

THE TABLE OF THE LORD



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What the Scripture refers to as “The Lord’s Table” (1 Corinthians 10:21) is mainly known in these days as “Communion” - taken from the King James translation (KJV) of 1 Corinthians 10:16. Most churches observe this once or twice a month - some not often at all - and is usually at the end of a service with a reading of the related scripture, a short message and prayer and then each member receiving a wafer and an individual small cup of wine or grape juice. However, as we go through the study of the Word dealing with this most vital subject, we find that there is far more involved. Even dictionaries describing “communion” reveal a far deeper meaning:

“The sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on a mental or spiritual level...a shared participation in a mental or spiritual experience...interchange or sharing of thoughts or emotions, intimate communication.”

So let’s look into the Word and see what is revealed about this most important event the Lord directed us to observe.

Just before he is about to go to the Cross, the Lord Jesus gathers his disciples together to celebrate the Feast of Passover. As they are reclining at the table he shares with them that this has been a major event in his thinking. What they were about to celebrate is about to find its fulfillment:

“And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God’” Luke 22:15-16.

In other words, what they were about to celebrate was not only the commemoration of a past event. It was a fact of Israel’s history but it was not only that. It was a “foreshadow” of a future event, pre picturing what was about to happen through the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, finding its fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

The Feast of Passover

Like the Lord Jesus and his disciples, the celebration of Passover was happening all over Israel. Families had gathered together and, around the table, were fulfilling the instruction of the Lord to remember how God had, by many miracles, delivered



them out of slavery in Egypt. The final act of judgment on the people in Egypt had been the death of their firstborn sons. Israel had been instructed to slay a lamb and smear its blood on the doorposts of their houses. When the angel of death went through the land and saw the blood on the doorposts, he “passed over” that house and the firstborn were saved.

The Passover Lamb

The Passover Lamb pre-pictures the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus, dying in our place and setting us free from our deserved judgment of God.

“Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” 1 Corinthians 5:7 (NKJV).

In New Testament times, every Jew understood what John the Baptist meant when, seeing Jesus, he cried out...

***“... ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”
John 1:29 (NKJV).***

When God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt through the slaying of the Passover lamb, He then made a Covenant with them, and brought them into the Promised Land and a whole new life and relationship with Him. This exciting event is described in its fullness in the book of Exodus. God’s instruction to Israel to celebrate it every year is given in Exodus 12:14...

“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord – a lasting ordinance.”

For Israel, the celebration was a reminder of what He had done for them. Even today, in modern day Israel, it remains the same with a gathering together to celebrate and retell the story of their nation’s deliverance from ancient Egypt. At the same time Jesus was with his disciples, all over Israel every household was commemorating what had happened. It was a remembrance feast.

Altogether, the celebration with his disciples included five specific aspects. The Early Church continued to express these in their fellowship together. We will outline them here and then look at each in more detail:

-  **The meal**
-  **The first cup**
-  **Ministry**
-  **The bread**
-  **The last cup**

The Meal

Like the Feast of Passover, the Table of the Lord is a celebration! This is a very important factor for us to know today. It is a celebration remembering all the Lord has done for us. How do we celebrate special events? Christmas is an example. All the family and friends gather together around a feast! The same with Thanksgiving in the United States. How is it celebrated? Around a table! Sharing a special meal around the table is always an informal occasion with much sharing together expressed. It is true fellowship. This is how they celebrated Passover and the Lord now declares:

“...do this in remembrance of me”

The Lord was not meaning for us to quietly, within ourselves, try to remember him and the salvation he has accomplished for us. The context of his statement was how Israel related to one another how the Lord had delivered them as a nation, recounting the miraculous deliverance of the Lord. In the same way, we as believers in Christ, are to gather together in celebration of all that he has done for us, relating and sharing with one another what it means to us.

