

Why “Eat” the Lord’s Supper?

Intro: Our weekly presentations always make us aware of the importance of coming together on the first day of the week to eat the Lord’s Supper.

It is conceivable that the Lord could have said, “Come together; and remember what I have done for you.” In fact, it seems entirely reasonable that a memorial might only include memories and speeches about something of importance that has happened in the past. But it is often the case that memorials are accompanied by symbolic acts that empower the memories and add impact to them. Take for example, the typical Veteran’s Day Memorial services which may include flag displays that remind us of the unity of our nation, or the playing of taps which reminds us of the solemn funerals of the fallen.

In the same way the Lord’s Supper brings us together to partake of bread and fruit of the vine. So today I want to explore with you the question, “Why did God choose to remember Jesus through a supper or meal?”

Perhaps our method of observing the Lord’s Supper tends to direct us away from the conception of a supper or meal. I don’t suppose any of us would take a small pinch from a piece of bread and drink less than half an ounce of some beverage and say, “I have just eaten supper.” Yet this is essentially what we do each week in the Lord’s Supper.

Some have reacted to this idea by suggesting that the Lord’s Supper ought to be some kind of extended meal where much more bread is eaten and fruit of vine is drunk. Some have even gone so far as to incorporate the Lord’s Supper into a church potluck setting. All of this is misguided, since it is not necessary to eat a lot of bread or drink a lot of the fruit of the vine in order for the Lord’s Supper to maintain its essence as a memorial meal.

But we should think more Biblically about why the Lord might have commanded us to remember Jesus this way. Why not simply sing some songs about Jesus? Or symbolically crucify him in some ritual crucifixion? A part of how we might answer that question is taken from the place eating something with others has in the history of God’s people.

What was conveyed by eating together in Scripture?

Eating together conveyed love and acceptance.

In the long history of the OT we can see how inviting someone to eat was a first sign of hospitality toward others.

We only have to remember the story of Abraham who saw three men coming near his tent in the distance and how he ran out to them and offered refreshment to them, including the preparation of a meal for them:

“So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it, and make bread cakes.” Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf, and gave it to the servant; and he hurried to prepare it. And he took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.” (Genesis 18:6–8)

Abram’s gesture showed love of these strangers and his acceptance of them. Little did he know that these “men” were not mere mortals, but angels of God sent to announce the Lord’s blessing of a child for him and his wife Sarah.

Eating together conveyed that a covenant has been made between two parties.

Later in Genesis we can see that when Jacob and his family left Laban, for whom Jacob had worked so many years, there were obvious tensions between the two.

Laban pursued Jacob and his company and confronted him with his hasty and secret departure; but eventually he proposed that they enter a covenant of respect and protection with each other.

“So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.” (Genesis 31:44)

As a part of that covenant ceremony, they shared a meal together giving indications that their conflicts were being settled and that they were at peace with one another:

“Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain.” (Genesis 31:54)

Likewise, it is interesting that when the people of Israel came to Mount Sinai, the Lord came down upon the mountain and entered into a covenant with them by giving them his Law. Afterward sacrifices were offered to acknowledge the new relationship with Him; and Moses took some of the blood and ceremonially sprinkled it upon the people. And then notice what the Scripture says:

“Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank.” (Exodus 24:9–11)

This covenant ceremony was given concrete expression in the sharing of a meal in God’s presence.

Eating together conveyed gratitude to the Lord for blessing His people with material things.

All throughout Israel’s long history they would continue to sacrifice peace offerings to God and save a portion of them to eat in the Lord’s presence.

“and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God.” (Deuteronomy 27:7)

When the Israelites came to the tabernacle/temple to worship at the various festivals, they would eat in the presence of the Lord in gratitude for how He had blessed them.

“You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. And you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the first-born of your herd and your flock, in order that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.” (Deuteronomy 14:22–23)

Eating together conveyed loyalty to the person eaten with.

