

Why We Believe the Lord's Supper is Inclusive

by David A. Huston

This paper is presented to correct some common misunderstandings about the practice of the Lord's Supper and foot-washing.

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? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

A SACRAMENT IS a supposedly Christian ritual which is believed to confer grace upon a person. According to Roman Catholic doctrine there are seven sacraments. According to Protestants and the Eastern Orthodox there are only two. All three groups consider the Lord's Supper (known by Catholics as the Eucharist and by others as Communion) to be a sacrament. We, however, reject the very concept of sacraments. That is, we do not believe there are any rituals or ceremonies a person can involve himself in that will automatically confer some aspect of God's grace upon him. We consider all such practices to be witchcraft.

We have introduced the subject of the Lord's Supper this way in order to dispense with all Roman Catholic ideas about this practice from the very beginning. Sadly, although most Protestants and Apostolics have rejected the doctrine of *transubstantiation*¹, many are still influenced by Catholic ideas about the Lord's Supper. For example, many believe that if a person eats a tiny piece of unleavened bread and drinks a small quantity of grape juice (or wine) in an "unworthy manner," he will bring eternal damnation upon himself. This has the effect of making the Lord's Supper a sacrament, since if participating in an unworthy manner brings damnation, then drinking in a worthy manner must bring salvation, or at least contribute some degree of saving grace to a person's life. Again, we reject this entire notion as unbiblical and devilish.

1. Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic belief that during the Eucharist, the bread actually and literally transforms into the flesh of Christ and the wine into the blood of Christ. They believe that simply consuming these elements confers forgiveness of sins.

Let us proceed then under the proposition that rather than being a sacrament, the Lord's Supper is an act of fellowship. It is first of all a remembrance of what Jesus did for mankind on the cross. As He instructed at the original Last Supper, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). It is also a time for celebrating our current life in Christ and looking ahead with anticipation to the Lord's coming. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The Lord's Supper is part of a meal.

In his important discussion on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul clearly places it within the context of a meal, saying, "When you come together to eat, wait for one another" (v.33). The gathering together of God's people around a dinner table was a more a prominent activity among the early Christians than it is for many today. Immediately after Pentecost we read, "And they continued steadfastly...in the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42). A few verses later this idea is reiterated: "So continuing daily with one accord...and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people" (vv.46-47). And in Acts 20:7 we read that "the disciples came together to break bread."

Jude referred to this kind of gathering as a "love feast" (Jude 12). In the original language it is the plural form of the Greek word *agape*. This word is usually translated either "love" or "charity" and is always used when describing God's love for man. Commentator W. E. Vine says this about the agape meal:

These love-feasts arose from the common meals of the early churches. They may have had this origin in the private meals of Jewish households, with the addition of the Lord's Supper. There were, however, similar common meals among the pagan religious brotherhoods. The evil dealt with at Corinth became enhanced by the presence of immoral persons, who degraded the feasts into wanton banquets, as mentioned in 2 Pet. and Jude. In later times the *agape* became detached from the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is the symbol of fellowship.

The elements of the Lord's Supper, the unleavened bread (matzah) and the grape juice (fruit of the vine), are not the reality of an agape meal but are only symbols of the reality. Eating bread and drinking juice is not equal to fellowship, since some can eat and drink while at the same time harboring hatred and bitterness in their hearts. The Lord's Supper is intended to be a representation of fellowship, the body of Christ being the substance. This is why Paul rebuked those who

participated in the meal yet failed to “discern the Lord’s body ” (v.29). They were participating in the outward symbol of fellowship while rejecting the inward disposition toward fellowship, which is “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Paul addressed them this way: “For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?” (vv.21-22). He told them flatly, “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper” (v.20). Even though they were eating and drinking with the others, it was not really the Lord’s Supper for them because they were doing it in the wrong spirit. Rather than preferring one another they were pushing one another out of the way.

Who may participate in the Lord’s Supper?

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, only a faithful Catholic may take the Holy Eucharist. Because of this, no Catholic priest will knowingly serve the communion elements to an unbeliever. This basic tenet has been accepted by many Apostolic people. They view the elements of the Lord’s Supper as something to be distributed by a pastor who determines who is qualified to receive them and who is not. To them, the Lord’s Supper is a practice which is reserved exclusively for those baptized in Jesus’ name, filled with the Holy Spirit, and worthy of participation. But there are no Scriptures that describe either this policy or this procedure. It is in fact a hand-me-down from the Roman Catholic Church—a pastor replacing the priest in the ritual.

We believe something altogether different. To us, the purpose of the Lord’s Supper is to draw people together, not to draw lines that push people apart. As Apostolic believers, we all allow and encourage unbelievers to worship with us and pray with us. We invite them to have a meal with us as a way of winning them to the Lord. Are we to say, you may eat everything on the table except the unleavened bread? Are we to say, you may have water, ice tea, or lemonade, but you may not have the grape juice? Are we to say, you may pray and worship with us before the meal and after the meal, but not while we are eating this bread and drinking this juice?

We believe that Jesus intended the Lord’s Supper to be inclusive. We recognize that the original Lord’s Supper included only His disciples and that Paul’s letter was not to the unbelievers in Corinth but to the believers. Yet when Paul speaks of the whole church coming together to have a meal and participate in the Lord’s Supper, are we to believe that no unbelievers were allowed to be in the room. Or that they had to sit on the sidelines? Just a few chapters after he discussed the proper conduct at an agape meal, he wrote, “Therefore if the whole church comes

together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?” (v.14:23). Clearly the Corinthians allowed unbelievers free access to their meetings. In fact, isn’t the work of the church to bring unbelievers into the body of believers? What better way to build a spiritual connection than having a meal together!

If the elements of the Lord’s Supper are mere symbols and not the reality, then what possible harm could it do to allow unbelievers to participate? The bread is only bread. The drink is only juice. There is nothing magical about them. They do not confer any special grace to those who consume them. They are not sacraments.

We have found that allowing unbelievers to participate can cause their hearts to be more open to the Lord and can kindle a desire for deeper participation in the reality of godly fellowship. For these reasons we believe the Lord’s Supper should be open to all who are old enough to understand the significance of the Lord’s death and certainty of His soon coming. The only specific exception we can find is spelled out by Paul, also in his first letter to the Corinthians. In Chapter 5 he writes, “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person” (v.11). Those who should not be permitted to participate would be those whom Jude described as “spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves” (v.12). It is the so-called brother who should be excluded, the one who has tasted of the reality, the one who ought to know better; not the unbeliever who is moving toward the reality but has not yet arrived.

Concerning the practice of foot-washing.

At the Last Supper Jesus said to His disciples, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15). With these words, did Jesus intend to establish a foot-washing ritual for His people to practice? Or was He teaching something with a deeper, more spiritual meaning? We believe the latter. Watchman Nee explained it far better than we ever could, so we refer you to Chapter 8 of his book *Love Not The World*, which can be found online at...

www.worldinvisible.com/library/nee/lovenottheworld/chapter%208.htm.

Note to the reader:

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Rosh Pinnah means 'Chief Cornerstone' in Hebrew.