The Cup of Sanctification

“According to an ancient rabbinic source, the Mishnah, four cups were involved in the Passover celebration - the first cup, “the Kiddush” which means sanctification. This cup begins the celebration. The second cup, the cup of plagues. The third cup, the cup of redemption or of blessing. The fourth cup is the cup of praise, sometimes combined with the cup of plagues because Israel praise God for using the plagues to bring them out of Egypt.”*

According to the New Testament records Jesus only used two cups (Luke 22:17-20). The first cup at the beginning of the feast was the Cup of Sanctification. Jesus took it and told the disciples to share it among them.

“After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes’” Luke 22:17-18.

To be sanctified means to be separated for a holy life. It expresses our fellowship together in our dedication to the Lord, celebrating the new life he has brought us into.

Throughout Israel, following the sharing of this cup and during the meal, the retelling of the story of their freedom from slavery in Egypt takes place and the Covenant that God brought them into. As the head of the table, the Lord Jesus uses this time to minister to his disciples the difference and the wonder of the new life they are about to step into as he completes the work the Father

* “Jews for Jesus”

has sent him to do. He teaches them what the Cup of Sanctification, outworked in reality in their lives, will produce. He gave them the most important truths and guidelines to follow after he went back to the Father. Everything he ministered to them as they were eating around the table were guidelines that not only applied to his disciples back then but, recorded by John in chapter 13 through to chapter 17, are just as vital for us as his followers today. He gave four important keys for our life as part of the Body of Christ...

Serving One Another

“The evening meal was in progress...so [Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him...When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” John 13:12-17 (read through from verse 2).

Back in those days, the washing of feet was a necessity for anyone entering the house because of the dusty streets and the open sandals that people wore. This task of washing their feet was given to the lowest of the servants. This is why Peter vehemently tried to stop Jesus from washing his feet (verses 6-11). Thus the Lord Jesus begins his final ministry to his disciples with an emphatic message and demonstration that the call, now upon those who would follow him, was that of *servanthood*.

The necessary custom of that day to wash people’s feet may not be a custom in our generation or culture. Some like to enact this occasionally, and that is good, but it is the truth behind it that is all-important and has not changed and can be expressed in many different ways of serving and helping others. A life expressing servanthood is the culture of the Kingdom of God.

Loving One Another

Around the table, as they partake of the meal, the Lord shares from the depth of his heart what is necessary for them to fulfil all that he will be sending them to do. The number one criteria -- *love*. Nothing will work or mean anything without that (see 1 Corinthians chapter 13).

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you

must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” John 13:34-35.

“As I have loved you” is the keynote to the kind of love the Lord Jesus is speaking of -- a willingness to forsake the comforts of life and lay down our life for others, just as he did. This is God’s kind of love.

“My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ” John 15:12-13 (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Living by the Spirit

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” John 14:15-18 (see also 16:7-15).

We are not alone! The Lord has sent the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit, to indwell us (John 20:22) and empower us (Acts 1:8). We have been given an Advocate, a Comforter, a Counsellor and an Enabler. He is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Ephesians 1:17-23), producing within us the very character of God (Galatians 5:22-23), transforming us into the very image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18), and imparting gifts to us so we can bless others (Romans 12:4-8).

Everything the Lord is teaching and instructing the disciples, which includes us today, is possible to be a reality in our lives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us.

Being One in Christ

The final prayer of the Lord Jesus in John chapter 17, reveals the depths of his heart’s desire for his followers - his Church. Verses 20-23 summarise it and includes each one of us...

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.

Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me”

These four things - *servanthood, love, living by the Spirit, and unity* - ministered by Jesus to his disciples as they celebrated the Feast of Passover around the table, are the foundational expression of our lives and ministry in Christ. As we fellowship around the Table of the Lord these four are the basis of what and how we minister to one another.

Ministry

Just as the Lord shared with his disciples, we have the greatest privilege of sharing our hearts together as we celebrate around the Table of the Lord. Not only possibly receiving a keynote message from the “head of the table”, we all have the opportunity and privilege to share what we have learned of the Lord, how he has met us in a time of need, what we have discovered of his love, the living truths we have discovered in the Word and the joy we have experienced as we have walked with him and served him. This is the fellowship (communion) we have with one another as we share around the Lord’s Table.

