or may not be implied depending upon your point of view, but it is certainly not explicit in scripture, and we cannot therefore make a doctrine out of it. Christ's basic purpose in Communion is simply that Christians in fellowship with each other participate in a simple meal to commemorate His death (CP 1Cor 10:16-17). There are only two requirements for participating in the Lord's Supper specified in scripture and we will look at them a bit later in this lesson.

There have been three major interpretations placed upon the meaning of Christ's reference to His body and blood when He instituted the Lord's Supper and we need to know what they are in order to

distinguish between them. **The first** is the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation. **The second** is the Lutheran Doctrine of Consubstantiation and **the third** is the non-Lutheran Protestant Doctrine of Symbolic Commemoration. Non-Lutheran Protestants include Pentecostals, Baptists and most, if not all, Evangelical Churches.

**##** The Doctrine of **Transubstantiation** promotes the theory that in the Roman Catholic Communion service the bread and the wine are literally converted by the officiating priest - though their appearance remains the same - into the actual body and the blood of Christ. Roman Catholics are taught that the power to change the elements (or emblems) - the bread and the wine - into the actual body and blood of Christ was given to the apostles at the last supper by Christ and has been carried on by Catholic priests as the successors to the apostles ever since. They are taught that through His earthly priest Christ's sacrifice is renewed at every Communion service, and that by giving the apostles and their successors the divine power to change the bread and the wine into His own body and blood Christ ensured that His redeeming sacrifice would forever be present in the Church. Roman Catholics believe **that partaking of Communion is crucial to their salvation. There is no warrant for this doctrine in scripture.** Even Catholicism's own St Augustine taught that Christ's references to His body and blood are merely figures bidding us communicate in His sufferings (ref Augustine - On Christian Doctrine).

**##** The Lutheran Doctrine of **Consubstantiation** is just as fallacious as the doctrine of transubstantiation. This denies that the elements are changed into the actual body and the blood of Christ but it asserts that the **literal presence of Christ is present in, under, and with the elements** so Christ can be received sacramentally by those taking Communion. **Sacramentally means necessary to salvation.** This is much the same as what Roman Catholicism teaches and like the Catholic teaching is also not scriptural.

**##** The non-Lutheran Protestant Doctrine of **Symbolic Commemoration** teaches that what Jesus says about eating His body and drinking His blood is not to be taken literally but only symbolically, and that the observance of Communion is a commemoration of the death of Christ in which Christ is spiritually present. The Lord's Supper is therefore a **Memorial Feast**. As they receive the bread and the wine, symbolic in their nature, it is an acknowledgement by those partaking of Communion that their **salvation is solely through the**

**broken body and the shed blood of Christ.** To eat the bread and drink the wine is to commemorate Christ's death and accept the benefits He has provided for us in His death until He comes again. **This is the correct teaching (CP Jn 6:47-63).** These passages are the continuation of a long discourse by Jesus contrasting the manna, the bread which the Jews' forefathers ate and which could not save them, with Himself, the Bread of Life, and they must be kept in the context of that teaching to better understand them. They provide us with the most in-depth explanation of Communion in scripture and while Jesus is not making a direct reference to Communion, this discourse conveys the same truth in words that Communion conveys in action (CP V27-35).

