

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The term "Lord's Supper" is not used by any writers of the New Testament except Paul. In Luke and Acts the term "breaking of bread" is used, but does not distinguish between the Lord's Supper and the common meals of the church. In I Corinthians 10:16 Paul uses the word "communion" (KJV), translated "sharing" (NASV, LB) and "participation" (NIV, RSV). The Greek word used here is *koinonia*, usually translated "fellowship" and means "sharing together" from the word *koina* "common" in Acts 2:44 where the believers "had all things common". Some churches use the word "Eucharist" to refer to the Lord's Supper. This is a scriptural word and is used throughout the New Testament and is translated "giving of thanks". Nowhere is it applied as describing the Lord's Supper, but is used in reference to the giving thanks at the institution and partaking of the Lord's Supper. Early Church Fathers (leaders following the death of the apostles) probably derived the term from the "giving of thanks" over the bread and cup in the Lord's Supper. This term was preferred by many of the early Christian writers from the second century on.

The Lord's Supper not only commemorates the death of the Lord, but also portrays the church as the body of Christ. A scripture vividly speaking of this is I Corinthians 10:16, 17: "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 one bread." There is a correlation between the Lord's Supper and the church, between the one body which is one bread and the one body which is the church. The bread and the cup seem to be a primary example of the unity of the body of Christ. This unity is seen in Paul's use of the word "sharing". He is not just speaking of one bread and one cup, but on the sharing of the bread and the cup. (Many times the bread and the cup is taken to absent members of the congregation, we find no fault with this, but the sharing together is what gives the bread and cup meaning). In the Old Testament the ones who ate the sacrifices of the altar became "sharers" in the altar (verse 18). The logic is: those who eat of the bread and drink of the cup are sharers in the body of Christ. The reason Paul is emphasizing this, and using the sharing of the bread and the cup as an example, is seen in the context of the chapter; that of idolatry (ver. 14). The Corinthians were familiar with things sacrificed to idols, and they were dealing with the question of eating meat that had been used in these sacrifices (verses 23-30). So Paul contrasts the partaking of the Lord's Supper with the partaking of idol worship: "...I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God, and I do not want you to become *sharers* in demons. 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" (verses 20, 21). A Christian partaking of the bread and the cup of the Lord, cannot partake of the bread and the cup of the world. This is partaking of the cup of demons, and comparable to idol worship. Observing the Lord's Supper means we are sharing in the very life of Christ. If we share in the cup of demons we provoke the Lord to jealousy (ver.22).

The fact that the Lord's Supper is a "sharing together" is further seen in the second passage dealing with this subject: that is I Corinthians 11:17-34, where Paul is dealing with schisms and factions in the church. Note the emphasis in this chapter of their "*coming together*". "You come together not for the better but for the worse" (11:17)... "When you *come together* as a church" (11:18)... "When you *meet together*, it is not (possible) to eat the Lord's Supper" (11:20)... "When you *come together* to eat" (11:33)... "So that you may not *come together* for judgment" (11:34). One important expression of the unity of the body of Christ is found in their eating together. Evidently the Lord's Supper was a part of a common meal in the early church called the "love feast" (Jude 12). The basic reason for them coming together was for the Lord's Supper. In Acts 20:7 it is stated "on the first day of the week, we were gathered together to break bread, Paul preached to them..." In the original language it is simply "to break *bread*" showing it was the common meal. But verse 11 states "...and when they had broken *the bread* and tasted..." showing this was the Lord's Supper. This is born out in Acts 2:42: "And they continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of *the bread* and to prayer." Verse 46 states: "day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread (no *the* in the original language), they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart." In verse 42 the breaking of the bread is the Lord's supper; in verse 46 the breaking of bread is the common meal they shared together. This gives a better understanding of Paul's statement: "when you come together as a church, I hear there are divisions among you ... therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk" (I Cor. 11:18- 20). Today it would be strange for one to be hungry and another drunk in our observing the Lord's Supper, however, knowing the common meal was also eaten together as well as the bread and cup we can understand Paul's concern for the Corinthians.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper at his final Passover meal with his apostles, it was the conclusion and fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover and the inauguration of a more perfect Passover. "Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Cor. 5:7,8). In comparing the Lord's Supper with the Passover Rousas Rushdoony in *The Institutes of Biblical Law* states: "The Christian Passover sets forth the believers's deliverance from sin and death *and* deliverance from the enemy. The Lord's table is victory because it is judgment. Paul declared it to be judgment against believers who partook 'unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body' (I Cor.11:27-30). If it is judgment against believers who transgress, how much more does the Lord's Supper proclaim damnation to a world in rebellion against God?" It was "while they were eating (the Passover meal) Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, he broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat, this is my body.' And he took the

cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.'" (Matt. 26:26-28). When Paul quoted this passage to the Corinthians he added: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep" (I Cor. 11:26-30). In partaking of the Lord's Supper we proclaim not only Christ's death but his resurrection and ascension. It states "until he comes" meaning that he is alive and is in heaven but will someday "come". It also proclaims that we are right with our fellowmen and the body is in right relation with the Lord because everyone partaking is in right relation with one another. This is seen in the command "let him examine himself and so let him eat". He did not say "examine himself and *not* eat." We are to "judge the body rightly" (NASV) or "discern" the Lord's body (KJV). The Lord has only one body on the earth, and that is his church. Therefore we are to "judge" or "discern" that body and make sure we are right with everyone in the body. We are to examine ourselves in relation to the body and see if there is conflict with any member or we have malice and hatred for any. Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount about presenting offerings at the altar is applicable here: "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your offering there and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matt. 5:23, 24). If we do not "judge the body rightly" then we eat and drink judgment to ourselves (ver. 29). Before we have communion with our brothers we are to discern the body and make sure we are right with them and they with us. Paul continues: "But if we judge ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord, in order that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another" (I Cor. 11:31, 32). Some comment on verse 27 is in order: "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, (unworthily, KJV) shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." Some have interpreted that as our being "worthy", however none is worthy. Paul is speaking of the manner in which they were taking the Lord's Supper. They were abusing it by turning it into a drunken and gluttonous feast (ver. 21). If we think of the Lord's Supper as being anything other than what Jesus said it is, we are as "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" as those who crucified him were guilty.

The night of the institution the Lord's Supper "while they were eating, Jesus took bread, and having blessed it, He broke it and gave to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; for *this is my body.*' And he took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for *this is my blood* of the covenant, which is shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Matt. 26:26-28). The meaning of the Lord's Supper is found in the words "my body" and "my blood". In all accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper Jesus mentions first "my body", the bread, then his blood which is the blood of the covenant.

In John 6 Jesus says "I am the bread of life" three times (ver. 35, 48, 51). He then says, "...the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (ver. 51). The Scripture speaks of Christ coming in the flesh (I John 4:2; John 1:14) and suffering in the flesh (I Pet. 4:1). His flesh, the bread, is His body and He "Himself bore our sins in His own *body* on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness..." (I Pet. 2:24). "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the *body* of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the *body* of Christ" (Rom. 7:4). In the Old Testament before the blood could become effective it had to be shed, then applied by the priest. The sacrifice was the body of the animal suffering death. Then the priest entered the most holy place and applied the blood as atonement for the people (Lev. 16:14-16). Jesus said the bread of the Lord's Supper was his body which was broken. His body had to be sacrificed before His blood could be applied. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not taking the blood of goats and calves, but taking His own blood, he entered the holy place once and for all having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:9-13). The bread reminds us of His suffering in His body as payment for our sins. To quote I Peter 2:24 again: "who Himself bore our sin in His own *body* on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness." The penalty for sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Since God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf..." (II Cor. 5:21), He paid our debt of sin in his own body.

Jesus said, "this cup is My blood of the covenant, which is shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). In prophesying of the New Covenant, Jeremiah quoted God as saying that when the New Covenant is made: "I will remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12; 10:17). God declared: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). In the Old Testament it was not enough that an animal was slain, the blood had to be taken by the priest into the Holy of Holies and offered it to God. John states "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7), but it was not enough that Jesus died as a sacrifice, "He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not taking the blood of goats and calves, but taking His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption ...the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God (will) cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:11-14).

We drink the cup to proclaim the fact that in Christ "we have redemption through His blood, and the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). The purpose of forgiveness of sins is that we can have life, eternal life. The full meaning of the cup is deliverance from death into life. When we drink the cup, we are not only symbolically drinking to remember that our sins are forgiven, we are also symbolically drinking the life, nourishment and provision that God through Christ supplies to His body. In the Lord's Supper we not only remember His death on the cross we also proclaim His "taking His own blood into the Holy Place not made with hands" and presenting it to God on our behalf.