

# Foundations Lesson #19B

## The Bread And the Cup

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he and his disciples ate together. While they were eating, he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it and gave it to them, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." After Jesus ascended into heaven, the church has continued this ordinance he instituted, the practice of partaking of his body and blood.

Roman Numeral number one on our outline deals with the origin, or background, of the celebration of the bread and the cup. On the night Jesus was betrayed, he and his disciples were observing the Passover. Some of the Scriptures on the Passover are given on the outline; I invite you to read them at your convenience. Essentially, the Passover was observed to commemorate the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, where they'd been living in bondage as slaves. A year-old lamb without blemish or defect was to be slain and eaten, and its shed blood was to be applied to the sides and top of the doorframes of the Israelites' houses, so that when God was bringing the plague of the firstborn upon the Egyptians, the destroying angel would "pass over" the houses of the Israelites when he saw the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. At midnight God struck down all the firstborn of Egypt. Then the Egyptians, being afraid that they *all* might die, told the Israelites to leave their country. So the Israelites understood that it was God's miraculous intervention that provided for their freedom from captivity.

Roman numeral number two on our outline lets us know that what Jesus celebrated with his disciples on the night he was betrayed was not just a one-time experience; he was instituting a new observance for the generations to come. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, says,

**1Co. 11:26** For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Scriptures don't tell us specifically how often the community of believers is to partake of the bread and the cup. Some groups do it weekly, some monthly, some more often, some less often. But whenever, or however often, it's done, this observance will be practiced by the church until Jesus comes back.

It's also good for us to understand some of the similarities in the symbolism between the Passover and the celebration of the bread and the cup. The Bible refers to Jesus Christ as "our Passover lamb" (I Corinthians 5:7), as the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and as "a lamb without blemish or defect" (I Peter 1:19). As such, he has shed his blood for our sins. But just as the blood of the literal Passover lamb had to be shed **and applied** in order to be effective, so also the blood of Christ was shed but **must be applied** by faith to our lives in order for us to benefit. So we get to leave the land of sin and bondage because, miraculously, our freedom from the captivity of sin and self has been provided by the Lord.

Since **those with faith** are the ones who benefit, it follows naturally that those with faith are the ones who get to participate in the bread and the cup. For unbelievers to partake of the body and blood of Christ would not be appropriate. So if you've accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you may partake of this observance. And when you do so, please be thankful. I Corinthians 10:16 identifies the cup as "the cup of thanksgiving."

Also, the observance of the bread and the cup – which is referred to by some as The Lord's Supper (from I Corinthians 11:20), or The Lord's Table (from I Corinthians 10:21), or The Eucharist, or Holy Communion – has been designed by God to be celebrated "when you come together" (I Corinthians 11:20). Scripture doesn't say that it's wrong to celebrate it individually, but the context in which Scripture speaks of the bread and the cup is always the **community** of believers.

Over the course of church history, there've been many debates over whether the body and blood

being consumed by the believers was literal or symbolic. Honestly, I don't think it's all that important what happens in the physical realm; I believe it's far more important what happens in the heart and spirit of the individual worshiper who's partaking of this precious communion with their Savior and Lord. On the night Jesus was betrayed, he didn't give his followers a piece of his body, nor did he prick his finger and give them some of his blood. He gave them bread, and he gave them the cup which contained the fruit of the vine. That's what they ingested – bread and the fruit of the vine. But the **effective dynamic** of what they were consuming was that of his body and blood.

It's the same today. The elements which are used are not nearly as important as their effective dynamic. When you partake of the bread and the cup, please be very aware that what you're actually doing is having an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ himself. That's what's important. This is not just some lifeless ritual, repeated by rote. There are no dead forms in Christ. Everything God does has **life** in it.

Regarding the elements, most churches I've been a part of have used an unleavened bread product – that is, bread or wafers or crackers without yeast – since the ancient Israelites were required to use unleavened bread when they celebrated the Passover. And, in my experience, grape juice has most often been used, rather than wine, mainly because the leaders of the services didn't want anyone who was struggling to be free from alcohol addiction to be tempted in any way. Since the Bible doesn't specify what should be used, it appears that there can be some variety in the elements that are employed.

