

# The Lord's Supper

Regarding the Lord's Supper (also called "communion"), we find the following in our statement of beliefs:

*The Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His [Jesus'] death until He comes, and should be always preceded by solemn self examination (1 Corinthians 11:23-32). The elements of Communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ. The Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way, fellowshiping with His people - 1 Corinthians 10:16*

This paper is an attempt by the leaders of Antioch Christian Church to provide a biblical foundation for this understanding of the Lord's Supper.

## The Origin

The historical origin of the Lord's Supper is the final supper that Jesus ate with His disciples the night before He was crucified. The actions and meaning of it are all rooted in what Jesus did the next day.

### The Exodus:

The Jewish Passover is described in Exodus 12, Leviticus 23:4-8, Numbers 9:1-14 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8. This yearly festival reminded them of the night God led them out of their Egyptian slavery. It was the Passover that Jesus celebrated with His disciples on the night before His crucifixion.

### The Gospels:

The Gospels of Matthew (26:26-28), Mark (14:22-25), and Luke (22:14-20) all tell of the "Last Supper" that Jesus had with His disciples the night before He died. Jesus tells them that the bread is His body and the cup is His blood of the covenant (Matthew & Mark). In Luke 22:19, He says, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" The Gospel of John contains teachings in which Jesus speaks of Himself as the bread of life (John 6:25-59).

### Paul and the Early Church:

As far as we can tell from the earliest records, the church did what Jesus said: They reenacted that supper in remembrance of Jesus and His death. Paul's letters are the earliest testimony that we have. In 1 Corinthians 11:20, he refers to an event in the life of the church called "*the Lord's Supper.*"

## The Participants

The Lord's Supper is an act of the Church – the gathered family of those who believe in Jesus (1 Cor 11:18, 20, 33). Some churches practice "*closed communion,*" meaning that only members of that specific church may participate. On the other hand, we at Antioch practice "*open communion.*" We invite all who have professed their faith in Jesus Christ and been baptized to participate.

By its nature, the Lord's Supper is not an act for unbelievers. However, there is nothing secretive about the Lord's Supper and unbelievers may be present. In that way, it is a public act of worship by which the gathered church "*proclaims the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Cor 11:26).

## The Action

The physical action of the Lord's Supper is eating bread and drinking the cup. Nothing is specified in scripture about the kind of bread or the way it is broken. And, only one statement by Jesus describes what was in the cup. (In Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25 and Luke 22:18, Jesus refers to it as the "*fruit of the vine.*") Following the tradition of most protestant churches, we use wafer crackers and grape juice at Antioch when partaking of the Lord's Supper. While we do not feel that we should make a big argument over the actual elements used, we do believe that we should celebrate the Lord's Supper with a sense of weightiness and therefore should be concerned about irreverent substitutes.

Likewise, there is nothing in the New Testament prescribing the frequency of the Lord's Supper. However, it seems there is evidence that the early church observed it weekly. (See Acts 2:42, 20:7; and *First Apology* by Justin Martyr.) As we consider observance of the Lord's Supper to be the centerpiece of our worship, we celebrate it each week at Antioch.

## In Remembrance

Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24,25). The participants of the Lord's Supper are to focus the mind on Jesus. As we do the physical act of eating and drinking, we are to do the mental act of remembering. That is, we are to consciously call to mind the person of Jesus as He once lived, the work of Jesus as He once died and rose again, and what His work means for the forgiveness for our sins. Each time, the Lord's Supper roots us in the historical work of Jesus' death for our sins.

## Spiritual Participation

Those who eat and drink the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner partake of Christ's body and blood - not physically, but *spiritually* - in that, by faith, they are nourished with the benefits He obtained through His death, and thus grow in grace. Here is something much deeper than remembering. In this regard, there are three beautiful aspects of the Lord's Supper that are described in Scripture. The *first* is the **spiritual participation** in the body and blood of Christ:

*<sup>16</sup>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? <sup>17</sup>Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.*  
- 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Believers are *spiritually* participating in His death when they *physically* take of the bread and cup. This is similar to our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ in baptism.

*Secondly*, believers are being **spiritually nourished** by the body and blood of Christ just as Israel was nourished by God in the desert with manna (Exodus 16:31-35). Christ Himself taught this mystery:

*<sup>32</sup>(Jesus said) it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ...<sup>35</sup>Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.*  
-John 6:32-33, 35. See also John 4:13 and 6:53-58.

*Lastly*, and again in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, we see this picture of communion as an act of obedience to Christ's command for remembrance when the gathered church comes together and "breaks bread". This is a picture of how **each believer is part of the body of Christ** and our dependence on Him and each other (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 25-27; Romans 12:4-5; Colossians 1:24, 2:19, 3:15; Ephesians 4:15-16, 4:25, 5:30). Eating together in the cultures of both the Old and New Testaments was an intimate experience of fellowship.

## Sacred Seriousness

In 1 Corinthians 11:1-22, we see Paul addressing issues in the early church about how the believers were participating in the Lord's Supper. There were divisions among the believers and they were taking communion in an unworthy manner. They were coming into the sacred ceremony such that Paul rebukes them saying "*it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.*" (1 Corinthians 11:20). Paul writes:

*<sup>26</sup>For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. <sup>27</sup>So then, 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. <sup>28</sup>Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. <sup>29</sup>For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. <sup>30</sup>That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. <sup>31</sup>But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. <sup>32</sup>Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.*  
- 1 Corinthians 11:26-32

Paul calls them to examine their hearts and motives. Then he warns them that the consequence is judgment that has already resulted in sickness and death for some of them.

## At Antioch Christian Church

Each week, as the gathered body of Christ and in obedience to the Lord Himself, we are to solemnly examine our hearts to celebrate the Lord's Supper. In this, we remember all that Christ has done for us, proclaiming His death

until He comes again. Additionally, we fellowship with each other and with Him as we spiritually participate in His body and blood, represented by the bread and cup.