It seemed hardly conceivable that one with whom you had shared a meal would soon become disloyal to you and betray you. But note the complaint of David:

“Even my close friend, in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.” (Psalm 41:9)

Against this very rich backdrop of information, the Lord instituted the Lord’s Supper. All throughout the NT we can see that the concept of the meal eaten together gives it deeper meaning.

When we eat the Lord’s Supper together...

We declare God’s love and acceptance of us as His friends.

By inviting us to His table the Lord reveals His love for us. And it is the most remarkable love:

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6–8)

By eating the Lord’s Supper we declare that we have been accepted by the Lord as His children.

Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (Romans 15:7)

We acknowledge that we have made a covenant of peace with Him.

The Lord’s Supper is our covenant meal. In fact as Jesus took the fruit of the vine and gave it to the disciples he said to them:

“And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.” (Luke 22:20)

As we eat we are being reminded the promises that God has made to us and the obligations that we have to Him because we have accepted His covenant.

We are reminded us of the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

Several years ago I was attending a worship service in Budapest where my good friend Bill Bynum was working. That day in that very small

meeting room there appeared a man in an overcoat from off the street. We were happy that he came into the worship service; but he had obviously not bathed in weeks. The odor from his body was almost intolerable. That's not the kind of person we commonly would invite to our table; but consider this:

We were not worthy to come to the table of the Lord in our sin. We were like that man, filthy and dirty and offensive to the Lord. But in His love He washed us and clothed us with the garments of holiness so that we could sit at His table. By his blood we were cleansed and forgiven; and our eating together forever declares what He did to save us.

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)

We symbolize the unity we have based on that sacrifice.

Paul wanted the divided church at Corinth to reflect upon the unity implied by the cross of Jesus. He wrote to them:

"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:16–17)

By eating the Lord's Supper we are showing that we are one body who share in the one bread. Maybe that is especially a part of what made the Corinthians misuse of the Lord's Supper so offensive. This act which was intended to remind them of their unity in Christ had been observed in such a way that it had destroyed it!

We show our gratitude for what the Lord accomplished through that sacrifice.

Just as eating in the Lord's presence was an acknowledgement of His gifts, so eating the Lord's Supper likewise is an expression of joyful thanks for His gift of salvation. This concept of thanksgiving in the Lord's Supper was not lost upon the ancient church. Not only did they, like the Lord, "give thanks" (Greek "eucharisteo") for the bread and fruit of the vine; they regarded its observance as a great act of thanksgiving to God. They referred to it as "The eucharist," a term derived from the very Greek word that means "thanksgiving." Thus in the Lord's Supper we show gratitude for what the Lord has freely given to us:

"joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." (Colossians 1:12)

We declare our intentions to be loyal to Him.

Paul warned the Corinthians of the consequences of observing the Lord's Supper and then attending the idolatrous temples of Corinth. Could they not see that each of these meals represented loyalty to either the true God or to the false gods of the Greeks? Paul warned: *"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do*

we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?" (1 Corinthians 10:21–22)

How would the Lord feel to know that we have broken bread in his presence at His table and then in disloyalty turned to other gods. David's prophecy of the traitor at the table found another fulfillment in Jesus. At the last supper Jesus acknowledge one among the disciples who would betray him to the enemy. He said:

"I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'" (John 13:18)

Who among us would want to be associated with that traitor who ate the Lord's bread and then betrayed him by giving Him up to the enemy?

When we eat with the Lord we are declaring our intentions to remain loyal to Him.

We anticipate our eternal union with Him.

As Jesus began the final meal with His disciples before His death, He anticipated that it would be the last Passover He would ever observe with them. He would fulfill that feast in His death on the cross; and what He did would make possible the union of all believers with Him in God's eternal kingdom. Thus He promised:

"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:29)

And so as we eat we look forward to that time when we shall celebrate that great heavenly wedding feast of Revelation 19 when as the apostle Paul put it, *"We shall always be with the Lord."* (1 Thes. 4:17)

Conclusion: As so, though it is a very simple service, each Lord's Day when we take that small portion of bread and fruit of the vine we are declaring some really big ideas.