

The Lord's Supper as a Meal

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Introduction: The Lord's Supper is the first "act of worship" commanded by the Lord. In fact it is the only "act of worship" specifically commanded by the Lord Himself. In Acts 20:7, the very purpose of the assembly on the first day of the week was to partake of that supper. Therefore it is a very important thing we do.

One of the questions about the Lord's Supper that has been raised of late is whether the Lord's Supper is to be eaten more or less as a meal with baskets of unleavened bread and pitchers of grape juice. I want to address this question.

- I. The Supper was instituted during the Passover Feast (Matt. 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-16).
 - A. Rabbinical description of the Passover Feast (Lenski, volume on Matthew, p. 1017).
 1. First cup with its blessing.
 2. Bitter herbs to recall the bitter life in Egypt.
 3. Unleavened bread, the chasoret, the roasted lamb, the chagiga.
 4. The housefather dips the bitter herbs into the chasoret with a benediction, then eats, and the others follow.
 5. Second cup is mixed (wine with water).
 6. First part of the hallel is sung (Psa. 113, 114, and with a prayer of praise, the second cup is drunk.
 7. The father washes his hands, takes two cakes of bread, breaks one and lays it on the unbroken one, blesses the bread out of the earth, wraps a broken piece with herbs, dips it into the chasoret, eats it and a piece of the chagiga, and a piece of the lamb.
 8. Everyone joins in the eating.
 9. Father eats last morsel of lamb; a third cup.
 10. Second part of the hallel is sung (Psa. 115-118). Then a fourth cup, sometimes a fifth; the conclusion of the hallel (Psa. 120-137).
 - B. The expression, "And as they were eating," (Matt. 26:21; Mark 14:22 refers to the point number 8. At the end of that period, but before point no. 9, Jesus took the unleavened bread and appointed it as the symbol of His body.
 - C. Then, according to Luke, after the supper, He took a cup and appointed it the symbol of His blood (Luke 22:20). Since the hymn sung in Matthew 26:30 was point number 10, then the institution of the cup was after point 9.
- II. Whereas the Passover was an actual meal with a considerable amount of food consumed and grape juice drunk, the Lord's

Supper was a memorial, not a meal.

- A. Jesus used the Passover meal as the occasion to command the observance of a totally different thing: the Lord's Supper.
- B. He chose only two elements: unleavened bread and fruit of the vine.
- C. He commanded that it be done in remembrance (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25).
- D. They had already eaten their feast; they did not set in and eat large quantities of bread and drink large quantities of fruit of the vine. This "Supper" was a symbolic one.

III. Making the Lord's Supper into a meal would tend to create the problems Paul dealt with in 1 Cor. 11.

- A. A distinction is made between the Lord's Supper and each one taking his own supper (11:21).
- B. He points out that feasting should be done at home. The Lord's Supper should not be eaten as a feast.
- C. It is uncertain in the minds of students whether this was a combination of the so-called Agape or "love feast" with the Lord's Supper or the Lord's Supper itself. In either case, Paul did not think what they were doing was a good idea.
- D. His comments on the bread and the cup are to remind us of its special significance.
- E. His points are that by observing the supper, we are proclaiming the Lords' death till He come.
- F. He warns against partaking in an unworthy manner, against not discerning the body (11:29).
- G. All of these dangers would be greatly increased if the Lord's Supper were consumed in the manner of a normal meal.
 - 1. Either by adding other foods to be consumed in addition to the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. In his book *Radical Restoration* LaGard Smith unabashedly advocates having a full meal with meat and vegetables and whatever else one might eat at a social meal.
 - 2. Or by eating sufficient quantities of the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine to make it into a common meal.
 - 3. Think of the thought process that would go into consuming large amounts of bread and fruit of the vine.
 - a. "That piece of unleavened bread representing the body of Christ was certainly good, so crisp and flaky. In fact it was so good I believe I will have another. Boy, was that good. I believe I will have yet another."
 - b. "This grape juice is certainly refreshing, so cool and sweet. I believe I will pour myself another glass."
 - c. In other words, the motive for having more has nothing to do with remembering the death of Jesus.

