

A Concise Study of...

THE LORD'S SUPPER



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The Lord's Supper's...

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THE LORD'S SUPPER ORIGINS

Consider the following verses:

“**Now these things happened as examples** for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.” – 1 Corinthians 10:6

“**Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction,** upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” – 1 Corinthians 10:11

“**For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come** and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.” – Hebrews 10:1

“⁴ Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; ⁵ who **serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things**, just as Moses ^[d] was warned by God when he was about to erect the ^[e] tabernacle; for, **“SEE,” He says, “THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.”** – Hebrews 8:5+6

“²³ Therefore it was necessary **for the copies of the things in the heavens** to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.” – Hebrews 9:23

“¹⁶ Therefore no one is to ^[n] act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath ^[o] day— ¹⁷ **things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the ^[p] substance ^[q] belongs to Christ.**” – Colossians 2:16+17

The above verses inform us that **what we understand and practice from the New Testament has its origins in the Old Testament:**

Examples (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11)

Shadows (Hebrews 8:5+6, 10:1; Colossians 2:16+17)

Copies (Hebrews 8:5+6, 9:23)

Therefore, anything we read from the Old Testament is foreshadowed in the New Testament, which gives us a complete picture of God's revelation to us.

By contrast, if we deliberately ignore the examples, shadows, and copies that Scripture tells us to examine, we destroy the original purpose of the Old Testament Law and practice, which was to give us a glimpse of the glorious things to come in the New Testament.

The question is then begged: where is the Lord's Supper exemplified, foreshadowed, and copied from in the Old Testament?

- 1) "Communion Table" - Exodus 25:23-30
- 2) "Unleavened Bread" - Leviticus 24:5+6
- 3) As a "Memorial" - Leviticus 24:7
- 4) For the nourishment of the "Priesthood" - Leviticus 24:8+9
- 5) Only for those "washed in water" - Leviticus 22:6
- 6) Every week - Leviticus 24:8+9
- 7) A time of self-examination - Leviticus 21:6
- 8) As a communion (literally, "a participation" or "link") between God and man - Leviticus 24:8+9
- 9) Eating the showbread "improperly" resulted in judgment - Leviticus 21:6
- 10) It was a witness to all of Israel - Leviticus 24:8+9

The above facts foreshadow what we know of the Lord's Supper from the New Testament in many ways:

The Lord's Supper is...

- 1) A memorial. (Luke 22:19+20)
- 2) A witness to the world. (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- 3) A communion (literally, "a participation", or "link") with God and fellow believers (1 Corinthians 11:33).
- 4) A time of self-examination. (1 Corinthians 11:28)
- 5) A divine, weekly appointment with our Lord. (Luke 22:16; Acts 20:7)
- 6) Able to render judgment – even physical ailment and death. (1 Corinthians 11:28-30)
- 7) It can render blessing. (1 Corinthians 10:16-18)
- 8) It was and is to be practiced weekly (Acts 2:42, 20:7; Heb. 10:25)
- 9) Practiced with unleavened bread (Matthew 26:17+26; Mark 14:12+22; Luke 22:7+19; 1 Corinthians 5:8)
- 10) Exemplified in the Old Testament (Hebrews 9:2)

It is easy to see (and not every example, shadow, or copy has been stated here) that the Lord's Supper had its origin foreshadowed in the Old Testament Table of Showbread. This means that how we practice it today should still resemble that shadow; if it does not, then we are destroying the type God specifically setup for us by establishing first the Table of Showbread, and then the Lord's Supper, for our benefit!

PURPOSES

The purposes behind the Lord's Supper are the following:

- 1) It is a memorial (Luke 22:19+20).
- 2) It is a witness to the world (1 Corinthians 11:26).
- 3) It is a communion (literally, "a participation", or "link") with God and fellow believers (1 Corinthians 11:33).
- 4) A time of self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28).
- 5) To keep a divine, weekly appointment with our Lord (Luke 22:16; Acts 20:7).
- 6) To fulfill its shadow from the Old Testament (Hebrews 9:2)

Therefore, the denominations are wrong when they say that the Lord's Supper, like they also interpret baptism, is "just a symbol." It is a memorial, but so much more: a witness, a communion/participation/link with Christ and our fellow believers, a divine appointment, and a fulfillment of the Old Testament's shadow of it, all according to Scripture.

As well, Catholicism is inaccurate when it says that the Lord's Supper's (called "the Eucharist" in Catholicism) focus is a Catholic concept called "transubstantiation", defined by their catechism to be the "mysterious transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ."

Outside of Jesus metaphorically saying, "This is my body" or "this is my blood", there is no teaching in the New Testament (or foreshadowed in the Old Testament) that the bread and juice in the Lord's Supper turn into anything at all. How can we know that for sure?

