

Understanding the Lord’s Supper

By Kent Crockett

www.makinglifecount.net

1 Cor. 11:23-26 I want to talk about “Understanding the Lord’s Supper.” I can remember the first time I took communion when I was a young boy. It was at a Presbyterian Church. I ate the bread and drank the little cup of grape juice, and I kept feeling the muscle on my arm to see if it was getting bigger. I knew Popeye got stronger when he ate spinach, so I thought that’s what was supposed to happen to me!

I wasn’t the first person to misunderstand the Lord’s Supper. On one hand there are people who believe that the bread and wine actually becomes the body and blood of Jesus. On the other hand, there are people who look at it as just a religious ritual with no meaning at all. Both are wrong. There are basically two different views on the Lord’s Supper.

One view is called “Trans-substantiation.” “Transubstantiation” means “a change in substance.” This view believes that the bread and wine actually turns into the body and blood of Jesus.

In 831 AD, a Benedictine Monk named Paschasius Radbertus published a treatise on Communion where he advocated that at the Lord’s Supper the bread and the wine is actually changed into the body and blood of Christ. Catholic Churches and many Lutheran Churches, which broke off from Catholic Church during the Reformation, believe this doctrine. I’m not trying to ridicule these churches—I’m just telling you what they believe about the Lord’s Supper.

When I was in 7th grade, I attended a Lutheran school where I learned a lot about God’s Word. One day we had a “True or False” Test about certain things in the Bible. One question stated, “When we take communion, the bread and the wine becomes the body and blood of Jesus.” I put “false.”

I remember getting my test back and it was marked incorrect. So I went up to the teacher and said, “You made a mistake by marking this wrong. It represents His body and blood.” I remember her saying, “No, we believe it actually becomes His body and blood.” I was stunned by her answer. I had never heard that before and I remember thinking, “That can’t be right!”

Of course, there are several problems with this view.

1. Exactly when does the bread and the wine change into the body and blood of Jesus? It was decided the transformation would take place when the priest said in Latin, “This is my body.” The priest would wave his hands over the bread and wine and say, “hoc est corpus meum” (which means, “This is my body”), and at that very moment it would be changed into the complete body of Christ, even down to the last eyelash and toenail. (By the way, this is where the phrase “Hocus pocus” comes from—the magician says “hocus pocus” when he does a trick and it’s supposed to instantly change.)

2. How could Christ’s body exist in thousands of churches at the same time, and could be compacted down to one small piece of bread. They also couldn’t explain why it still tasted like bread and wine.

3. What if a mouse should eat the bread, or a dog lap up the wine? If the bread and wine literally was the body and blood of Christ, Jesus could be living inside of a mouse or a dog. They had some serious discussions on what should be done if a person were to vomit after receiving the sacrament.

4. How do you dispose of the excess bread and wine? After the Eucharist is finished, the leftovers are still supposed to be the literal body and blood of Christ. If it’s actually turned into Jesus, how can you throw it in the garbage or pour it down the drain? So in Canon VI at the Council of Trent, the leftover bread was ordered to be placed in a holder called the monstrance. Soon after this, entire congregations would proceed to the monstrance, bow down to the wafer of bread and worship it as the living Christ.

The other view is that the Lord’s Supper is Symbolic. We take it to remember His crucifixion and it does not become the body and blood of Christ. Communion is actually three things:

1. The Lord’s Supper is a Remembrance: (v.23-25)

Notice in 1 Corinthians 11:24 & 25, Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” Turn to **Luke 22:15-20**. The Lord’s Supper was the Passover Meal. That was a Feast in the Old Testament that they had observed every year for many centuries. For us to understand the Lord’s Supper, we need to first understand why they ate the Passover Meal.

A number of years ago, my mother came to visit with us for several days. I thought she might like a certain movie, so I went to the store and rented it. After about an hour of watching the movie, my mom said, “I’m sorry, but I just don’t understand this movie at all.” I picked up the video case and realized I had made a mistake. I had rented **the sequel** to the movie, which was part 2, instead of the original movie, which was part 1. She couldn’t understand Part 2 because she didn’t know anything about part 1.