IV. No one can say precisely how big a piece of unleavened bread should be eaten, or exactly how much fruit of the vine should

be drunk.

- A. I am not going to try to say how big or how much since we have no details on the matter.
- B. Many of those who contend for this position say that at their services they do not require a person to take a large piece. They can take a pinch or a large piece. Then it is sinful to start a church over how large a piece of bread may be eaten.
- C. I do think that taking the position that it must be eaten as a meal to the point of starting a new congregation is to take a pretty strong position and it makes the strong implication that those who do not do it that way are wrong.

V. Some quotations about the Agape or love feast:

- A. This feast was not commanded by Jesus or by the apostles.
- B. It was practiced by the brethren in an attempt to recreate the setting in which the Lord's Supper was instituted, but Jesus never said create the setting.
- C. Little is said of the feast in the New Testament.
 - 1. Back during the battle over institutionalism the "love feast" was highly touted as an example of the kind of things brethren were wanting to do with their kitchens and fellowship halls.
 - 2. The word *agape* is found in the New Testament 116 times. You want to know how many times it is translated "love feast" or "feast of charity"? Once - and that is in Jude 12.
 - 3. Brethren ate together in the New Testament, but there is only one mention of a love feast.
- D. Barnes says: "Besides, I know not that there is the slightest evidence, as has been often supposed, that the observance of the Lord's Supper was *preceded*, in the times of the apostles, by such a festival as a love-feast" (p. 757).
- E. In their article on *Agape*, McClintock and Strong tell us a lot about the love feasts mostly by giving their inferences and the inferences of other scholars, but they say: "Though the Agape usually succeeded the Eucharist, yet they are not alluded to in Justin Martyr's description of the latter (*Apol. i, paras. 65, 67*); while Tertullian, on the contrary, in his account of the Agapae, makes no distinct mention of the Eucharist. 'The nature of our Caena,' he says, 'may be gathered from its name, which is the Greek term for love. However much it may cost us, it is real gain to incur such expense in the cause of piety; for we aid the poor by this refreshment; we do not sit down to it till we have first tasted of prayer to God; we eat to satisfy our hunger; we drink no more than befits the temperate; we feast as those who recollect that they are to spend the night in devotion; we converse as those who know that the Lord is an ear-

witness. After water for washing hands, and lights have been brought in, every one is required to sing something to the praise of God, either from the Scriptures or from his own thoughts; by this means, if any one has indulged in excess, he is detected. The feast is closed with prayer'" (Vol. 1, p. 99).

- F. Frederic Godet lived from 1812-1900. He believed the church practiced a love-feast concluded by the Lord's Supper, but he provides us with the information that: ". . . At length the meal itself was totally abolished" (p. 571). This abolishment was almost certainly because of the abuses that kept occurring in connection with the feast. He also makes this comment on 1 Corinthians 11:21: "By the way in which they act, they change the sacred feast into an ordinary supper, which has no longer anything in common with the sacred feast which it should recall" (p. 571). Also on verse 22: "Paul points out three principal sins in this conduct. First, the feast itself so celebrated; the agape, with the Holy Supper terminating it, is not a meal taken for support; it is a religious rite expressly instituted, and that for a religious purpose. If any one wishes to satisfy his hunger, he has the means of doing so otherwise" (p. 572).
- G. In LaGard's book he provides no reference to any *scriptural instruction* to partake of a common meal in connection with the Lord's Supper.
- H. His book is an effort to restore inward holiness by outward arrangements in which there is a greater feeling of fuzzy warmth inside, but such things as he discusses have no inherent connection with assuring holiness and zeal, and some of his ideas are just plain wrong.

Conclusion: We must remember that our source of authority is not the church fathers. It is the New Testament. It is apostolic teaching and examples. If we do not have it there we do not have it. Jesus did not command that a meal be partaken in connection with the Lord's Supper. Paul condemned the abuses that had occurred at Corinth having to do with making the Lord's Supper into a common meal. The Lord's Supper must be kept a memorial meal observed for the sole purpose of reminding us of the Lord's death and proclaiming that death until He comes again.