

## Discovering the Sacraments

### The Lord's Supper (1) - Remembering and moving on - 1 Cor 11:17-34

Church history is littered with good things thrown out with the bad. Symbolism is one.

While throwing out superstition and 'magical' ideas of what the bread and wine become we have reduced the Lord's Supper to a mere **memorial meal**.

It is important to remember all that Jesus did, but there are other depths we can learn... **a proclamation about Jesus** - what he, and his death, means to us, **a participation in Jesus** by his children - who are 'in Christ', and **an encounter with Jesus**, meeting with him anew, receiving his grace and going out with his challenge to take up our cross.

#### Questions for meditation and groups

1. Share your own testimonies about the Lord's Supper, - has Jesus met with you in communion? What was special?
2. We may not get drunk, greedy or overlook the poor at our communion services but in what other ways may we 'eat and drink in an unworthy manner'? (1 Cor 11:27)
3. How would you explain to a non-Christian friend the 'why, what, where, when and how' of the Lord's Supper? Use 1 Cor. 11 where possible.
4. Some people get worried about what to do with the bread and fruit juice left over at communion. What would you do? Why?
5. In what ways could children be introduced to the Lord's Supper?
6. What might add significance and depth to your celebration of the Lord's Supper? What have you appreciated at other churches?
7. If Jesus was here and offered you the bread and wine what would go through your mind and heart?
8. Should someone who is seeking to know Jesus but isn't yet a Christian be discouraged from taking Communion?
9. How can you use the time of Communion to deepen your walk with Jesus?
10. What might enhance the sense of fellowship together in Communion?

The Lord's Supper is not simply something we talk about - it's something we do together and with Jesus.

So, rather than just talk about the Lord's Supper, you may find it useful to share the bread and wine in your Home Group or other group.

Use it to grow closer to the Lord and closer to each other.

Use the space below to note your own thoughts about the Lord's Supper.

Your story

Reformers and British dissidents reacted against bad things in the church of their day - and threw out some good things too.

One of those good things was **symbolism**. Rightly fighting superstition and shallow ritual they disposed of what could offer meaning, communication and depth to a Biblical message.

We have 2 sacraments - baptism and communion, and reduced sacraments to a shadow of what they could be. Both baptism and communion became 'add-ons' with minimal significance - communion is seen by some as an *aide-memoir* - a visual aid about Jesus.

We needed to move from the popular idea of a magical transformation of the bread and wine into Christ's actual flesh and blood and the superstition that in literally taking Christ's flesh and blood we are saved whatever our personal spiritual state may be. But that doesn't mean that what Jesus instituted has to be emptied of meaning.

In protestant circles we've used the phrase '**a means of grace**' to summarise their significance. Without them we deny ourselves a whole means of getting more into the grace of the Lord Jesus, and cut ourselves off from blessing. By them we are touched by grace, grow in grace and put ourselves under grace.

**The sacraments are a doorway to more of Jesus!** A deeper life in Christ! And as such we should not belittle them, treat them lightly or ignore participating in them.

### 1. A Memorial meal

I have moved in my time from looking on the Lord's Supper just as an act of remembrance to something deeper.

*But even if we looked on it merely as that it remains an amazing means of grace!*

It is so easy to forget! I forget so soon! But that's just the *mental faculty*, the *heart* forgets even quicker! Our hearts are fickle, wayward, shifting their loyalty and priorities.

Jeremiah 17:9,10 reminds us *the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure - who can understand it?* - and he reminds us that the Lord *searches and examines the heart and mind*.

Without regular reminders of affection, a romance or marriage grows cold and fails, without contact a child grows apart from his parents, *without regularly engaging in the Lord's Supper our relationship grows distant and cold*.

We may remember with our heads - the facts are always there in our heads (as are the facts of family and marriage

relationships) but the heart-centred relationship grows thin.

We are reminded that Jesus spent quality time with his disciples on the night before he died, that he went through suffering and an agonising death for us - and not just physically but bearing our sins in his own body - his body broken and his blood poured out - all in the simple signs of taking bread and wine.

But, it is far more than just a reminder.

**2. A statement made about Jesus!** How important, how central he is to you. One of the things Paul is concerned about is the way Jesus has become overtaken by drinking and feasting. He's been dismissed to the fringes of the celebration. Instead of being at the centre and worshipped and adored, he's simply a sideshow.

Within a few years of Jesus' death the Corinthian Christians had done with communion what we've done with Christmas.

The early Anabaptists were used to a communion where church-goers didn't bother with communion at all, or drifted in late or left early. Other things were their priority. At their communion services those Anabaptists would not start until everyone was there.

What is it saying to others who gather, what is it saying to new Christians or those who are considering becoming Christians? Who is this Jesus?

What does he mean to us?

The suffering and death of Jesus is at the centre of our faith and worship. Jesus must be held up and shown to all as Saviour and Lord.

We 'proclaim his death' - says Paul! What do we proclaim about his death? - is it that his death is unimportant or is it that his death is central and the source of our salvation? Proclaiming and explaining in ways that defy words - through powerful symbols and signs.

Beware of trampling the Lord's name in the mud of our own appetites, being so full of ourselves and our own wants that Jesus gets left out.

### 3. Participation.

The fact of our participation in the bread and wine -in eating and drinking- demonstrates a sharing in Jesus, a participation in Jesus himself. We're not an audience at a

spectacle but participants in the sacrifice of God's Son.

And that is what is so serious about taking communion. Paul tells the Christians at Corinth that they should watch out - not take this lightly, and 'in an unworthy manner' - it is a symbol that I am part of Jesus, I am in Jesus and he in me, I have a share in the salvation Jesus offers, I have a share in the riches of Jesus!

There is a strong parallel with Baptism - being crucified with Christ. As I take the bread and wine I am saying Jesus was crucified for me, I was crucified with Christ. I share in his death and his resurrection life!

### 4. An encounter with Jesus.

Large stations often have 'meeting points' where you can arrange to meet up.

The first Last Supper was a time and a place of meeting and encounter; Jesus washed their feet, he broke the bread, he poured the wine. He passed it to them. He met with his disciples and shared it with them.

The upper room wasn't a special place - very ordinary - but it was his place of meeting and encounter.

When we take communion there is something that is unexplained and unexplainable happening. At this table, in a way beyond understanding, Jesus meets with his disciples - you and me - in the broken bread and poured wine. It is a meeting place, a place where he looks on us and we may look on him in a unique way. We gaze on the sufferings of Jesus, the broken heart of Christ for us and the world that has rejected him.

We see his compassion, we hear his call, we appreciate more of his mercy as we meet him here.

An early Anabaptist communion prayer - *Stay with us O Christ, it is evening and the day is far spent. Abide with us O Jesus, abide with us, for where you are not, everything there is darkness, night and shadow. But you are the true Sun, light and shining brightness, those for whom you light the way they cannot go astray.*

The Lord's Supper is the centre-point of our worship, the sharing in such simple elements yet the sharing in Christ - our Saviour and redeemer.

It is the meeting point and if I don't meet with Jesus there, I am impoverished and I lose out.