

GOD

Communion

Let's begin with a record in I Corinthians chapter 11.

I Corinthians

- 11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread:
- 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.
- 11:25 After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.
- 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

In this record, the apostle Paul is, by revelation, recounting to the Corinthian Church events that took place when Jesus had eaten supper with his disciples just a few hours before he was betrayed by Judas and arrested. From these verses we see that Jesus was telling his disciples to eat some bread and drink some wine in remembrance of him. He instituted a memorial, something they were to do to help them remember him and his accomplishments. We read that when they did this, they “showed (or remembered) his death until he comes” (until the Return). This record also mentions that the cup is the new testament, or covenant, in his blood – in other words he made a “blood covenant” with Israel. Even though we are not the Israel of the Old Testament that that covenant was made with, we still benefit from this memorial, as we'll see.

We need to go to the Word to find out what all this meant to those people he was talking to, as well as what it all means to us now in our present administration of grace.

Turn back to I Corinthians chapter 10 verse 16:

- 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

Here we see the cup and the bread referred to as “communion”, and this is what we call the memorial that Jesus instituted.

The word translated “communion” in I Corinthians 10:16 is the Greek word *koinōnia*, which is translated “communion” four times but is also translated “communication” 1 time, “contribution” 1 time, “distribution” 1 time, and “fellowship” 12 times. Bullinger's *Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* defines the word *koinōnia* as “the act of partaking or sharing”. The word can best be rendered “full sharing”. A “full sharing” works both ways, so a participant in this memorial called “communion” can expect to receive the full benefits that are available. So, it would be good for us to learn what these benefits are as we participate in communion.

This meal that was eaten by Jesus and his disciples, traditionally referred to as “The Last Supper”, as well as the truths and significance of the bread and the cup that are part of communion, have been misunderstood through the years, with the result that most Christians do not fully appreciate the meaning of communion and, in consequence, do not realize the benefits that are available to claim when we understand the significance of what Jesus Christ accomplished. I Corinthians is an epistle of reproof, written by Paul in about 57AD, less than 30 years after these events. It didn’t take long for misunderstanding to set in.

Continuing in I Corinthians chapter 11, we learn more:

I Corinthians

11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.

11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation (judgment) to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.

11:30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

We see from these verses that the Corinthians must have been doing something wrong. Twice it mentions “eating and drinking unworthily”, and it mentions “damnation”, or “judgment”, because they didn’t “discern the Lord’s body”. What’s all this about? And the consequences mentioned, where many were weak and sickly, and many sleep (or died prematurely): How can we avoid these consequences?

Jesus said to eat the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of him, as a memorial. Communion is a memorial, not a sacrament. In other words, it is not a rite with a mysterious meaning, as suggested by certain religious groups. There’s nothing mysterious about it. Contrary to what some groups teach, you are not literally eating the flesh of Jesus or drinking his blood. When Jesus took the bread, and said “this is my body”, and when he took the cup and said “this is my blood”, he was using a figure of speech called a metaphor. That word “is” can be understood as “represents”. Jesus was using things they could see to represent his body and blood so when they did this memorial, they could remember what his real body and blood accomplished for them.

When we partake of communion, we are remembering what Jesus Christ did by his life and his death, and we are remembering the accomplishments of his death and resurrection. We all know that Jesus Christ died for the sins of mankind, but there’s more. Most people today think the entire communion ceremony deals with Jesus dying for our sins, and they don’t distinguish, or discern, between the two separate parts of communion, the bread and the cup. Both are taken to represent the same thing. This error is what has kept people from realizing the great benefits of communion. They have failed to recognize the difference between the accomplishments of Jesus’ broken body as separate from the accomplishments of his shed blood, just like it says in I Corinthians 11:29 where it says “...not discerning the Lord’s body.”

So, the body and blood of Jesus, represented in communion by the bread and the cup, are two different things, and each one of these is significant. It is only when we understand the true significance of each of these that we can expect to fully benefit from partaking in communion.

For a full appreciation of what the body and blood of Jesus Christ accomplished for us, let's briefly consider the context of the "Last Supper" and Jesus' initiating of this memorial. Tradition has erroneously equated the "Last Supper" with the Passover Meal, suggesting that Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples before his arrest and ultimate crucifixion. We know from careful study of God's Word that this is not true.

Jesus instituted the memorial of communion on Monday evening, and the Passover meal that year was to be on Wednesday evening, two days later. That Monday morning, Jesus had already known that the time of his death was near, and he had begun preparing his apostles by teaching them. But, since he wasn't God, Jesus himself still did not know exactly when he was to die: all he knew was that it would be around the upcoming Passover season. Without an exact time, Jesus could only plan to still be alive to eat the Passover meal with his disciples one last time before his death. Jesus knew that if he was still alive, he had to eat the Passover meal, because he had to fulfill the law (and this was a mandatory feast). So, that Monday he sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to secure a room for them all to eat the Passover meal together. Since Jerusalem was getting crowded with Judeans who came from afar to celebrate the Passover, Jesus sent his disciples a couple days early to be sure to get a place.

But, sometime between the time Jesus sent two disciples and the time he sat down for supper with his disciples that evening, God told Jesus exactly when he would die. Jesus found out that he would not be eating the Passover meal after all, and that supper that evening would be his last. God revealed to Jesus that he, Jesus, would be the final, perfect Passover lamb, with his death accomplishing once and for all what the yearly sacrifice of a Passover lamb only did for a year. I Corinthians 5:7 says that "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."

