

# Communion

## Lesson 8

### I. Summary of the Series

- a. As we prepare to participate in communion we are reminded that Jesus instituted communion with his disciples on the eve of the Jewish **Passover**.
- b. We are also reminded that Christ, our Paschal lamb, is the **promise** of our deliverance from the bondage of sin, and the One who abolishes our everlasting separation from God.
- c. The unleavened loaf that we shall partake of is called our "bread of affliction." It serves to remind us negatively of past affliction and symbolizes (positively) the **new life** in which we are cleansed from the leaven of the old sin nature. *1 Cor 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. KJV*
- d. We are also reminded that the sacrifice which we memorialize was first and foremost **God's sacrifice**. *Ex 23:18 Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread; neither shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until the morning. KJV*
- e. Before distributing the bread, it is likely Jesus prayed a **common** Jewish prayer of Thanksgiving which was something to the effect of: *Blessed be thou, our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread out of the earth!*
- f. Before distributing the **cup**, he may well have prayed a Jewish prayer which says: *Blessed be our God, the King of the universe, the Creator of the fruit of the vine!*

### II. The Bread

- a. In the reference to bread as the **symbol** of life-giving sustenance, we see that Jesus identifies Himself as the bread of life, the source of eternal life. *John 6:48-51 I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. KJV*
- b. The breaking of the bread is significant to the ceremony because the act of breaking was designed by our Lord to **illustrate** the wounding, and breaking of his own body on the cross. *1 Cor 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. KJV*
- c. We should particularly notice the fact that He **Himself** broke the bread. In other words, the Lord gave up His own body to be broken for us. *John 10:18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. KJV*
- d. This self-inflicted breaking of Christ for our benefit ensures the result He intended; **everything** that needs to be accomplished for our deliverance is performed by His own hand. He is the initiator and the finisher of our faith. *Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. NIV*
- e. Next, He gave it to the disciples. Here we notice that not only the breaking, but also the **distribution** of the bread is a necessary part of this rite. Distribution to each individual signifies the individual's participation in several ways.
  1. First, the communicant must himself **break** the symbolic body of Christ by breaking from the loaf his own portion, which he then consumes.
  2. This action symbolically makes the communicant an **active** participant in the breaking of the body of Christ. It is an admission of guilt which says that "my sin nailed Him to the Cross."
  3. Secondly, as our teeth crush the bread, we are symbolically demonstrating our **agreement** with those who actually beat the body of Christ and demeaned his person prior to crucifying Him.
  4. Even as we now count ourselves as the **friends** of Christ, and as we examine our hearts before Him, we see that in countless ways in our thoughts, attitudes, words and deeds we have betrayed that friendship, and thus added to His affliction. *Ps 41:9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me. KJV*
- f. But the symbolism does not stop there. There is a **positive** aspect to be considered. By eating the bread we are also identifying ourselves with the Person of Christ; we are demonstrating our oneness with Him. *John 17:23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. KJV*
- g. By eating of His symbolic body we are by faith in Him, taking to ourselves His **righteousness** and His right standing before God. *Rom 3:22-24 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus KJV.*
- h. Our Lord said, Do this in remembrance of me: i.e. 'Eat this bread, broken in remembrance of my body broken on the cross; eat this bread which gives **eternal life**. *John 6:53-58 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: KJV*

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### III. The Cup

- a. As eating was essential to the understanding of the symbol of bread, so drinking is essential to our understanding of the symbol of blood in **two** important aspects.
- b. First, the cup emphasizes the critical aspect the blood of **atonement**. Here Jesus stressed to each of His disciples the necessity of identifying themselves personally with the blood of atonement.
- c. As each disciple drank of the cup, it was the equivalent of the Jewish Priest placing his hand upon the head of the animal to be sacrificed as a means of **personally** identifying with the sacrifice. *Ex 29:10 And thou shalt cause a bullock to be brought before the tabernacle of the congregation: and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the bullock. KJV*
- d. Up till that Passover night in Jerusalem, the **promise** of atonement had been symbolized by the slaughtering of animals under the Jewish sacrificial system. *Heb 9:22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. NIV*
- e. But Jesus came as the **actual** fulfillment of the promise of real, full, and complete atonement. In effect He was saying THIS is THAT blood of mine which was pointed out by all the sacrifices under the Jewish law; but, this blood offering is different. *Heb 10:4-5 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: KJV*
- f. Secondly, the wine also symbolizes the blood of the sacrifice which was slain for the **ratification** of the new covenant. *Heb 9:14-15 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. KJV*

### IV. The New Covenant

- a. In the Hebrew language, the word for covenant also often signifies not only the covenant or agreement, but also the sacrifice which was slain on the occasion as a means of ratifying, **in blood**, the agreement between the parties.
- b. When Jesus held up the cup of wine and said to his disciples “Drink ye all of this” He was alluding to **both** the atonement accomplished by His shed blood and the establishment of the New Covenant by which we are saved. *Heb 9:15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the covenant. NIV*
- c. Just as his disciples had literally eaten the bread by which he signified his body, they also literally drank the wine by which Christ **signified** the atonement and the new covenant affirmed by his blood.
- d. In this literal eating and drinking each of His disciples were signifying their personal **identification** with Christ and belief in him who was the Lamb sent from God who was about to take away the sins of the world.

### V. The Controversies

- a. For many hundreds of years, various Christian **factions** have debated the meaning of communion, whether it is symbolic memorial or a living sacrament in which Christ is really present in the elements.
- b. The debate has raged as men have variously attempted to craft language and **logic** explaining the presence of Christ in the Eucharist or His absence from it.
- c. Given the nature of the controversy, the length of time that it has persisted and the intensity of sentiment on both sides, it is **doubtful** that it shall be resolved before Christ Himself makes it plain to all men.
- d. What is beyond controversy is that in communion believers are exhibiting their **faith** in the fact that he was put to death; we exhibit the emblems of his broken body and shed blood, and put forth our belief in his completed work on the cross on our behalf.
- e. We are **unified** in our understanding that Communion is a solemn occasion, reserved for true believers in the Church and that it is both a reminder and a pledge of our faith in Christ’s finished work and a statement of our submission to Him. *1 Cor 11:27-29 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. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. KJV*

### VI. Application

- a. To what extent would you say that your personal participation in Communion over the years has reflected a full understanding of its significance?
- b. To what would you attribute your lack of understanding of the significance of the Lord’s Supper?
- c. What can you do about it?