



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 11.2 – The Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper

The Institution of the Lord’s Supper

What we teach concerning the Lord’s Supper must come from the Bible passages that refer to the Lord’s Supper. These are few in number. There are four accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper: Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. In addition, we have the Apostle Paul’s admonitions and instructions concerning the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 28-34. There are also references to the breaking of bread in Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7 that may refer to the Lord’s Supper.

It is clear from these accounts that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper on the Thursday evening before His death. Paul says: **“The Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’”** (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

On that very evening Jesus was celebrating the Old Testament Passover with His disciples. We read in the Gospel of Luke: **“Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He (Jesus) sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat’”** (Luke 22:7-8). Jesus told Peter and John how they could find the **“large, furnished upper room”** (Luke 22:12) where Jesus and His disciples would eat the Passover. The Passover meal consisted of roast lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and grape wine. Certainly this was a very solemn occasion. We read: **“When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God’”** (Luke 22:14-16).

Other events that took place that same evening were the quarrel among Jesus’ disciples as to which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24-30), Jesus’ washing of the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17), and Jesus’ announcement that one of them would betray Him (Mark 14:17-21). It is not possible to know for sure the exact order of these events, but all of them took place that evening in connection with this Passover meal.

No doubt the Passover meal proceeded as was customary in those days. Luke writes: **“He (Jesus) took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes’”** (Luke 22:17-19). This does not refer to the Lord’s Supper but to the grape wine that was customarily served at the Passover. Grapes grew on vines, and so Jesus referred to the wine as **“the fruit of the vine”**. It is also clear that the Passover meal coincided with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Therefore, the bread that was eaten at the meal would have been unleavened bread, that is, bread without yeast. Jesus told John that evening who the betrayer would be, for He said to him: **“It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.”** Then we are told: **“Having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon”** (John 13:26).

It was during this last Passover meal with His twelve apostles that Jesus instituted His supper. He gave them unleavened bread to eat and grape wine to drink. But as He gave them the bread and the wine,

He gave them much more. After blessing and breaking the bread, He gave the bread to them and said: **“Take, eat; this is My body”** (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22). Luke mentions additional words: **“This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me”** (Luke 22:19). Paul’s account which he **“received from the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 11:23) includes the same words: **“Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me”** (1 Corinthians 11:24). Notice that all four accounts quote Jesus as saying the same words: **“This is My body.”**

Matthew, who was himself present at this meal, continues the account in this way: **“Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom’”** (Matthew 26:27-29). Just as Jesus had said: **“This is My body”** as He distributed the bread, so now He said: **“This is My blood”** as He gave each of them the cup containing the grape wine (the fruit of the vine). Mark’s Gospel adds the detail that **“they all drank from it”** (Mark 14:23), following Jesus’ instructions that all of them should drink from this cup. Judas Iscariot left the group at some point during the feast, but we do not know for sure whether he was still present or not.

Luke gives us a slightly different wording in his account. Instead of reporting that Jesus said: **“This is My blood of the new covenant,”** Luke reports that Jesus said: **“This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you”** (Luke 22:20). There is no difference in meaning between the two. Remember that the new covenant is the forgiveness of sins, as foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34. So Jesus is saying that together with the wine He is giving them His blood, through which He won the forgiveness of sins for them – He is giving them the forgiveness of sins which is theirs through His blood. The Apostle Paul’s account uses the same words as Luke: **“This cup is the new covenant in My blood.”** Then Paul adds these words of Jesus: **“This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me”** (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Jesus’ words to His disciples that evening were His last will and testament. In his letter to the Galatians Paul spoke about the seriousness of a human covenant or testament: **“Brethren, I speak in the manner of men. Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it”** (Galatians 3:15). Since no one has the right to alter a human covenant, surely no one has the right to alter the covenant made by the Lord Jesus Himself on the night before His own death. It is only right for us therefore to take Jesus’ words as they stand without attempting to alter them in any way. As Jesus gave His disciples the bread, He said He was giving them His body. As Jesus gave His disciples the wine from the cup, He said He was giving them His blood. In giving them His body and His blood, Jesus was also giving them **“the new covenant in [His] blood” “for the remission of sins.”**

There is no doubt that earthly elements Jesus used in this first Lord’s Supper were unleavened bread and grape wine. Whenever the early Christians followed their Lord’s instruction to **“do”** this Lord’s Supper, they used the same earthly elements: bread and grape wine. This is shown from the fact that the Apostle Paul speaks of eating the bread and drinking the cup when he writes to the Corinthian congregation about the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:26-28).

The Old Testament Passover meal prefigured the Lord’s Supper to a certain extent by. When the Passover was instituted, the Israelites were slaves of the Egyptians, and the Pharaoh of Egypt refused to let them go. But God provided a remedy in the blood of a lamb. The blood was to be smeared on their doors, and when God’s angel passed through the land to kill all the firstborn in the land, he would **“pass over”** those homes that were marked with the blood of the lamb. Our human situation is worse than the slavery of the Israelites, for by nature all of us are in spiritual bondage to sin, death, and the devil. God’s remedy is the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who was sacrificed on the cross. His blood was poured out for us to take away our sins. Because of this blood of Jesus, God passes over us and forgives our sins. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us”** (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Israelites ate the meat of their Passover lamb, which was a preview of the true

Lamb of God: our Lord Jesus. In the Lord's Supper we do not partake of an animal (a lamb), but we receive the real thing: the very body and blood of the Lamb of God, which our Lord gives to us together with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

Some students of the Bible have concluded that Jesus was talking about the Lord's Supper already in John 6:26-58, after His feeding of the five thousand. But Jesus' words in John 6 about eating His flesh and drinking His blood do not refer to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper had not yet been instituted at that time. Jesus Himself explained what He meant by the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood when He said: **"He who believes in Me has everlasting life"** (John 6:47). Faith in Jesus is faith that Jesus gave His flesh into death for us and that He poured out His blood for us. The point of Jesus' words in John 6 is that there is no salvation except by faith in Him and His flesh and blood. This faith is the spiritual eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood that is absolutely necessary for salvation. This is what Jesus meant when He said: **"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life"** (John 6:53-54). Faith in Jesus is absolutely necessary for salvation, but partaking of the Lord's Supper is not absolutely necessary for salvation. Everyone who believes in Jesus is saved. Not everyone who partakes of the Lord's Supper is saved. The "eating and drinking" in John 6 always brings the blessing of eternal life. As we will see in Lesson 11.6, however, someone who partakes of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment on themselves (1 Corinthians 11:29). For these reasons we know that Jesus was not referring to the Lord's Supper in John 6.

Our Lutheran fathers explained the difference in the *Formula of Concord*: *"There is a spiritual kind of eating, which Christ treats above all in John 6... This spiritual eating, however, is nothing other than faith... The other kind of eating of Christ's body is oral or sacramental, when all who eat and drink the consecrated bread and wine in the Supper receive and partake of the true, essential body and blood of Christ orally"* (*Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, Solid Declaration, Article VII, p. 604*).

Questions

1. When did Jesus institute the Lord's Supper and what was about to happen to Him?
2. What was Jesus celebrating with His disciples when He instituted the Lord's Supper?
3. What are some of the other things that took place on that same evening?
4. What is the food of the Lord's Supper?
5. What did Jesus say He was giving His disciples to eat and drink?
6. What is meant by the new covenant?
7. Why would it be wrong for us to alter or explain away Jesus' words?
8. How did the Passover prefigure the Lord's Supper?
9. Why can we be sure Jesus is not talking about the Lord's Supper in John 6?