It is at the Table of the Lord that we can see every believer freely operating in their particular spiritual gift, ministering to one another so that the Body of Christ may grow and be blessed. Romans 12:4-8 lists seven specific gifts. Each of us have been gifted by the Lord with one predominate one, though we can grow in all. Recognising which one we have received is very important, not just for us but for others. For us, it gives us fulfilment in what God has called us to do. For others, we can bring great blessing...

“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”

Ephesians 4:7-16 wonderfully describes this as the believers are “equipped” by the foundational ministries. It is “as each part does its work” that we will grow to the “whole measure of the fullness of Christ”.

“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith

and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

The New Testament reveals clearly how the Early Church operated this way. The Corinthian church, in its enthusiasm, had all the people expressing their spiritual gifts in their gatherings but they were interrupting and overriding one another. Paul writes, not to stop them ministering, but to bring adjustment...

“What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up...But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way”
1 Corinthians 14:26;40.

Paul’s exhortation to the Colossian believers describes it well...

“ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts”
Colossians 3:16.

The Bread

While they were eating, Jesus took the bread and broke it. Every head of the table around Israel that day was doing the same thing. It was called the Bread of Affliction and symbolised the hardship of slavery in Egypt. The bread was broken and divided among them, picturing their unity in their sufferings as a nation. Imagine the shock it would have been to the disciples to hear the Lord Jesus, on breaking the bread, declaring...

“Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” *1 Corinthians 11:24*

He was about to take upon himself the sufferings of the whole world.

In today’s Jewish celebration, the second or middle of three pieces of unleavened bread is taken from a special bag. It is then broken, and wrapped in a cloth and hidden from view. After dinner it is brought out and distributed among the participants who all eat it together.

What a picture of the Lord Jesus this is. The second Person of the Godhead, whose sinless body was “broken” in death, wrapped in a cloth and hidden in burial, then brought back - resurrected by the power of God!

Three other symbolic pictures

Contained in the symbolism of the broken body of Jesus on the Cross, the bread pictures three other realities for us...

Unleavened

In the scriptures, leaven (yeast) is a picture of sin, hypocrisy and false teaching (1 Corinthians 5:6;8).

“When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. ‘Be careful,’ Jesus said to them. ‘Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ They discussed this among themselves and said, ‘It is because we didn’t bring any bread.’ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, ‘You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? ...How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees”.

Everything we partake of at the Table of the Lord is a declaration of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Eating the broken piece of unleavened bread is the expression of our faith that, because of our new birth in Christ, we are now a new creation -- **“the old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17.**

Our human suffering

Again, our faith in the finished work of Christ on the Cross is in operation when we eat the Bread. The prophet Isaiah declared of Him...

*“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed”
Isaiah 53:3-5.*

His love for us and His concern for all aspects of our human suffering,

was revealed as He walked amongst people on earth...

“When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases’” Matthew 8:16-17.

“And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick” Matthew 14:14 (NKJV).

Not only did Jesus bear our sins on the Cross, the horrific wounds inflicted on his body as the Roman soldiers whipped him and mocked him was also endured for us. He bore our physical suffering. We declare as we partake of the Bread -- “by His stripes we are healed”.

Our unity as a Body

Eating the broken piece of unleavened bread also symbolises that we are part of the Body of Christ, the Church. United together we are one Body.

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part but of many...But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” 1 Corinthians 12. Read through verses 12-27. See also 11:16-17.

Recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul rebuked the Corinthian church in relation to their attitude to the Lord’s Table. This was for three reasons...

They were divided

“In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you...” verse 18.

They were self-centred

“... when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own

private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in?" verses 21-22.

They lacked love

"...Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!"

They were so focused on their own needs, expressed in their actions to others, Paul declares their gathering was *not* the Table of the Lord...

"So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat" verse 22...

...and exhorts them...

"...my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together" verses 23.

Paul summarised the Lord's Table in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17...

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf."

The Bread not only represents the physical Body of Jesus, it also represents all believers as the Body of Christ. As we partake of a broken piece together it pictures us as the one "loaf" that we are in Christ.

