

## THE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP: COMMUNION

It has been said that Christian worship of God entails five elements or parts. Those five are said to be prayer, singing, preaching, offering and communion. Let us examine the communion around the Lord's table.

The communion, or Lord's Supper was given to Christians by the Lord Himself. Paul instructs as follows:

*For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. <sup>26</sup>For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).*

This communion comes about as a direct instruction of Jesus. The Gospels also record this moment in Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22. The Lord's Supper arose from the Passover feast of the Jews, an event celebrated since the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12). The Old Testament event celebrated God's deliverance of the Jews from the bondage of Egypt. In our day, we celebrate the deliverance from the bondage of sin.

In both cases, blood was a central element of the celebration. At the end of their time in Egypt, blood from a pure and unblemished lamb was placed upon the doorposts (Exodus 12:7). This caused the Lord to pass over their house while visiting death upon the firstborn of all Egypt and all those uncovered by the blood. The Israelites would celebrate Passover each year in the spring. It was during this feast that Jesus, while celebrating it as a Jew, gave command that it be continued into the Christian age. It was so done and was done weekly when the Christians met together (Acts 20:7).

Some would limit the Lord's Supper to an annual, quarterly or twice yearly event. Some would expand upon what God has said and would allow it at special occasions such as weddings and baptisms or during special holidays. Others would allow communion anytime it might be convenient. However the example here is a first day of the week celebration. It is interesting that those who reduce the Lord's Supper to an occasional memorial have a different thinking about the financial contribution. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, the offering was collected on the first day of the week and so our friends collect money on the first day but will not remember the Lord in His memorial meal even though the language is near exact.

There were but two elements included. The unleavened bread used by Jesus (we know this because unleavened bread was all that was allowed to be used in the Passover according to Exodus 12:8) was said by Him to signify the breaking of His own precious body. He next takes the cup filled with "fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25 and Luke 22:18) and offers it as remembrance for the blood that He would shed for our sins. Although frequently occurring at the same time, the offering or contribution is not part of the Lord's communion. Only these two elements make up the communion.

The purpose here is two fold. Jesus instructs us to do this "in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24,25). He also tells us to use this time as a moment of personal inspection: "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. <sup>29</sup>For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body*" (1 Corinthians 11:28,29). As we see clearly, this is a very important moment in the life of the Christian. It is not a time of trifling or distraction. Like all of worship it is essential to be done according to the Lord's direction. Communion was not practiced apart from worship. And it was never said to be more important than any other aspect of worship. However, it can be a deeply moving and greatly motivating time for those washed in the very blood of the crucified Lord.

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**NEXT WEEK: THE OFFERING**