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Mini Study

The "Lord's Supper"

"...this do in remembrance of Me" (I Corinthians 11:24).

Christians are united in the desire, in some manner, to remember the death of Jesus. Indeed He Himself asked us to remember His death, and together with His resurrection such a remembrance is at the heart of the Christian faith. Yet there is much confusion surrounding this memorial.

- The remembrance is known by a variety of names: Lord's Supper, Communion, Passover, the Mass, Eucharist, Memorial. It is, too, varied in its timing. Some observe it "anytime," others daily or weekly or quarterly.
- The apostle Paul places his authoritative stamp on an annual observance. He states the time of the observance: *"...the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread"* (I Corinthians 11:23). It is a perpetual observance for all Christians until He returns in person in glory.
- For Christians, the Memorial is a solemn remembrance of the suffering and death of Jesus as the only sacrifice for our sin, and our example of holy living. *"This do in remembrance of Me,"* Jesus said when introducing the observance to His apostles. Paul adds: *"...as often as you may eat this bread, and drink this cup, you solemnly proclaim [announce publicly] the death of the Lord, until He shall come."* (v.26)
- The observance is an annual renewal and confirmation of the agreement (covenant, compact) we made at our baptism. As such it is observed only by those who have been "born anew" through repentance and baptism, those in whom dwells the Spirit of God (*cp* Hebrews 10:29).
- As for any memorial service, the Lord's Supper is a solemn observance. The Corinthian brethren had turned it into a raucous drunken "party" and Paul had to correct their behaviour (vv.20-22). It was not a meal, for they ought to satisfy their appetite at home. This should be a solemn occasion, he tells them (vv.27-29): *"whoever should eat this bread, or drink the cup of the Lord, unworthily, that one will be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and let him drink of the cup; for he eating and drinking unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord."*
- We may indeed be "unworthy" to eat at the same table as Jesus. But this, "unworthily," refers to the manner in which we approach the service. With reverence, in other words, with due regard to its meaning. It's a personal responsibility to *"examine ourselves,"* to discern our attitude to the awesome sacrifice of our Saviour. A careless observance of this solemnity is reflected in our bodily health, for the Lord will chasten us in this life (Hebrews 12:6). In Corinth, the brethren were guilty of "respect of persons," the affluent ignoring those who had little. They "despised the assembly of God" (v.22) - the Body of the Lord.

The “Lord’s Supper”

- There are, then, the elements of bread (Gk *artos*) and “the cup.” As we partake of the material, by faith we absorb the endless spiritual benefits of His sacrifice (*see* John 6:33-40). To this Jesus Himself had added a further element. He “...*put water into the basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples*” (John 13:5). It was an expression of the respect and duty of care all of us have to one another (Galatians 6:2, 10). Jesus added: “...*you also ought to wash the feet of one another. For I gave you an example, that as I did to you, you also should do*” (John 13:14-15). It is still, today, an integral symbolic part of the service.
- This “last supper” of Jesus and the disciples took place on “*the night in which he was betrayed*” by Judas Iscariot, the evening prior to his death on the cross. John tells us it was “...*before the feast of the Passover*” (John 13:1). This refers to the seven-day *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, which began the next evening, a festival observed by even the Gentile Christians in the early church (I Corinthians 5:1-8), and by many in the church of God to this day.
- Jesus is “...*the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). He is “...*our Passover, sacrificed for us*” (I Corinthian 5:7). The night and day following the supper He was cruelly mistreated by the religious (Sanhedrin) and secular (Roman) authorities (Acts 2:23). They impaled Jesus on a wooden stake and He died, sacrificed for our sins, at the time of the evening sacrifice, which, on that day (Nisan 14 on their calendar) was the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. In Jesus was fulfilled all the sacrificial types of the Old Covenant.
- This solemn observance is an annual remembrance of our essential need to be spiritually nourished by the “flesh” of Jesus, and our total dependence on His shed blood for the forgiveness of our sin.

(All Scripture references are LITV unless otherwise noted.)

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