

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23–29

Subject: *The Lord's Table...*

Complement: *... is a covenant celebration of proclamation, thanksgiving, and commemoration.*

Big Idea: The Lord's Table is... a celebration; a proclamation; a commemoration; a time of thanksgiving.

INTRODUCTION

Very likely, every one of us here has participated in celebrating the at the Lord's Table dozens, if not hundreds of times. But unless we are careful, we can fall into the trap of mindlessly participating without understanding what we do, and why we do it.

Augustus Strong said of the Lord's Table: "The Lord's Supper sets forth, in general, the death of Christ as the sustaining power of the believer's life."¹ Monroe E. Dodd (of the Southern Baptist Convention), wrote in his 1934 book *Christ's Memorial* that the Lord's Supper is the "proclamation of a past act, pronouncement of a present experience, prophecy of a future event."²

This morning, I want to enhance our understanding of the Lord's Table by examining the various names by which it is known.

I. THE LORD'S TABLE IS KNOWN AS THE LORD'S SUPPER

It was on the night in the upper room, after they had eaten the Passover meal that celebrated the Jews' deliverance from slavery in Egypt, that Jesus reinterpreted that most significant of Jewish feasts. Do you remember what John the Baptist said when he first saw Jesus? "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), in reference to the lamb that was to be killed and eaten, its blood smeared on the doorposts to turn aside the avenging angel. We read:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."
Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying,

1 Strong, A. H. (1907). *Systematic theology* (p. 962). Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society.

2 Smith, G. T., & Gros, J. (2008). *The Lord's Supper: five views* (p. 102). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

“Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Mat 26:26–28)

This meal was not the creation of any congregation, man or denomination. The supper was instituted by Christ for those who would come after him. He is the one who offers the invitation to come, and that is why we are particular that only those who have received Jesus as Saviour and Lord might partake. Wayne Grudem writes:

The Lord's Supper is not simply an ordinary meal among human beings—it is a fellowship with Christ, in his presence and at his table.³

The Lord's Supper is a powerful symbol, a “speech act”, something designed to prod our imagination and so recall his atoning death. Strong writes: “It symbolizes the death of Christ for our sins.... It symbolizes the continuous dependence of the believer for all spiritual life upon the one crucified, now living, Savior, to whom he is thus united.”⁴

This meal reminds us of what Christ did. It declares for all time and to all the world that God hates sin, but also that He loves enough to send His Son to die on our behalf. At this supper, we are confronted with the reality of the bare cross and the empty tomb! At this table, we experience real fellowship with the risen Christ and his brothers and sisters, by faith and through the presence of his Holy Spirit.

The Lord's Table belongs to Jesus Christ, and it is He who invites us to come, and to remember what he has done. Secondly...

II. THE LORD'S TABLE IS CALLED EUCHARIST

“Eucharist” is how the Catholics describe their celebration of the Supper. It's a good word which comes from the Greek meaning “to give thanks”, just as Christ gave thanks for the bread and wine.

Whenever we celebrate this meal, let us do so as an act of thanks-giving to God for what he has done for us, and in us. It should not be hard as we remember all that Christ has done for us. Paul writes: “*But*

3 Grudem, W. A. (2004). *Systematic theology: An introduction to biblical doctrine* (p. 954). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.

4 Smith, G. T., & Gros, J. (2008). *Op.cit.* (p. 101).

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Surely, we can be thankful for a love so great?! And as for our sin, we read:

In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the **forgiveness** of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace (Eph 1:7)

Redemption! Forgiveness! Indeed, the Lord's Table is a time of thanksgiving, for we are reminded of how we have been loved, redeemed and forgiven!

Still need convincing? What Christ's death accomplished was to remove all of the barriers that keep us from going home to rest in the Father's loving embrace. Every one of us can go home again, because Christ has opened the way. This meal is a proclamation of the freedom and peace we can have. Paul wrote:

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.
Ro 4:25-5:2

Whenever we remember that Christ has made peace between us and God should give us cause for thankfulness and celebration. The Lord's table is indeed about **eucharist**, *thanksgiving*.

III. THE LORD'S TABLE IS CALLED COMMUNION

The Communion service is often what we call it. and that word means "*to experience another*," "*to have a close union with another*." Another word for this is *fellowship*. We know that we have been called into fellowship with Christ, for as Paul writes:

There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.(Ephesians 4:4–6)

This meal, then, is a powerful reminder that Christ is in all of us; this is a family meal declaring our fellowship with Christ and with each other. Here, we experience Christ together, sharing and declaring what we

have in common in-and-through Him. Scripture tells us that where two or three are gathered, he is with us (Matt. 18:20). We are two or three; therefore, the Prince of Peace, the Lamb of God is indeed with us in this experience of worship, just as He is present wherever His people gather.

