



Grace Community Bible Church

ELDER'S PERSPECTIVE SERIES

Communion

The Elder's Perspective series articulate key biblical and theological convictions of the Elders at Grace Community Bible Church.

THE Lord Jesus Christ gave us two specific commands for the Church; to baptise and to celebrate a communion time in honour of Him. Baptism by its nature can only be experienced once per believer, but the Lord's Supper is to be an ongoing celebration.

ORIGIN

The command to celebrate the Lord's Supper was given during the celebration of an Old Testament feast called the Passover. Jesus said to His disciples that He would celebrate the Passover with them (Matthew 26:18). But during the Passover meal Jesus did something quite out of the ordinary for that feast; instead of placing the focus on the past event He pointed to a new celebration that would be done in remembrance of Him. Jesus identified Himself with the Passover Lamb, as was foretold by John the Baptist, "**Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29). Jesus said to His disciples, "**this is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.**" (Luke 22:19).

In effect Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament feast and made it now a time of remembrance of His shed Blood for us. We find that the early church followed that command and began to practice the observance of the Lord's Supper on a regular basis (Acts 2:42).

SIGNIFICANCE

The Lord's Supper has numerous meanings: one is the remembrance of the Lord and what He has done for us, and the second aspect being the fellowship of this special time. Jesus told His disciples to do this, and it can be implied that it is the Church who is being told to come together and do this in remembrance of the Lord. We are told to remember His death for us, which speaks of the past. We are looking at a time in history that is specific and can say, "this is the moment when Our Saviour bore our sins."

And by going through the same motions and words of that night we somehow transport that past event into the present, which makes it very much a part of our lives. In Luke 22:20 Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. . ." So the significance has a present reality in that it instituted the new covenant, which is presently at work in our lives.

The Lord's Supper also has a future meaning which is indicated in Matthew 26:29, "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus points us towards the day in the future when we will "break bread" with Him. Thus, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper today, we can think of that glorious day coming, when we will be with our Saviour and enjoy His fellowship.

MODE

The sharing of the bread and the wine occurred at the Passover meal. But having a meal is not a requirement for the remembrance today. Moreover, the early church appeared to have a love feast prior to the actual celebrating of the elements. The Scriptures indicate that the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup occurred during the meal (Matthew 26:27).

However, most scholars agree that the "remembrance" only includes the bread and the wine. There is a certain practice indicated in the Scriptures that apply to the celebration of the supper: first the giving of thanks for the blessing of salvation that the elements

symbolize (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25); and secondly, after the prayer, the elements are shared with the people for them to eat and drink. The actual elements are shown in Scripture to be bread and wine.

The custom of the day had a great impact on the elements used. Bread and wine were commonly used for nourishment and had become symbols of the spiritual nourishment and blessing of God (Genesis 14:18, 27:28, 37; Amos 9:13). Thus they were fitting symbols to be used at that feast. Today because of our different cultures we have somewhat differing elements.

While we still use a type of bread, it is the wine that most often is changed. Our society raises people who have had very little exposure to wines as children, mainly due to refrigeration of other drinks. Also our wines are far more "potent" than the wines of the "Bible Times" that were "cut" with water. **The emphasis in Scripture is not on the nature of the bread and the wine, but on their symbolic significance.**

A few words need to be said about the "bread" used by most churches. Nothing should ever be used that would be offensive to the mouth, for this is to be a rather solemn moment. Many churches use little pieces of tiny hard bread that has the consistency and taste of a piece of chalk! And while this is not in itself wrong – it could be distracting to the communion. The use of "fresh" bread – readily available would be an improvement on the "chalk."

The question also is often asked – should we not then use unleavened bread and real wine as used in the original communion service. This argument is often followed by a reference to the scriptural use of leaven. Some believe that because leaven typifies sin – then the bread used in communion should be unleavened. It is important to note here the complete argument.

If we draw on the original account as our example – then we must partake of communion during a meal – and indeed during a Passover meal – not during a church service. While that was most likely the custom of the First century church – this custom died out before long and communion became part of our regular worship.

Moreover, if we desire to return to the example given in the upper room in all its practical details – then we must use "real fermented wine" – with the appropriate water added and relevant historical fermentation processes.

If we argue that leaven typifies sin and therefore is inappropriate for our communion bread to contain leaven – then we also misunderstand what it is about leaven that typifies sin. It is the **spreading** qualities of leaven that typifies the **spreading** qualities of sin. Moreover – this is illustrated by Matthew 13:33 **"He told them another parable. 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.'"**

However, it is clear from Scripture that the type of bread or the contents of the bread is not important. Firstly if it were so then Paul at least with his propensity for detail would have made this important factor clear in his epistles that deal with communion. Secondly – in some cases of Old Testament worship – God actually specified that leaven be used in offerings and worship. One such example is found in Leviticus 23:17 **You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as first fruits to the Lord.** Other laws concerning worship included the use of both leavened and unleavened bread. Leviticus 7:11-13 **"And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings that one may offer to the Lord. If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the thanksgiving sacrifice unleavened**

loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of fine flour well mixed with oil. With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving he shall bring his offering with loaves of leavened bread.

