



# The Lord's Supper & OEC

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

Most Christians have as a part of their heritage the habit of drinking wine or grape juice and eating bread or its equivalent in a self consciously symbolic way. These symbolic meals are linked to the final meal Christ had with his disciples. Throughout the centuries different Christian traditions have developed around this meal.

## JESUS AND COMMUNION

Jesus makes a remarkable claim when he says his followers must feed on him if they are to have eternal life (John 6:53–57). Christians get sustenance from Christ whether Jesus is referring to the Lord's Supper here or not. There are four accounts in the New Testament that seem to be describing some form of symbolic meal: Matthew 26:26–30, Mark 14:22–26, Luke 22:14–20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. All of these accounts share common elements. In the already established symbolic meal of *Passover*, the people of Israel remembered the events of their deliverance from Egypt under the sign of the sacrificed Passover lamb. This was done as if they themselves were a part of these original exodus events (Exodus 12).

Jesus explains his intentions about the Passover meal like this: *"I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples."* (Matthew 26:18) In this context, giving the bread and wine as his body and blood with the words *"this do in remembrance of me"*, Jesus is actually pointing to himself as the true substitute for those he delivers. It is Jesus' blood which is the sign of having God's anger pass over them, just as the Passover lamb's blood was a sign for Israel. The "new covenant" language Jesus uses to describe the meal he has with his disciples refers to the Old Testament practice of having a meal after a covenant was made.

In referring to the cup of wine he drinks with them as *"the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you"* (Luke 22:20) and the bread as his body, Jesus is transferring the meaning of the Passover from the "old" to the "new" covenant prophesied and described in Jeremiah 31:1–34.

## EARLY CHURCH PRACTICE

There are no clear passages that clearly explain the procedure the earliest Christian gatherings used in their meals, but there are indications that they had them and they were important to them. For example, Acts 2:42–46 and 20:7 talk about gathering together to *"break bread"*.

The passage in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 gives the clearest indication that there was a continued practice of having a "Christian" Passover meal. Believers gathered to eat this supper to focus on the new covenant established by Christ's body and blood.

Paul is writing to correct a lack of order in their meetings and wants to encourage a more appropriate way of having what he terms the "Lord's Supper". Their practice displayed an incorrect attitude in the way they approached this meal. He even says that their current practice was *"not the Lord's Supper"*. The warning Paul gives is that those who take part in the meal in an unworthy way are actually *"eating and drinking judgment on themselves"* (1 Cor 11:27).

This has all sorts of implications but at its most basic it is clear that if Christians are going to have a symbolic meal to remember the Lord's blood and body, it must be done with the right attitude. We want to make sure that what we call "*the Lord's Supper*" actually functions in a way that is consistent with the Biblical text.

Having recognised that there was an original meal shared by Jesus before his death, and meals shared by Christians after his death, resurrection and ascension, where does that leave us?

### **CHURCH HISTORY**

The big belief held by many since the ninth century was that the bread and wine actually *became* the body and blood of Christ when it was consecrated by the priest, despite the fact that it retained the *appearance* and *taste* of bread and wine (this was called *transubstantiation*).

The church built upon this view that since the real body and blood of Christ was seen as present, a real sacrifice was being made at the Lord's Supper, and so the elements should be venerated or even worshipped. Needless to say, this was not a Protestant view and was roundly condemned by all the reformation leaders.

### **CHURCH PRACTICE NOW**

Some denominational heritages see the Lord's Supper as valid only if it is run by a person officially ordained into the ministry of that denomination. This is born out of an attempt to maintain a proper practice of the Lord's Supper, but it is not a Biblical *requirement*, just as there is no biblical requirement for either ordination or denominations.

Perhaps the biggest problem is that Christians tend to assume that the Lord's Supper only happens in the big meetings (usually on Sundays). The original Passover meal happened at night, only once a year and in households.

There is nothing to stop Christians having a memorial meal in smaller groups or family groups. There is no requirement made in scripture as to how regularly to have this meal. The essential requirement it seems is that it is done with the right attitude. That is, one of belief and thanks for Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf. This meal, if it is to be celebrated, is for Christians. So have the Lord's Supper in your home group or with friends if you want to. It's like prayer.

### **THE LORD'S SUPPER AT OEC**

At OEC we have wanted to celebrate the Lord's Supper in the best and simplest way we can without stifling different church cultures insofar as they are consistent with the Biblical text. We have never used wine at our larger public gatherings to avoid creating a stumbling block for some.

The practical organisational details are important only inasmuch as they don't detract from what is being remembered. That is, whether we use wine or grape juice in larger or smaller gatherings, with one cup or many little cups is largely irrelevant so long as it can be used helpfully to focus on what Jesus has done and bring attention to his sacrificial death, which brings atonement to us.

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**If you have any questions, ideas or comments related to the Lord's Supper, please contact one of the OEC Church Council. Or you can:**

- Comment on a feedback card and place it in the giving box
- Email the OEC office: [office@oechurch.org.au](mailto:office@oechurch.org.au)
- Ring the church office to arrange a chat on 6362 1025