Baptists understand the church as the people of God gathered voluntarily to worship God in the name of Jesus Christ. ...Christ is always present in and among his people when they gather in faith. Thus the Lord's Supper is a way of communing with each other and with Christ; it is a communal event of memory and proclamation that strengthens the unity of the church.⁵

God is present here not in the bread and the wine, but in the hearts of *His people*. The Lord's Supper is a commemoration-of and witness-to our unity in Christ. In Him we are joined together. As Paul says:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. (1Co 10:16–17)

God is here *because we are here*, worshipping and partaking together of the bread and wine *at His command*. This, indeed is *communion*.

IV. THE LORD'S TABLE IS CALLED SACRAMENT

The word "sacrament" is a loaded word, but when we as Baptists use this word to refer to the Lord's Supper (and to baptism), we do not mean that it is necessary for salvation, "nor is it a sacrament in the sense of a means of grace greater than worship or proclamation".⁶ Strong writes:

The Lord's Supper, like Baptism, is the symbol of a previous state of grace. It has in itself no regenerating and no sanctifying power, but is the symbol by which the relation of the believer to Christ his sanctifier, is vividly expressed and strongly confirmed.⁷

The original meaning of sacrament was the "oath of allegiance" that a Roman soldier swore at the beginning of his military service. He swore that he would serve the emperor to the death. Every now and then

5 Smith, G. T., & Gros, J. (2008). *Op.cit.* (p. 108).

6 Smith, G. T., & Gros, J. (2008). *Op. cit.* (p. 98).

7 Strong, A. H. (1907). *Op.cit.* (p. 964).

throughout his career, the soldier would be asked to *renew his sacrament*, his oath of allegiance, his pledge of loyalty. In this Supper, we remember Christ's sacrament to us. He pledged his loyalty and love for us to the death. He pledged to God that he would do whatever was needed to bring us a chance at salvation. He kept that pledge, all the way to the cross and the grave and beyond.

I believe strongly that the two sacraments we believe in as Baptists — baptism and the Lord's Supper — go hand in hand. Our baptism is our oath of allegiance, our pledge of loyalty and fidelity, our sacrament to God, and that this memorial meal, this communion, this Eucharist is where we renew our solemn pledge and vow to love and serve Him. It is a public proclamation that we are *fully identifying and participating in what Christ has done by His death and resurrection*.

This table is for us a renewal of commitment and promise. But because it is such a sacred promise, it is only for those who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour... not just for those who “go to church,” but for those who have surrendered to Him and pledged to serve Him! Anyone is welcome at this Table, but they must first be certain of their standing with God.

Sometimes in the rush and “busy-ness” of life we forget the promises we've made. The experience of celebrating this Supper allows us to renew those promises. This morning, as you participate, consciously renew the pledges, the commitments, and the loyalties that you have offered him.

CONCLUSION

If we receive the biblical witness about Christ's death for us and our sin, and if we believe that it is only by His death that we have been justified and delivered from sin's lordship over us, then we should take particular delight in the Lord's Supper. It is at His table that we are specially showing our unity in Christ, in remembering His sacrifice for us as we proclaim His death, and in making ourselves visible as a family of His followers “being made holy” (Heb 10:14).

We gather in thanks for Christ's cross, in commitment to follow Him as His disciples and in hopes of His soon return.⁸

And so, we come to celebrate this Lord's Supper. He invites us to gather to remember his sacrifice on our behalf. We gather and celebrate this **Eucharist** by giving thanks to God for what Christ did on our behalf. We celebrate this **Communion**, as we open ourselves up to the living presence of Christ who is here even now. We celebrate this **sacrament**, receiving "spiritual nourishment" even as we renew our pledge of loyalty, to the Christ who committed Himself so to us.

The church's central event is the proclamation of the word of God, and in the Lord's Supper "visible words" proclaim Christ's death until he returns. Just as faithful preaching communicates Christ and helps believers commune with him, so the Lord's Supper draws faithful participants closer to Christ and each other.⁹

Pavlova, the famous ballerina, was once asked to explain a dance she had performed. She replied, "Do you think I would have danced it if I could have said it?!" To attempt to describe the Lord's Supper and all that it means is like trying to describe the Sistine Chapel or the Mona Lisa; it must be experienced, and can only be fully apprehended by those who have been joined by faith to Christ.

Here and now, spread before us, is the Lord's Table. Let all those who have confessed Him as Lord and Saviour come and eat, and share with Him who is the Living Head of the Church. To its blessing and fellowship, all disciples are welcome. This is not our table, but the Table of the Lord.

2048 words 02/03/2013 16:11

8 Dever, M.E. *The SBJT Forum: The Lord's Supper*. *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* Volume 6. 2002 (3) (98-99). Louisville, KY: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

9 Smith, G. T., & Gros, J. (2008). *Op. cit.* (p. 108).