



ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

QUEST LESSON F-5

The Problem: How do Christian believers, separated from the time of Christ by almost 2,000 years, keep constantly in mind the significance of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven? How do they enter into the spiritual experience enjoyed by Jesus' first disciples?

There is more than one answer to that question. We have the records of the life of Jesus in the New Testament. By regularly reading these inspired documents and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to our minds and hearts as we read, we are drawn ever closer to Christ. As we daily speak to the living Christ in prayer, we are given His divine presence in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He constantly reminds us of Calvary and its meaning and assures us that our sins are forgiven and that we are accepted as sons and daughters of God.

There is yet another way by which we are regularly reminded of Jesus' death for us and His willingness to bestow spiritual blessings upon us. The celebration of the Lord's Supper "was designed by Christ to be a means of regular renewal for those who believe in Him. Some churches call the Lord's Supper the Communion Service, others refer to it as the Eucharist (meaning "thanksgiving"), and still others speak of it as the Mass. Whatever term is used, and however the service is conducted, the basis for it is found in the services instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, which He ate with His disciples the night before He was crucified.

So that we can be sure we are celebrating the Lord's Supper as Jesus did and giving it the meaning that He gave to it, we must turn to the Scriptures and study carefully the records of that special last supper. For centuries this service has been conducted in Christian churches all over the world. It has been given different meanings and celebrated in different ways. Our concern is to find out what Jesus wanted to teach by this service. We could spend a lot of time looking into the interpretations of theologians throughout the history of the Christian church. But the primary source for any Christian doctrine or practice is the Word of Christ. That is why in this lesson we shall turn to the New Testament and let Jesus answer our questions.

Objectives

First, we shall note Jesus' teaching of the importance of humble service.

Second, we look into the records of the ordinance of humility.

Third, we note how the Lord's Supper was instituted. Fourth, we study the meaning of the Lord's Supper

Fifth, we shall discover what the Bible says about the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the heavenly Kingdom.

I. Jesus' Teaching Of The Importance Of Humble Service

As a background to the study of the Lord's Supper, we need to look into the kind of heart preparation that Jesus wanted His disciples to make. He gave much instruction about humility, the forgiveness of others, and total dependence on God as necessary prerequisites to receiving the blessings of the Lord's Supper.

The Word

1. What problem kept recurring among Jesus' disciples? Mark 9:33-34; Matthew 20:20-21, 24; Luke 22:22-24.

2. How did Jesus illustrate the principle of humility? Matthew 18:1-4.
3. What further teaching did Christ give regarding the danger of pride? Matthew 20:25-28; 23:8-12.
4. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, how did Peter emphasize the need for genuine humility? 1 Peter 5:5.

Explanation: The Gospels record a number of instances in which the disciples became embroiled in argument as to which of them was to occupy the highest place. They wasted time over questions of status and personal importance instead of seeking the Lord with all their hearts and working for souls with unselfish love. When man's pride is projected into the work of the Christian church, there is always disunity and contention.

Jesus illustrated the great significance of humility by taking a child, sitting him on His knee, and urging the disciples to be like him. The point was not that they should be childish in conduct. But they were to understand that, just as a child is unspoiled by the evils of the world, and totally dependent upon his parents for loving care, so we are to be separated from the pride of man and rely fully on God for spiritual sustenance.

Jesus taught that greatness in God's sight is a matter of loving service for others, not a matter of occupying the seat of a ruler. The greatest person in the church, as far as God is concerned, is the person who renders the most humble service. Greatness is demonstrated by giving, not by receiving praise and glory.

Peter, of all people, after the ascension of Jesus, demonstrated in his life the principles of true greatness. He had been a proud, outspoken individual. Now he was a humble shepherd of God's flock. That is why he could write with conviction that "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Relevance: As we come to the Lord's Supper service, we need to turn our hearts to Jesus, asking that He will take from us all self-seeking and pride. The blessing is there for all who seek the Lord in humility and penitence.

II. The Ordinance Of Humility

Right up to the last supper, the night before Jesus, death, the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus could not lead them into a deeply spiritual service while that sin was in their hearts. He did something very special to teach them humility, and He urged that they should copy Him in the future.

The Word

5. What demonstration of love and humility did Jesus give his disciples at the Last Supper? John 13:4-5.
6. How did Jesus answer Peter's objection to His washing his feet? John 13:6-11.
7. Of what is the washing of feet a symbol? Titus 3:5-7; John 15:3.
8. What did Jesus urge His followers to do for one another? John 13:12-17.