The Cup of Redemption

The Cup of Redemption, also referred to as the Cup of Thanksgiving, was the final cup Jesus shared with his disciples at the close of the meal.

"...after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" Luke 22:20.

His Blood Poured Out

" 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life [which it represents].'" Leviticus 17:11 (AMP)

Blood represents the life and, in the pouring out of the Lord Jesus' life on the Cross, an amazing eternal "contract" was taking place in Heaven. This is what we are celebrating when we take the Cup of Redemption.

➔ Redeemed

To be “redeemed” means to be purchased back. We have been bought by the price of the life of the Lord Jesus!

“...You are not your own; you were bought at a price...” 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

➔ Forgiven

All our sins have been forgiven and forgotten never to be raised up against us again!

“...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” Psam 103.12.

➔ Atonement Made

Atonement means we have been brought back into relationship with the Father again. We are “at one” with Him.

“God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith” Romans 3:25 (5:11).

➔ Exchanged Life

A great exchange has taken place. On the Cross all that we were was placed on Jesus...

* **our sins** - Acts 13:38

* **our old self** - Romans 6:6

* **our deserved judgment** - Romans 8:1-4

...and we were raised together with him in his resurrection as a “new creation” to live a whole new life (Ephesians 2:6-9).

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV).

➔ Free Access

Through the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, by the Cross, his Resurrection and Ascension into the presence of the Father, we now have free access into the Presence of a holy, righteous Father God. It is a glorious *finished* work!

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV).



➔ Child of God

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” John 1:12-13.

➔ Joint-Heir with Christ

“...if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” Romans 8:17.

➔ New Covenant

We have entered into a new covenant with God through the Lord Jesus - the covenant of grace - full of the promises of God for every aspect of our lives now and for His glorious plan for us in eternity.

“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance...” Hebrews 9:15.

➔ Victorious Daily Walk

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” Romans 6:4 (NKJV).

➔ The Kingdom of God

We are now citizens of the Kingdom of God.

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” Philippians 3:20-21.

Our whole life-style has changed and we belong to the culture of the Kingdom.

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” Colossians 1:13

➔ Glorious Eternal Life

“...as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God’” 1 Corinthians 9-10 (NKJV).

The Presence of the Lord

The most wonderful thing about the Table of the Lord is that it is *HIS* table. He sits with us as we gather around it in unity together. We are at one with him and with one another. The result of the sense of his presence is the glorious expression of the heights of worship from his people - Heaven and earth joining together in worshipping Him!

“...I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!’” Revelation 5:13.

The Final “Amen”!

“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.” Jude 24-25.

The Beginnings of the Church

The foundation of the Church is clearly defined in Acts chapter 2. The disciples followed keenly the direction given to them by the Lord before he went to the Cross and, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them (Acts 1:8), saw thousands of new believers come into fellowship with the Lord. Following Peter’s exhortation to the new believers...

“...save yourself from this corrupt generation” (Acts 2:40)

...they took steps which are essential for every believer to be able to live a victorious Christian life, for the church to grow, and for many come into the Kingdom of God.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” Acts 2:42-47.

In summary, they had two specific places they met together:

The Temple Courts - here was a facility where they could gather in their larger numbers to hear the teaching of the apostles. What the apostles taught

we know today...they put it into writing - the New Testament - and we hold in our possession the precious Word of God.

Their homes - here they gathered around the Table of the Lord with their families and other believers, the apostles breaking bread together with them...

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” Acts 5:42.

The Church Today

We pray that all of us, as the Church today, will experience the same all-consuming reality of the finished work of our Lord Jesus. As well as the teaching of the Word in combined, larger gatherings or via the media, may the Table of the Lord, with all its wonderful truths, become more and more a reality in the life of the living Church and have its full expression in our lives. Let us love one another and fellowship together around His Table, ministering to one another with the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us. Let us celebrate together all that the Lord Jesus has accomplished for us, depicted in partaking of the precious “cup” and “bread” - making us alive and healthy in our spirit, soul and body. Through us, his transformed people, may we see many come into the wonderful restored relationship with the Father that the Lord Jesus came to make possible.