When scriptures are kept in context it is quite clear that the expressions Jesus uses about eating His body and drinking His blood are to be understood spiritually. They are used figuratively not literally. In V51 Jesus is in effect saying, "I will give this bread which symbolises my body given in death to save the world." (CP V51). By comparing V47-48 with V53-54 we see **that believing in Jesus is the same as eating His body and drinking His blood.** We receive spiritual life by believing in Christ and sharing in the redemptive benefits of His death on the cross (CP V47-48 with V53-54 and 63). Jesus teaches in V63 that even if we could literally eat His body and drink His blood it would not save our souls. This clearly refutes both the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation and the Lutheran Doctrine of Consubstantiation. The life Jesus speaks of is spiritual and eternal life, not fleshly life. Eating of Christ simply means that man must accept by faith what Christ has done for him and live by obedience to Him without sin so the penalty will not have to be paid again (CP 1Cor 11:23-32). Paul received the revelation of the Lord's Supper direct from Jesus Himself. It is clearly symbolic in nature, and as the word **remembrance** in V24-25 signifies, it is a memorial of Christ. Those who partake of Communion must do so reverently, remembering always the atoning sacrifice of Christ's death for them. But it is not meant to be a morbid re-enactment of Christ's death. Rather it is to bring to remembrance the purpose of the cross and Christ's victory over it (CP Ac 2:22-24; 3:13-18; 5:30-31; Col 2:13-15). Christ bore more than our sins in His suffering and death. He also bore our grieves and our sorrows - our sicknesses and our pains. Grieves translates to sicknesses and sorrows translates to pains from their Greek root words so there is not only spiritual healing in Christ's atoning death but there is physical healing as well (CP Isa 53:3-6; Mt 8:16-17; Ga 3:13-14,29; 1Pe 2:24). These scriptures prove bodily healing

in the atonement. (See Lesson 10 - Healing - for a more detailed teaching on this subject) As we take unto ourselves the elements of the Lord's Supper representing Christ's body and blood, we take unto ourselves all the promises of God that are yea and amen in Christ - all the salvation benefits He purchased for us with His blood (CP Jn 14:12-14; 2Cor 1:19-20).

As was noted earlier, there are only two requirements specified in scripture for participating in the Lord's Supper: **participants must be saved, and their lives must be consistent with the mission of Christ.** Since Communion symbolises the inward experience of grace, only those who have participated in Christ's death can commemorate His death. Participants have to examine themselves before taking part in Communion (CP 1Cor 11:27-32). Paul draws out for us here the implications of the nature of Communion. If any believer is conscious of any sin in their life not yet repented of and confessed, or are cherishing anything in their heart not consistent with the Christian walk, they should not partake of Communion. This does not mean that Christians have to be perfect to partake of Communion. Believers honestly and earnestly striving after holiness, doing all that lies within them to live according to God's word and being sincerely repentant over any sins committed and confessed, are at perfect liberty to take Communion. The memory of the greatness of Christ's sacrifice should cause participants to abstain from sin (CP V26 with Ro 6:1-13). To eat and drink unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body, is to partake of the Lord's Supper in an indifferent, self-centred, careless and irreverent manner, treating the Lord's Supper as a common meal, the bread and the cup as common things, not attributing to them their solemn symbolic importance as representing the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus. Those who do this are held responsible for Christ's death. They eat and drink future judgment upon themselves. We must never treat Communion as though it were meaningless. The Corinthian Church did and they paid for it, and whilst we are not meant to morbidly re-enact Christ's death every time we have Communion, we are meant to be sensitive to His suffering and ignominious death on the cross that brought healing for our bodies and salvation for our souls. Communion depicts the total work of Christ on man's behalf and reflects in one act man's total response to this work, and though there is no saving grace in Communion, when believers receive the elements they receive spiritual blessings in proportion to the faith they exercise in Christ. **The commemorative or memorial aspect of**

**Communion lies not in its nature but within the heart of the believer. It is here that faith in Christ's atoning death is exercised by the participant. Just as the Passover is a perpetual memorial feast commemorating the Jews being spared by the death angel in time past, so the Lord's Supper serves the same purpose for Christians. As we partake of the bread and drink from the cup we are taken back in time and realise that each of us individually stands at the foot of the cross acknowledging the salvation that Jesus purchased for us with His blood.**

**How often we partake of Communion depends entirely upon the respective fellowships and individual believers. It is not specified in scripture, however it was a regular observance by the first century Church and it was the focal point of their worship. The word often in 1Cor 11:25-26 suggests regularity but it is not binding upon believers (CP Ac 2:46; 20:7). Many Churches do commemorate weekly, as the first century Church did; many others though do it once a month.**