Explanation: Jesus observed that, although there was no servant present in the upper room to perform the usual duty of washing the feet of the guests, not one of the disciples was willing to assume that role. In the context of their debate about who was the most important man, it would have been very humiliating indeed for any one of them to deign to wash the feet of his brethren. Jesus had no such scruples. He was the God of the universe in the garb of humanity, but He took the part of a humble servant. (Compare Philippians 2:5-8).

Think of the emotions that must have surged through Judas' mind as Jesus washed his feet. Judas was about to hand Jesus over to the Jewish authorities. He had already bargained with them for 30 pieces of silver. But this Messiah, who knew what Judas had done, stooped to wash his feet. There was undoubtedly a powerful conviction for Judas at that moment. But he rejected it! In his estimation, no one who would adopt the position of an unimportant servant was worthy of his adoration. He was determined to go through with his plan to betray Jesus! And thereby, he destroyed himself for eternity!

Peter's reaction was different. He could not imagine His Lord bending so low as to wash His feet. He was convicted that he should have been doing what Jesus was doing. And he knew that it was personal pride that had kept him from it. When Jesus indicated that this physical washing was merely a sign of a deeper spiritual cleansing, Peter wanted more of it. Whatever his personal problems, Peter genuinely wanted the spiritual blessings that Jesus had to offer. Judas spurned these spiritual blessings; He wanted temporal greatness, not a purified heart.

John 13:8, 10 and Titus 3:5-7 make it perfectly clear that Jesus' washing of the disciple's feet was intended to symbolize the cleansing of the soul from sin. The significant point is that He is the One who does it. We cannot purify ourselves! Jesus provides "the washing of regeneration [Greek = rebirth] and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

Jesus' statement that we "ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14) indicates that this service should be continued as a preparation for the Lord's Supper service. That is why in the Seventh-day Adventist Church we celebrate the Ordinance of Humility, or foot-washing service, just prior to partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Relevance: What more beautiful way to demonstrate love for another soul than to wash his or her feet? Jesus wants us to love one another so much that we will serve one another as He served His disciples. The humbling of our hearts is an especially important preparation for the rich spiritual experience of the Lord's Supper service.

III. The Lord's Supper Instituted

The last supper, that final Thursday evening of Jesus' life, was intended to be the celebration of the Passover (John 13:1). The Passover pointed forward to the sacrifice of the Messiah for the sins of the world (1 Corinthians 5:7). The day after the Passover supper Jesus was crucified, and the Old Testament services that pointed forward to His death lost their significance. The type had met antitype. This is why, at the last supper, Jesus instituted another service that would take the place of the Passover, and that would be celebrated until His second advent, reminding Christians of His sacrifice.

The Word

9. After He had washed the disciple's feet, what service did Jesus institute? Matthew 26:26-28.
10. How do we know that Jesus wants His followers to celebrate the Lord's Supper until He comes the second time? 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
11. What danger is there in partaking of the Lord's Supper if, your "heart is not right with God? 1 Corinthians 227-30.

Explanation: Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper by taking bread, which He used to represent His body that the next day would be broken for the sins of the world, and "the fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29) that He used to represent His shed blood. The fruit of the vine was the pure juice of the grape. Jesus did not drink alcohol. (Compare Proverbs 20:1). The bread was unleavened bread, because this was the only kind of bread used in the Passover supper. Leaven is used in Scripture as a symbol of sin (1 Corinthians 5:7). Hence, we leave it out of the bread that we use for the Lord's Supper service.

Jesus said of the bread, "This is my body" (Matthew 26:26). He did not mean that He was transforming the bread into His literal body. After all, His body was there sitting at the table with the disciples. Obviously He was using a metaphor. He meant, "This represents my body." And the grape juice represented His shed blood.

We know that Jesus wants His followers to celebrate this Lord's Supper until He comes the second time, for that is exactly what He said when He instituted the service: ". Do this in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). Nothing could be clearer than that. We are to celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly until Jesus comes.

Taking part in the service when one's heart is not in tune with God is a very risky thing. The Apostle Paul warned of this (1 Corinthians 11:27-30). He pointed out that illness and death had resulted in some people who had eaten the Lord's Supper unworthily.