In same way, we can’t understand Part 2 until we first know about Part 1. The New Covenant is part 2. The Old Covenant is part 1. We can’t understand Part II (the Lord’s Supper) until we first understand Part I (the Passover Feast). In the Old Testament, they killed a Passover Lamb and ate the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Look at this verse pertaining to the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread: **Deut. 16:3** “You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), **in order that you may remember** all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.”

The reason they ate Unleavened Bread at the Passover every year for centuries—was because God wanted them to **remember their deliverance** from

Egyptian bondage. God didn’t want them to forget how He set them free. That was Old Testament, part 1.

Now let’s look at Part 2. Jesus is in the Upper Room with His disciples and they are observing the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus had already told them that He was the bread that came down out of heaven (John 6:41). And now He is about to transition them from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. He is ending Part 1 (the Passover) and replacing it with Part 2 (the Lord’s Supper). The Lord’s Supper under the New Covenant, will now take the place of the Passover Meal & Feast of the Old Covenant.

Here is how He replaced it. At the Passover Meal, they had unleavened bread and wine. Jesus held up a piece of bread and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.” Did He really mean that the bread was literally His body, or did He mean it symbolized His body?

I want to show you something. “This is my wife, and this is me.” (show the congregation our picture). But this (picture) really isn’t my wife. She’s sitting over there. And this (picture) really isn’t me. Because I’m standing right here. This is just a picture of me and my wife.

When Jesus showed them the bread and said, “This is My body,” He didn’t mean it actually was His body because He was standing right there. He meant it was a picture, or symbol, of what He would be doing on the cross the next day. His body would be broken on the cross. That’s why He said to take the Lord’s Supper—to remember Him.

Jesus knew that people are quick to forget. He didn’t want us to forget what He did on the cross. So to insure that Christians throughout the ages would remember what He did on the cross (just like the Old Testament people observed the Passover Meal so they wouldn’t forget), He instituted the Lord’s Supper.

So, in effect, Jesus said, “I’m replacing the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. I’m the Passover Lamb who will die for your sins. Instead of eating the bread to remember your salvation from Egypt, I want you now to remember your salvation from sin.”

This little wafer of bread is symbolic of the worst suffering that any human being has experienced on earth. This cup is symbolic of the payment of every sin that has ever been committed or will be committed until He returns.

The cup is called the New Covenant. Jesus said, “This is My blood of the New Covenant.” But the cup was not literally the New Covenant, just like the bread is not literally His body. When they drank the cup, they did not drink the New Covenant. It was a symbol of His blood being shed on the cross.

Hebrews 9:17 says, “For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.” The New Covenant didn’t go into effect at the Last Supper, but when He died on the cross the next day.

2.The Lord’s Supper is a Proclamation: (v.26)

Verse 26 says “for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” In the Old Testament, they observed the

Passover until Jesus came. He replaced the Passover Meal with the Lord’s Supper.

So the Lord’s Supper does two things—it looks back to the 1st coming, when He died on the cross, but it also looks forward to the 2nd coming, when He returns. But then at the 2nd coming, the Lord’s Supper will end because we will be with Him at that time.

Luke 22:18 Jesus said, “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.”

Luke 22:29-30 Jesus told His disciples, “And just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom.” There will be no need to take the Lord’s Supper after He returns because every believer will be eating and drinking with Him in His Kingdom.

3. The Lord’s Supper is a Self-Examination (v.27-30)

1 Cor. 11:28 says, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

The early church usually took the Lord’s Supper when they had Agape Feasts. They would have a meal together, and then they would take the Lord’s Supper. The problem in Corinth, where Paul was writing to, was that some of them would get drunk at the Agape Feast by drinking too much wine (v.21). When we take the Lord’s Supper, we use grape juice, which is unfermented wine. Their wine was fermented because they didn’t have the refrigeration processes we have today. Some of them drank too much wine and got drunk.

Paul says because they got drunk and didn’t take the Lord’s Supper in a respectful way, some were physically weak and sick, and some had even died. That’s why it says in v.28 that we need to do a self-examination before we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Ask yourself:

1. Am I truly a Christian? If you aren’t, [you need to receive Christ](#) into your heart before you partake of it.
2. Is there a sin I need to repent of? Jesus died for our sins, but He also died to set us free from sin.
3. Do I need to forgive anyone? Jesus died to forgive us, and He told us we must forgive others.