In each instance where Jesus said, “This is my body” or “this is my blood”, he says so while he is still holding the bread and juice before consumption. Catholicism teaches that “transubstantiation” does not occur until the bread and juice are consumed. If Jesus was being literal, then by the time the bread and juice enter our mouths, they would already be literal flesh and blood! Not only is this simply revolting, and is simply against the entire thrust of New Testament teaching on the Lord’s Supper:

First, the Lord’s Supper is a memorial, or by definition, a symbol. The bread and juice are symbols from beginning to end, just as the showbread in the Old Testament was bread from the time it was set to the time it was consumed.

Second, the Lord’s Supper does not render its benefits from any kind of transmuting process, but rather by God’s blessing in our obedience to Him, just like baptism is not about the water, but our obedience to be immersed into water where he thereby bestows the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:18-22).

Third, calling the Lord’s Supper is a mystery is against Scripture: in Colossians 1:26+27 tells us that the mysteries from the past (Old Testament) are now “fully revealed” to the saints (New Testament). Colossians 2:2 and 4:3 emphasizes the same – the mystery has been revealed, no longer hidden! See also Romans 11:25, 16:25, Ephesians 1:9, 3:3+4, 9, and 6:19.

Making the Lord’s Supper to be “a mystery” or part of religious mysticism is not a Christian concept at all, but rather a Gnostic one, where “secret knowledge” or “secret words” were necessary to fully grasp God’s will. Not at all! The mystery that is Christ is fully revealed!

TERMINOLOGY

Sometimes the Lord's Supper is called "Communion", "the breaking of bread", or "the Eucharist." Which is the Scriptural name?

First, we can eliminate "the Eucharist" as not being Scriptural. Although it is a Greek word, it is not used in the New Testament to refer to the Lord's Supper. It is simply a nice word that means "gratitude" that the Catholic and Orthodox churches picked up as a label for the Lord's Supper.

Second, the Lord's Supper is called just that in 1 Corinthians 11:20, so certainly that is a Scriptural name.

Third, the Lord's Supper is also called a communion/participation or other term (depending on translation) in 1 Corinthians 10:16-18, so that is also a Scriptural name.

Fourth, the Lord's Supper is called "the breading of bread" in Acts 2:42, 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 10:16, so that is as well a Scriptural name.

Therefore, any name but "the Eucharist" above is a proper term for the Lord's Supper.

Some will question whether "the breaking of bread" is really communion or just people eating. Many denominational scholars certainly argue this point, so which is it?

It is simple: when you see the definite article "the" in front of "breaking of bread" (as in Acts 2:42, or 20:7), that is the Lord's Supper. If you just see "breaking of bread" like in Acts 2:47, it just means people were sharing a meal together.

The definite article "the" in English draws distinction to a concept that would not otherwise be distinct. For example:

“A car” could be any car.

“The car” means we are talking about a specific car.

“A house” means we could be talking about any house.

“The house” means we are talking about a specific house.

All the same, when we see a “breaking of bread” in Scripture not preceded by the definite article “the” (as in the above examples), then we are not talking about the Lord’s Supper.

Therefore, when we do see “breaking of bread” preceded by the definite article “the”, we can be certain we are talking about the Lord’s Supper, as it is a distinct breaking of bread, not just any meal shared.

FREQUENCY

A common (but false) plea for Christian unity commonly says, “The frequency of the Lord’s Supper should not be something believers argue about.”

There are both Scriptural and merely practical reasons why a WEEKLY Lord’s Supper is the only Scriptural option:

1) It is a good question to ask why any church **always** takes up a weekly offering, but many do not have a weekly Lord’s Supper? Is not the latter at least as important as the former, if not much more so?

2) Do we have a right to stray from the pattern of the New Testament, where communion was not only practiced weekly, but THE primary reason why the church met? See Acts 20:7

3) The Lord has always expected His people to follow the pattern He has set down for His ordinances: Exodus 25:9, 40; Numbers 8:4; 1

Chronicles 28:19; Acts 7:44; Philippians 3:17; Hebrews 8:5. Do we have a right to stray from the pattern? No!

4) The Old Testament showbread was consumed weekly by the priests (Leviticus 24:8+9). This very concept is used by Paul as an illustration in 1 Corinthians 10:16-18 in reference to the Lord's Supper!

5) The Old Testament's showbread was a shadow of the Lord's Supper (see pages 2-4 above). The showbread was consumed weekly; the only fulfillment of the shadow is a weekly Lord's Supper.

6) Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 10:16-18 that the bread and juice consumed are a "blessing" to us in the same way that the bread on the table of showbread served as nourishment to the priests. As priests of the New Covenant, so we too have nourishment from the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. To deny ourselves the weekly Lord's Supper is to deny ourselves the very sustaining spiritual nourishment that Christ means to give us to our perseverance in the faith!

7) The Lord's Supper is a witness to the world (1 Corinthians 11:26). Are we to be a witness as the corporate body of Christ every time we assemble weekly (Hebrews 10:25), or only monthly or quarterly or possibly never?

8) Paul's instructions to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11 with regards to their improper partaking of the Lord's Supper is in the context of their weekly assembly and weekly "love feast". Why should we assume that the Lord's Supper was arbitrarily less than weekly when seen in the context of this passage?

9) All other essential elements of worship (preaching, prayer, and giving) were always practiced weekly. To assume any other element of service was anything but weekly is simply assumption and not Scriptural.

10) Jesus said specifically in Luke 22:16 that He would not eat the Lord's Supper He had just established again until He ate it with us in the Kingdom of God. When did the Kingdom of God begin and thus the Lord's Supper begin to be practiced? In Acts 2, when after Jesus' Commission (Matthew 28:18-20, where He begins by saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me", making Him King of His Kingdom), ascension and coronation in Heaven as King (Daniel 7:13+14), the first sermon was preached, the first converts immersed, and the first Lord's Supper held right thereafter (Acts 2:42). Therefore, we still have a weekly appointment with Christ, as the first church members had! Shall we stand up our Lord? Surely not!

EFFECTS

1 Corinthians 11:27-30 states, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰ For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number ^ssleep."

This passage begs many questions:

1) If the Lord's Supper is "just a memorial", as denominationalism purports, then how can it render judgment, sickness, weakness, or even death upon those who practice it "in an unworthy manner"?

This is simply because the Lord's Supper is not "just a memorial." Scripture states that the Lord's Supper is a witness, a communion/participation/link with Christ and our fellow believers, a divine

appointment, and a fulfillment of the Old Testament's shadow of it, all according to Scripture. See page 5 above for further details.

2) What is “an unworthy manner”?

This means to take the Lord's Supper flippantly, or for granted. Some will deny themselves the Lord's Supper if they feel “unworthy” but that is not the meaning here at all! No, it is a matter that someone may take the the Lord's Supper “just because” others are doing it, but instead need to realize the very thing they are doing has real and definite effects, and should never be taken lightly. When taken reverently, with self-examination and understanding, the Lord's Supper is a blessing equivalent to essential nourishment to the soul (1 Corinthians 10:16-18).

3) What does it mean to be “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord”? If a person partakes of the Lord's Supper “in an unworthy manner”, it becomes a matter of unrepentant sin. Also see Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26-31 for context involving Christians who persist in unrepentant sin, and the inherent danger therein.

4) What is the mandated self-examination?

The Lord's Supper gives us an opportunity not only to receive essential nourishment from the body and blood of Christ each week (1 Corinthians 10:16-18), but to do so by confessing our sins before God and seeking His forgiveness, which He is eager to provide (1 John 1:9). This weekly examination, confession, and forgiveness, prepares us to receive the body and blood of Christ's benefits again, both to our perseverance, but also as a witness to the world of a refreshed, forgiven soul from week to week.

5) If the Lord's Supper can render judgment when partaken improperly, does it bestow blessing if partaken Scripturally?

YES! This is something almost entirely lost in the modern understanding surrounding the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-18, Paul specifically refers to the bread and juice in the Lord's Supper as a "blessing" to us, directly comparing it to the nourishment given to the priests upon their consumption of the showbread in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, every immersed believer is a priest (1 Peter 2:5), and thus when we enter our weekly worship, we enter as priests, to receive our nourishment! However, we receive our nourishment not from bread that goes stale, but from contact again with the very body and blood of Christ that gives us forgiveness and the hope of eternal life!

Therefore, we can see that the Lord's Supper is a memorial, but much more so. Its effects on the partaker – positive or negative – are very real!

IN REVIEW

1) The Lord's Supper's origins were foreshadowed in the Old Testament table of showbread, which was with unleavened bread, prepared and eaten weekly by the priests, for their nourishment, in communion with God.

2) The Lord Supper is a memorial, but also a witness to the world, a communion with God and our fellow believers, and a divine appointment.

3) The Scriptural terms for the Lord's Supper include "the Lord's Supper", "the breaking of bread", or "communion."

4) The only Scriptural frequency for the Lord's Supper is weekly.

5) The effects of the Lord's Supper are real and serious. We should partake it in self-examination, seeking God's forgiveness and blessing.

In conclusion, may we practice the Lord's Supper by God's Word alone!