

# The Purpose of the Lord's Supper

Dr. Jeff Stott

When it comes to the Lord's Supper there are several reactions toward it. For some, it is a *dreary* religious ritual. The few times I went to church as a child and even after I was saved as a teenager, I considered the Lord's Supper as an uninspiring church activity. When I walked into the church and saw the Lord's Supper table set up my first thought was, "Oh no! The church service is going to be longer and I have to sit through this boring activity." I hope that doesn't describe you, but if it does, I hope the following truths will help remove the boredom and replace it with enthusiasm along with a deeper understanding of the significance of the Lord's Supper.

You may not approach the Lord's Supper with an attitude of dreariness, but with a sense of *duty*. For this group the Lord's Supper stirs nothing up inside them. They have participated in the Lord's Supper so many times it has become routine. They know it has meaning and may even ask for it to be observed more often, but the impact of the Lord's Supper has disappeared for them. They see the Lord's Supper as an important religious activity that all good Christians should do. For them, it is nothing more than a religious ritual that should be done.

Another approach deals with *doubt*. This group knows the Lord's Supper is suppose to be important and significant, but doesn't understand it. They have many unanswered questions about the Lord's Supper that hinders them from fully applying its meaning and purpose. Instead of approaching the Lord's Supper with faith, they approach it with confusion.

Others approach the Lord's Supper with *delight*. This group has studied the Word, they love Jesus, and have a deep appreciation for what He did for them on the cross. For them, the Lord's Supper is a meaningful worship experience between them and their Lord. They do not approach the Lord's Supper with dread or out of duty. They approach it with great joy, strong faith, and deep reflection.

In order to grow in delighting in the Lord's Supper it's helpful to understand its six primary purposes. Jesus intended these six truths to happen every time His people ate the bread and drank from the cup that represents His sacrificial death on the cross.

## **You are to look around and restore**

When you, as a believer, take the Lord's Supper you are to *look around* and *restore*. The primary teaching in the Bible on the Lord's Supper is 1 Corinthians 11:23-34. Yet, this section that introduces the Lord's Supper begins by addressing some divisions in the body of Christ: "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it" (1 Cor. 11:17-18). To help remove some of the division Paul addresses the practice of the Lord's Supper in verse 23. The reason he does so is because one of the results of the Lord's Supper is restoration among believers. When the Lord's Supper is applied correctly, unity and forgiveness will be the outcome. When you meditate on the sacrificial act of Jesus and the forgiveness that was offered through the cross which brought about the reconciliation of man to God your natural response is to seek forgiveness from those you have offended.

As you take the Lord's Supper you should ask God, "God is there anyone I have hurt, sinned against, and offended that I should ask for their forgiveness?" If there is then you need to make it right as soon as you can. As you think about the death of Christ and the restoration His death brought to you, it should drive you to restore and reconcile with others.

## **You are to look back and remember**

When a believer participates in the Lord's Supper it should cause them to *look back* and *remember*. Two times in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 you are reminded that Jesus said to "do this in remembrance of me." The Lord's Supper is about remembering the Lord Jesus and His death.

To "remember" means much more than simply to bring something to mind or to merely to recall that an event happened. To truly remember is to go back in one's mind recapture as much of the reality and significance of an event or experience as one possibly can. To remember Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross is to relive with Him His life, agony, suffering, and death as much as is humanly possible.

When Jesus tells you to "do this in remembrance" of Him He is telling you to think about the sacrifice He paid, the pain He went through, and the greatness of His

substitution for you on the cross. He wants you to remember this because it reminds you of how much He loves you. He wants you to look back and remember how much He demonstrated His love for you.

### **You are to look without and reach**

When you participate in the Lord's Supper it should cause you to *look without* and *reach*. When correctly applied, the Lord's Supper should motivate you to reach out and share Christ with others. Notice carefully that God's Word says, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, *you proclaim the Lord's death*" (emphasis added, 1 Cor. 11:26). The message of the cross and the Lord's death is not only for you to remember, but it is for you to proclaim.

When you participate in the Lord's Supper you are saying you believe Jesus died for your sins, He rose again, and your sins have been paid for by His blood resulting in eternal life through Him. When you take the Lord's Supper you are making a public statement to those sitting around you that you are a follower of Christ and are not ashamed of the Lord.

The very act of proclaiming His death through the Lord's Supper should remind you to proclaim Christ in the world. You should think about how important the message of Christ is and how you can share it at school, work, with family and friends. One purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remind you to share the good news of what Jesus has done for you.

### **You are to look ahead and rejoice**

When the Lord's Supper is applied correctly it will cause the believer to *look ahead* and *rejoice*. The Lord's Supper brings your attention to the fact that someday Christ will return to for you and other believers. God's Word says, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, *until he comes*" (emphasis added, 1 Cor. 11:26). You proclaim the cross of Calvary every time you take the Lord's Supper, but it is always in the shadow of Christ's return.

One of the great truths of the Bible is the return of Christ. Someday His glorious appearing will occur: "For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the

dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The Lord’s Supper is not only about the death of Christ, but the reign of Christ. Jesus died on the cross so that He could resurrect from the grave. He resurrected from the grave so that He could ascend to the Father. He ascended to the Father so that He could come back again for His people. When the Lord’s Supper is applied correctly, you will be more excited about the return of Christ.

### **You are to look within and repent**

Another purpose of the Lord’s Supper is for you to *look within* and *repent*. God wants you to use the Lord’s Supper as a time of self examination. God’s Word teaches, “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup” (1 Cor. 11:28). Before taking the Lord’s Supper you should spend time evaluating your thoughts, motivations, attitudes, and actions. Some areas of examination can include the following.

- *Examine your salvation* (2 Cor. 13:5). Have you truly surrendered to Jesus Christ as the master and Lord of your life? If you have not then you need to ask Jesus Christ to be your Lord. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, to help you repent and to turn to Him for everything in your life.
- *Examine your relationships*. Evaluate how you treat others (Col. 3:12-13). Are you treating those in your life with kindness, humility, gentleness, respect, and love. How are you treating your parents? How do you treat your kids? How do you treat the people you work with or go to school with?
- *Examine your attitude*. Does your attitude toward life reflect someone who has been given abundant life? Do you speak words of victory and success or defeat and sarcasm? Do you think with a renewed mind or a worldly mind?

A key component of the Lord's Supper is a time of reflection and repentance for every believer. During the Lord's Supper talk to God asking Him what areas in your life need examination and cleansing.

### **You are to look up and renew**

The Lord's Supper is also a time for Christians to *look up* and *renew*. It serves as a reminder you are in a covenant with the Lord. In describing the actions and words of the Lord's Supper notice what Matthew recorded: "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, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of *the covenant*, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (emphasis added, Matthew 26:26-28). Notice Jesus referred to a "covenant." A covenant has two sides. One side is forgiveness of sins by the Lord. When a person enters this covenant with the Lord at salvation God guarantees his sins have been removed and forgiven by the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

The other side of the covenant is obedience. When a person accepts Christ as the Lord of his or her life, they are saying, "I will obey You, Lord. You are my God and I will submit to you gladly." Part of the Lord's Supper is to remind you that when you were saved you entered a covenant with God saying you would follow Him and obey Him as an expression of the your love. As person belonging to God, the Lord's Supper is a time to look up to God in your heart and rededicate yourself to the covenant that was made with Him knowing that He will always keep His end of the covenant. It's a time to look up and renew.

When you take the Lord's Supper correctly your experiences should contribute to the unity of the church, an examination of your life, an expectation of the Lord's return, a motivation to evangelize the lost, a reminder of God's love through Christ, and a renewal of obedience toward God.