Relevance: The Lord's Supper is a beautiful reminder of Jesus' sacrificial death for us. As we partake of the bread and the grape juice, we remember that He "bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus said that His blood would be shed "for the remission [forgiveness] of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The Lord's Supper reminds us that we are forgiven and that our living Lord is present with us.

IV. The Spiritual Meaning Of The Lord's Supper

The spiritual meaning of the Lord's Supper is emphasized throughout the New Testament. Jesus and the apostles taught the enormous importance of believers constantly partaking in Christ by faith.

The Word

12. In one of His great sermons during His ministry, how did Jesus explain what it means to partake of His body and blood? John 6:51, 53-57, 63.
13. How does Jesus dwell in the heart of the person who receives Him? Romans 8:9-10; John 14:16-18.
14. What did the shed blood of Christ make possible for us? Acts 20:28; Romans 5:9; 1 John 1:7.
15. How many times was Jesus sacrificed for our sins? Hebrews 7:27; 9:28; 10:14.

Explanation: In His great sermon concerning the Bread of Life (John 6), Jesus clarified beyond doubt what it means to partake of His body and blood. The fact that He was using a metaphor becomes abundantly clear when we read John 6:63: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." We partake of Christ's body and blood when we receive His Word into our hearts. This we do by receiving the Holy Spirit to live within us and explain to us the Scriptures as we study. The Spirit imparts to us the righteousness of Jesus (Romans 8:9-10).

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we receive Jesus spiritually into our hearts. The literal bread and grape juice symbolize our spiritual reception of the Lord, by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is not literally present in the bread and wine. But He is present in the heart of the true believer who partakes of the bread and wine.

The broken body of Jesus and His shed blood on Calvary's cross made it possible for us to be saved from sin. In Scripture His blood is used to represent the cleansing of the sinner (1 John 1:7). Only once was it necessary for Jesus to be sacrificed for human guilt. That one sacrifice was so infinite that it is sufficient to cover all sin for as long as this old world continues. The punishment He bore is adequate for every sinner no matter how degraded if he will open his heart and accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Relevance: The Lord's Supper is one of the main ways that God uses to remind us of Christ's work for us, and to bring us into closer heart union with Him. Are you willing to join with fellow believers in this beautiful service?

V. The Lord's Supper In The Heavenly Kingdom

The celebration of the Lord's Supper here is just a foretaste of the thrilling supper we will have with the Lord in His Kingdom.

The Word

16. When did Jesus say the next occasion would be on which He would celebrate the Lord's Supper with His followers? Matthew 26:29.
17. What are the qualifications necessary for those who will celebrate the Lord's Supper in the heavenly Kingdom? Revelation 19:7-9.

Explanation: Jesus told His disciples that He would not partake of the Lord's Supper with them again until they were all together in the Kingdom. Even so, He is with us by the Holy Spirit every time we enter into this sacred service.

Those who receive the righteousness of Jesus as a free gift will be taken to the Kingdom to enjoy the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7-9). "The righteousness of saints" (Greek = righteous works), is only acceptable to God when it is the result of Christ's righteousness in the heart. (Compare 1 John 2:29; 3:7; Galatians 2:20; Romans 10:6-10). We partake of Jesus, and He is our righteousness. The Lord's Supper is a renewal of that experience every time we celebrate it. But Jesus wants to live within our hearts always; not just when we are partaking of the bread and the wine. Then we will always be qualified for heaven, and ready to meet Him when He comes the second time.

Relevance: Have you received Jesus as your Lord? Have you invited Him to live in your heart? Do you partake of His "body and blood" every day, by reading His Word prayerfully, with the teaching assistance of the Holy Spirit? This is what it means to maintain a relationship with Jesus. Then when you celebrate the Lord's Supper, it is a thrilling reminder of Jesus' work for you and a renewal of your heart's relationship with Him.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. Jesus said that the bread and wine would be converted into His literal body and blood.
 - b. The bread and wine symbolize the death of Jesus for us.
 - c. The Ordinance of Humility prepares us for the blessing of the Lord's Supper.
 - d. Jesus said that we should be childish.

Discuss: Since all of Christ's disciples are to partake of both the bread and the wine in communal service, we have good evidence that the Lord wants His people to fellowship together in worship. It is not possible to celebrate the Lord's Supper, as Jesus instituted it, on one's own. It must be done with those who believe as we do. Hence, Christian worship is to involve congregational communion as well as personal devotion.