

Study 12

THE LORD'S SUPPER

In the practice of: the Lord's Supper for believers.

The Lord's Supper is also known as the Eucharist (Greek for "Thanksgiving"), Holy Communion, The Lord's Table. Roman Catholics often refer to it as the *The Mass*. It is practised three times a year (Quarterly) by Presbyterians, monthly by many Evangelical churches, weekly by Anglicans, and not at all by the Salvation Army.

ROOTS IN THE PASSOVER

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Luke 22:19-20

Jesus celebrated the Passover with His Disciples annually for three years. But it wasn't until the Passover celebration recorded in Luke 22 that Jesus revealed the Passover's true significance. In a moment I want to draw your attention to three significant differences between the Passover that Jesus celebrated with His Disciples and the traditional Jewish Passover celebration.

1. Reading Exodus 12, where the Passover is recorded, what was the occasion that instigated the Passover and why was it called “the Passover”?

There were three significant differences between the Passover that the Christ celebrated with His Disciples and the Passover instituted in Exodus 12. These include: the role of the Passover (“Pascal”) Lamb.

2. Why might there be no mention of a Passover lamb in the Passover accounts in any of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John)?
 - (a) There were no lambs available that year
 - (b) Before they could slaughter the lamb it ran away
 - (c) Jesus was The Real Passover Lamb
 - (d) This was a vegetarian Passover

TYPE OF CHRIST & HIS SACRIFICE

Hopefully you selected option “c” to Question 2. The focal point of Christ celebration of the final Passover was Himself. *He* was the True Lamb of God.

3. What did John the Baptizer say about Jesus as “the Lamb” and how does this relate to the Passover? (John 1:29)

4. Not only was the Passover Lamb eaten, what other purpose did it serve (clue: *its blood*) and what was the significance of this?

The Passover Lamb was a representation of Christ. It was to be *a year old* when it was sacrificed. Christ too, was a *young* man when He was sacrificed. The Passover Lamb was to be without blemish. Christ was a *sinless* sacrifice. The lamb’s blood was to be placed over the people. Unless *we* are under The Lamb’s “blood”, God will not “passover” us either.

A PICTURE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

When the first Passover was celebrated, it was to show that the Israelites were different to the Egyptians. They were different primarily because of *Who* they worshiped. The One they worshiped required of them *utter devotion*. The Passover Meal distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians and its annual memorial would ever remind them of this: *when you are devoted to God, you are different*. The Passover Meal was to be eaten quickly - a reminder that when God commands, obedience must not be delayed. The Passover Meal was prepared and eaten by the whole community - the aroma of roast lamb would have wafted over Egypt - this was an inescapable and very public witness to the Israelites devotion to God.

- Only Christianity has commemorative Meal celebrating the Saviour's victory. Being a Christian makes you *different*.
- The Lord's Table is an act of *worship* of the Risen Saviour.
- The Lord's Table is an act of *obedience* to our Saviour Who commanded us to observe it.
- The Lord's Table reminds us of Christ's obedience and *challenges* us to always obey God.
- When we meet together publicly to commemorate the Lord's Table we are a combined *witness* to the world of our devotion to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

5. In First Corinthians 11:25, how often are told to commemorate the Lord's Table?

Some churches commemorate the Lord's Table weekly. Others do it Quarterly. Some, not at all. There is no Scriptural requirement on how often this should be done. We generally practice the Lord's Table weekly. It is one of the most important aspects of our assembling together. We take lengths to avoid it becoming a dry routine. Some people argue that doing it so regularly runs the risk of it becoming a meaningless ceremony. But it is not frequency that causes this. It is attitude.

6. With what kind of attitude should we approach the Lord's Table? (Note 1Cor. 11:27)

A COVENANT MEAL

It seems that the early church met together for worship around a meal. The Lord's Supper formed a part of this. This "Love Feast" had gotten out of hand in Corinth. The Apostle Paul wrote a stinging rebuke to the Corinthians in First Corinthians 11. This meal was meant to culminate in the Lord's Table and was meant to celebrate the unity they had in Christ.

7. Note First Corinthians 11:21-22. How was what they were doing undermining their unity?
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To bring correction to the Corinthians, Paul uses a powerful Christian tool: *the practice of reminding* (Rom. 15:15; 1Cor. 4:17; 15:1; 2Tim. 1:6).

8. In the midst of their arrogant squabbling and schisms, what is it that Paul wants to initially remind the Corinthians of? (1Cor. 11:23-25)
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"Do this ... in remembrance of Me" (1Cor. 11:25). With these words Christ instituted the Lord's Table. Roman Catholics believe that it was with these words Christ *ordained* His disciples as "priests" to administer the bread and wine as *the actual* body and blood of Christ. When the Priest presents the bread and the wine (called "accidents") to the church, Roman Catholics believe that they mystically transform into the spiritual body and blood of Christ. This is called "Transubstantiation". When Martin Luther came along in 1517 and publicly announced 95 objections to Roman Catholicism, one of them was his objection to Transubstantiation. He proposed, and Lutherans still hold to, "Consubstantiation". This is the idea that Christ was present *with* the emblems of bread of wine. In both views, the Lord's Table is regarded as a "sacrament" (that is, a visible expression of God's invisible grace). Many believers who view the Lord's Table this way testify that their participation of Holy Communion is a spiritually nourishing experience. However, Ulrich Zwingli proposed that the Lord's Supper was merely an "ordinance" where the emblems are just *reminders* of what Christ has done. Most Protestant churches today are "Zwinglian" regarding the Lord's Table.

As you prepare for the next time you partake of Holy Communion, whether you regard it as a Sacrament or an Ordinance, do so with a sense of prayerfulness (1Cor. 11:28-29).

Amen.