Roman Numeral number three on our outline addresses the observance of the bread and the cup, in other words, what happens when we partake. Again, physically, we're eating a piece of bread and drinking a bit of grape juice. That's not highly significant. But the meaning and the relational aspects associated with our eating and drinking are very significant.

When we partake of the bread and the cup, we're participating in a memorial. The word “memorial” comes from the word “memory” and it means **that which preserves the memory of something**. The Bible gives us several examples of memorials God has established. For example, God had the Israelites make a pile of twelve large stones at Gilgal. You can read about that in the book of Joshua chapter 4. The stones were there so that the Israelites might remember, for the generations to come, that the LORD miraculously separated the waters of the Jordan River, allowing the people of Israel to cross over on dry ground into the Promised Land. Memorials serve their purpose when we continue to remember what happened, in this case, what the LORD has done. Memorials become tainted when we place too much emphasis on the memorial itself. We read in the book of Numbers, chapter 21 that snakes were biting and killing people in the desert, so Moses sought God. God told Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole. When a bitten Israelite looked at this bronze snake, his life was spared. For future generations, the bronze snake should've simply been a reminder to the Israelites of God's protection and healing power, as it had manifested itself when Moses had led Israel. However, many generations later, people were burning incense to the bronze snake, so a godly king named Hezekiah had to demolish it. Again, placing too much emphasis on the memorial itself is unhealthy.

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event of human history. Nothing else even comes close to its significance. The observance of the bread and the cup should help us remember his suffering, his dying, and his love in having endured that gruesome and torturous death on the cross. He did it for us, and we can't afford to forget what he did. As he said, “do this in remembrance of me.”

When we partake of the bread and the cup, we're also celebrating God's having delivered us from the bondage of sin. On the night of Jesus' betrayal when he was celebrating the Passover with his disciples, Matthew records,

**Mt. 26:27-28** Then he [Jesus] took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

When the Israelites celebrated the Passover, they acknowledged with joy that God had saved them from the bondage of Egyptian slavery. When we celebrate the bread and the cup, we should acknowledge with joy that the blood of Christ has saved us from the bondage of sin.

**Rev. 1:5b-6** To him [Jesus] who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

We also declare that we belong to Christ by our participation in the bread and the cup. Jesus said, “This is **my body**,” and “This cup is the new covenant in **my blood**.” Our act of eating and drinking of the elements is clearly proclaiming that we belong to Christ and that he belongs to us.

**Gal. 5:24** Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Next we see that the observance of the bread and the cup requires self-examination.

**1Co. 11:27-31** Therefore, 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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

Some people in the church at Corinth had failed to discern the difference between ordinary food and the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Partaking of holy food requires a holy life. We don't know what their sins were. Perhaps some were living in sexual immorality, or were full of greed, or were lying or stealing. We don't know. But when they partook of the pure and holy Lord Jesus Christ, a reaction took place as the holy and the unholy collided, and the result was judgment – some became weak or sick and some even died.

Thankfully, such judgment can be easily avoided. God has not instituted the bread and the cup because he wants to judge his people, but because he wants to bless his people. Just as ordinary bread and grape juice are designed to nourish us physically, partaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, the bread of life, has been designed to nourish us spiritually. Before partaking, we need to judge ourselves – asking the Lord to examine us for anything that would disqualify us from taking part. If he reveals something to us, we can either repent and make it right before partaking, or we can abstain from partaking. If he doesn't reveal anything, we can partake in a clear conscience and receive the blessing. God does not require perfection. If he did, none of us would qualify. But he does require us to discern the difference between the holy and the unholy.

**Ps. 139:23-24** Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

The last two items on our list deal with the future. The observance of the bread and the cup teaches us to anticipate Jesus' return.

**1Co. 11:26** For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not the final chapter. He's coming back as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

**Heb. 9:27-28**

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

When we partake of the bread and the cup, we're declaring that Jesus will yet return. Lastly, our present celebration of the bread and the cup foreshadows a future celebration.

**Mk. 14:25**

[Jesus speaking] "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."

In Matthew's account of this incident, a few details are added. It says,

**Mt. 26:29**

"I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

I have no idea what the details of that celebration will look like, but I'm sure it'll be absolutely glorious. As sons and daughters of a great King, we have much to look forward to. Amen. God bless you all.