

**The Meaning of the Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23-27**

The Lord's Supper: Why does it exist? What is so important about this brief religious ceremony?

First, we must understand that there is meaning behind the bread and the cup. Yet if we fail to teach our children and new Christians the meaning, the Lord's Supper will soon become nothing more than a ritual.

When Jesus gave his disciples the unleavened bread at the 'Last Supper' he referred to the bread as "my body." The 'Last Supper' was the last Passover meal that Jesus ate with his disciples. A lamb was sacrificed and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The meal was eaten annually by the Jews to celebrate the deliverance of their ancestors from Egyptian slavery.

When Jesus referred to the bread as his body he identified himself as the Passover lamb. John the Baptist foreshadowed this connection by calling Jesus the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Later the Apostle Paul would refer to "Christ our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus was the Passover sacrifice for all men. His sacrifice, like the original Passover was about deliverance. But His sacrifice was for the deliverance from the slavery to sin.

**When a Christian eats the unleavened bread he is to remember Jesus who *delivered him from sin.***

When Jesus asked the disciples to drink the cup, he referred to it as "the new covenant in My blood." This statement refers back to a time in the history of Israel when they first received the law from God. Beginning in Exodus 20 is the record of the law given by God through Moses. The 'covenant' that God made with Israel included the first part of what is called the Law of Moses. However, the 'old covenant' contained more than law. The last thing that Moses related to the people on that occasion was a promise from God (Exodus 23:20-33).

God had made a covenant with Abraham, that included three great promises. The same covenant was made with Isaac and Jacob. When Israel was delivered from Egypt there was no longer a single man at the head of the family – Israel was a nation!

The first promise to Abraham had become a reality; his descendants had become a nation of people. God then carried his promised forward to the entire nation. He promised that he would

bring them into the land of Canaan which was his original promise to Abraham.

Upon receiving the law and the covenant promise, the nation of Israel agreed to follow God's law. A sacrificial animal was killed and the blood sprinkled on the people. It was then offered on the altar. The remaining blood was poured out at the base of the altar.

Jesus referred to the cup at the Last Supper as "the new covenant in My blood." In this statement he drew a parallel between himself and the sacrifice that was offered when Israel received the old covenant promise. He was indicating that his blood would be *poured out* for the new covenant between God and man. The cup finds its meaning, not in the Passover meal, but in the sacrifice associated with the covenant.

While the old covenant contained many laws, central to the covenant was the promise of the land inheritance for Israel. Central to the new covenant is a better promise (Hebrews 9). The *better promise* is not a temporary physical land inheritance. Rather, the Christian has received the *new covenant* with the promise of everlasting life.

**When a Christian drinks the cup he is to remember Jesus who *brought a new covenant with a better promise, everlasting life.***

The symbolism in the Lord's Supper holds deep meaning for the Christian, but it is not merely symbolic. Paul states that "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." Every Christian makes an open declaration concerning the death of Jesus. And yet, the Lord's Supper does not simply look back to the cross, it looks forward in hope as it calls us to rejoice in our *salvation* from the slavery of sin and in the *promise* of heaven.

The Lord's Supper is vital as it reminds each Christian of their deliverance and hope in Christ. At the same time it serves as encouragement as we participate with fellow saints in making a unified proclamation concerning the Christ.