In another place – leaven is spoken of as the teachings of legalists who would bind up the lives and practices of genuine Christians. In fact it was Christ himself who warned his disciples of their legalism. He said in Matthew 16:6, "**Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"

And when his disciples assumed that he was speaking about bread – he answered them by saying - Matthew 16:11-12 "**How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"

And so it is the Eldership's conclusion that the make-up of the elements are irrelevant to the remembrance and the significance of Christ's death and shed blood to purchase the people of God.

EFFICACY

What are the personal benefits and blessings for the obedient Christian in partaking of communion?

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him." (John 6:56). **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life."** (John 6:54). The efficacy of the Lord's Supper is in the form of blessings as the two previous verses reveal. Like our understanding of the efficacy of Baptism, we know that **there is no saving grace** offered through the Lord's Supper. For salvation is by faith and faith alone. Whenever we are given a command from the Lord, we can expect a blessing from the obedience to the command. John 6:56 seems to indicate that partaking of the Lord's Supper draws us in close fellowship with the Lord. We believe much in the same way that sin reduces the joy of the fellowship, so also taking of the bread and the wine restores the blessings of salvation.

John 6:54 speaks of the eternal life that is given to those who will partake in the broken body and shed blood of our Saviour. While this has a direct meaning of initial salvation by faith in Christ, we believe that it could have a secondary reference to the daily blessings associated with eternal life. We think of it in much of the same way as the abundant life promised in John 10:10. Close fellowship with Christ is attained by being obedient to His commands. Part of the blessing is a direct result of the requirement that the believer confess his sins by an examination of his soul. Failure to do this will result in the person eating and drinking judgment upon himself (1Corinthians 11:29).

LIMITATIONS

On the subject of unworthy participation First Corinthians chapter 11 gives clear instruction. 1 Corinthians. 11:27-32

"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But

when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

In the same way a person trampling the Australian flag underfoot indicates that person's attitude to the government the flag represents – so also does the actions and attitudes of Christians towards the emblems demonstrate their attitude to the One the emblems represent. Consequently it is a serious thing to partake of communion "lightly," For to partake in an unworthy manner is to consider the emblems as of little or no consequence. This dishonours the Lord and is tantamount to treating with indifference the person of Christ.

Therefore – the instruction is given to each person – brother or sister – to engage in rigorous self-examination, confession of sin and manifestation of repentance (and restitution, if necessary) to ensure the emblems are received in a worthy spiritual condition. **This examination has in view the partaking of the elements – NOT STAYING AWAY FROM THE SUPPER.**

Verse 30 of this passage gives us a stern warning. That **is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.** It is a three-fold judgment that comes upon those who eat and drink unworthily.

1. **Weakness** – indicating a general weakness, which could be both spiritual and physical.
2. **Sickness** – which is clearly physical illness.
3. And **Sleep** – or death which means dead physically.

How deeply solemn is the announcement that God will not tolerate such conduct and in His judgment He removes their testimony and presence at the Table. His ways of temporal discipline can be severe. The case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 illustrates the extreme severity of His chastening hand. May the fear of the Lord mark us in this area.

Verse 32 draws our attention then to the distinction between the believer and the world. The man of the world may do with seeming impunity that for which the Christian is chastened – for his judgment lies in the future and the Christian is disciplined in order that he might become a "partaker of his holiness" (Heb 12:10).

SUBJECTS

The Lord's Supper was given by Christ to the Church through the disciples. In other words it was given to all believers. In Acts 2 we find Peter calling people to "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven" (Acts 2:38). The text follows that those who accepted his message were baptised, and in verse 42 we find them devoting themselves to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

CONCLUSION

In the local church the Lord's Supper must be given careful significance. It should be clearly pointed out that only self-examined believers are to participate. We agree with most Bible scholars who would have the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Sunday) during the morning or evening service. Usually those who come to this service are the true believers. It could also be advantageous to alternate between the morning

and evening services to help those who may have jobs that require them to work every Sunday morning for example.

Therefore – we at Grace Community Bible Church will make communion available to any Christian who is not in obvious known sin – and who has personally trusted Christ as Lord and Saviour. We would **NOT** make communion available to children under the age of 12 (unless as in an exceptional circumstance where the child could clearly articulate his or her faith and a clear living testimony of regeneration seen). Moreover, we would discourage parents from either giving or allowing their children access to the emblems so as to maintain the clear distinction between the regenerate and the unregenerate.



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