When he knew this and its full implications, Jesus knew he should institute the communion memorial while they were still together. Jesus didn't have days or even hours to prepare this.

We know that the memorial of communion consists of two parts, bread representing the body of Christ and the cup, representing his blood, and now we know that Jesus was the ultimate Passover Lamb. So how do body and blood fit in with the Passover sacrifice, and what are their significance?

We need to go to the record of the original Passover. The original Passover took place as God was preparing to have Moses lead His people, the Children of Israel, from the bondage of Egypt into the Promised Land. After a series of plagues, Pharaoh still refused Moses' requests to let God's people go. So, the tenth and final plague was about to occur, in which the "destroyer", or "angel of death" (a devil spirit, since the devil is the author of death), would pass through the land of Egypt and kill the first-born of every household, both humans and animals. God provided protection from this to the Children of Israel, giving instructions as recorded in the book of Exodus, chapter 12:

Exodus

- 12:1 And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,
12:3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth *day* of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:
12:5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take *it* out from the sheep, or from the goats;
12:6 And ye shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.
12:7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike *it* on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.
12:8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it.
12:11 And thus shall you eat it; *with* your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it *is* the Lord's Passover.
12:12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the Lord.
12:13 And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye *are*: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy *you*, when I smite the land of Egypt.
12:14 And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

The last verse says that the Children of Israel were to observe the Passover every year, to remember how God delivered them.

From the record in Exodus we see that there were two distinct and equally important aspects of the sacrificial Passover lamb: flesh and blood.

The flesh was to be roasted and eaten. By eating the lamb's flesh, the believing children of Israel were in reality eating physical wholeness to themselves. After the Passover, when they left Egypt, they were physically whole. Psalm 105:37 tells us: "He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and *there was* not one feeble *person* among their tribes."

It wasn't the actual lamb they ate that gave them strength (it wasn't "magic meat"): it was their believing in doing this act that allowed God to heal them.

The sprinkling of the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel caused the destroyer to "pass over" them, sparing their lives. The shedding of the lamb's blood represented the atonement, or covering, of the sins of the Children of Israel. The shedding of blood was works (again, believing, not "magic blood"), and as a result the children of Israel were spared from death, the ultimate consequence of sin. As it says in I Corinthians 15:56, "The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law."

So, we see that there were two significant aspects to the Passover Lamb: the flesh (body), for physical wholeness, and the blood (death of the lamb), for an atonement for sin.

Jesus Christ was the ultimate, final Passover Lamb. When he instituted the memorial of communion, he distinguished these two aspects of the Passover lamb: the body and the blood.

As it says in Malachi 3:6, God doesn't change, so we today can expect to receive the same great benefits from the sacrifice of the ultimate Passover lamb (Jesus Christ) as the Israelites received by sacrificing and eating that original Passover lamb.

I Corinthians

11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread:

11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

The broken bread in the communion ceremony represents Jesus Christ's broken body. We remember how his body was beaten and crucified. As the ultimate Passover lamb, his body was broken for our physical wholeness, just like the eating of the flesh of the original Passover lamb provided physical wholeness to the Children of Israel during the Exodus.

Isaiah 53:5 says: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."

That was written of the coming Messiah and was at the time still future. But to us, after the crucifixion, resurrection, and Day of Pentecost, we can refer to I Peter 2:24, which says: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were (past tense) healed." The stripes refer to the beating of his body. The verse says that because of this, our healing is a reality NOW. The physical punishment Jesus went through paid the price for our physical wholeness.

In the Communion memorial, when we eat the bread, we are reminded of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us by his bodily suffering. We know that it is not God's will for us to be sick. It is available for us to claim perfect physical wholeness through what Jesus accomplished by his broken body. There is nothing magical about the bread we eat in the communion memorial. Communion is a memorial, a reminder to us to claim the physical wholeness that is available to us NOW. When we believe, we will receive.

I Corinthians

11:25 After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.

The cup represents the shed blood of Jesus Christ. This is not talking about the bleeding he did while they were beating him or nailing him to the tree. "Blood" here is a figure of speech for soul life: in Leviticus 17:11 it says "the life of the flesh *is* in the blood." "Shed blood" refers to Jesus giving up his life when all was accomplished.

Just like the death of the original Passover lamb (shedding of its blood) temporarily covered the sins of Israel, the death of Jesus Christ bought for us the remission of sins. In the communion memorial, drinking from the cup is a reminder of what Jesus' death accomplished for us in the sin category.

So, Jesus Christ was our complete substitute: he was our Passover. We have been made free from sin and the penalties of sin. We don't have to tolerate sickness.

When we properly distinguish the two aspects of communion, the body and the blood, we can claim the benefits.

The Corinthians had gotten to the point that they did not distinguish between these two aspects, and they paid the consequences, as it says in I Corinthians 11:

11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation (judgment) to himself, not discerning (distinguishing) the Lord's body.

11:30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

This is true of most people today: they fail to distinguish what our Lord accomplished in his broken body from what was accomplished in his shed blood. When we know God's Word and claim the benefits of both, we can expect not only our being saved from sins but also physical wholeness today.

God says in Psalms 103:3: "Who (God) forgiveth all thy iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases" (there are two parts mentioned). And, God says in Exodus 15:26: "I *am* the Lord that healeth thee."

So, when we come to partake in the communion memorial, let's remember the accomplishments of Jesus Christ for both our redemption from sin and for our redemption from the consequences of sin, namely sickness and disease. Let's claim what Jesus Christ made available, believing and expecting to receive.

- Dr. Rick Batt