

“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” (John 6:53)



A Hard Saying

When Jesus spoke these words to his disciples their response was “*This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?*” (John 6:60 NIV)

After the Last Supper and the introduction of the bread and wine as emblems of the Lord’s body and blood, it was a natural thing to associate the words of Jesus (in the box above) with the Memorial Service.

Some have stretched this connection beyond reason or truth, suggesting that through some mysterious process, the bread and the wine are actually changed into the body and blood of Christ during their “communion” service. We will not concern ourselves with this foolishness, but will seek rather to understand the words of Jesus in a manner that is consistent with scripture.

The Practical Application

Jesus would have been well aware that many of his followers would believe that in partaking of the bread and the wine on a regular basis, they would be fulfilling the need to “eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood.”

In a very practical sense, if we refuse to honor his commandment to partake of these emblems in remembrance of him, we deny him. If we do not consider his request as a priority in the conduct of our lives, how can we hope to be a recipient of his gift of life eternal.

The Word made Flesh

In addition to the practical application of the Master’s words, there was also a symbolic or spiritual meaning. Jesus was the “word made flesh.” His entire life was a manifestation of the things that had been written before hand. Jesus was the “bread of life.”

Man does not live by bread alone but by the words of God. Jesus’ words were in full agreement with those of his Father’s and they are therefore “spirit and life.” (John 6:63) We eat his flesh symbolically when we consume the word of God daily, as the staff of eternal life.

In a similar way, we are told that the life of the flesh is in the blood. (Lev. 17:11) A serious commitment to a sacrificial life, (taking our cross daily and following him), is the only way to partake of his poured out life. A dedicated life of sacrifice will enable us to symbolically fulfill the requirement to drink his blood.



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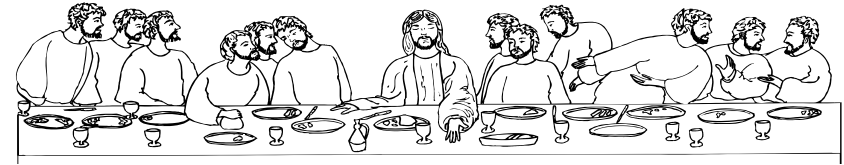
The Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ

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“Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: **this do in remembrance of me.**”

(1 Cor 11:24-25)



THE LAST SUPPER

We are all familiar with the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples just before he was crucified. It is commonly known as the Last Supper. We read about the account in Luke 22:15-20:

“...With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

Why did the Lord Jesus request that we remember him by partaking of these memorials, (the bread and the wine)? As we consider all of the related information, including the instruction in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, we should arrive at some of the following conclusions:

- Jesus was not looking for greatness and honor. He wanted his followers to remember him often because it would keep them together.
- His sacrificial death was the key event in the process of salvation. We should keep this sacrifice as our continuing focus.
- The bread and the wine were only symbols representing his body given and his blood (life) poured out.
- Partakers must examine themselves before eating and drinking these emblems.
- This communion (fellowship) is to be shared by true faithful servants and not by unbelievers or persons abandoned to sin.
- Participation in this service on a regular basis is a command not a suggestion.

“But let a man examine himself”

Personal Preparation for the Memorial Service

“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. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:28-32)

There is a grave responsibility for participants in the Memorial Service:

- We must examine ourselves. Have we kept the Master's commandments? Have we been faithful servants? If not, have we sought repentance and forgiveness through our mediator? (1 John 1:8-9)
- We must resolve any offenses in our relationships with our brethren. (Matthew 5:23-24)
- We must avoid participation in the Memorial Service with either unbelievers or consistently unfaithful brethren.
1 Corinthians 10:20-21
1 Corinthians 5:11
2 John 1:1-11
2 Corinthians 6:14-18

If we would judge Ourselves

In all of these actions and deliberations we must always judge ourselves first. The Apostle Paul wrote:

“For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” (1 Corinthians 11:31-32)

It is apparent from the instruction of Paul on the Memorial Service that there is an opportunity for us to examine ourselves in complete honesty and then make the necessary changes in our lives.

If however, we fail to take advantage of this opportunity, and we continue in willing blindness to our weaknesses and faults, God will find the way to help us. This may well involve the chastening of the Lord so that we are not condemned with the world in the day of judgment.

God is not willing that we perish

The purpose for all of this examination and correction is that we prepare our hearts as good and faithful servants for acceptance into his coming Kingdom. God is working in our lives to help us in this endeavor.

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread,”

The First Day of the Week

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” (Acts 20:7)

Meeting to break bread, in respect for the Lord's command to remember him in this way, was initially a daily event.

We are told in Acts 2:46 that the early believers shared many things in common and they broke bread together in their houses. “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”

As time passed the custom for the observance of the emblems centered around the first day of the week, perhaps in respect for the day of the resurrection of Christ. Sunday may also have been chosen to avoid any conflict with the Jewish Sabbath, which was on the seventh day.

In addition to partaking of the emblems (the bread and the wine) which were a symbol of the body and blood of Christ, the Memorial Service also focused on their need for:

- Thanksgiving and Praise (Luke 22:17, 19; Psalm 107:8,15,21,31)
- Self examination (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Repentance and renewal (1 John 1:7-9)
- Fellowship and communion with other faithful disciples (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)
- Lack of fellowship with disciples of the world. (1 Corinthians 10:20-21; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
- To show or declare the Lord's death (sacrifice) (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- To provide hope for the Kingdom to come (Luke 22:16-18; 1 Corinthians 11:26)
- Renewal of commitment to dedicate to sacrificial lives (Romans 12:1-2)
- To receive strength through exhortation and edification. (Hebrews 10:24-25; Romans 14:19)
- To remain obedient to the Lord's command (1 Corinthians 11:24-25)

As we consider the many features and benefits of this service, it is apparent that the Lord knew our weaknesses and needs when he established this memorial, not for himself, but for our good.

