

CHURCH.

LESSON 15

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about church building to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] GALATIANS 5 – 6 and EPHESIANS 1
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Galatians 5-6 and Ephesians 1).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE] (3) 1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-5
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Review two by two.

(3) Self-control: 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. It is God's will that you be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to acquire a wife (or: that each of you should learn to control his own body) in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) [CHURCH SACRAMENT] THE LORD'S SUPPER
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Introduce. This teaching is about the Lord's Supper. We will learn what the Bible teaches about the Lord's Supper, its institution, meaning and practice.

Read Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.

A. THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. Biblical names for the Lord's Supper.

Baptism with water and the Lord's Supper are called the two Christian sacraments. A *sacrament* is a religious ceremony regarded as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

In 1 Corinthians 11:20 this sacrament is called the Lord's Supper. That was to distinguish it from the love feast (the agape) which the Corinthians connected with it. Unfortunately the Lord's Supper degenerated into a supper or meal in which the rich treated the poor miserly.

In 1 Corinthians 10:21 this sacrament is called the Lord's Table. That was to distinguish it from the table of demons. The Gentiles at Corinth used to bring their sacrifices to their idols in the temples and then sit down to enjoy a sacrificial meal together. Such a meal Paul called "the table of demons", because sacrifices to idols are in reality sacrifices to demons. The sacrificial meal connected with it is in reality exercising communion with demons.

In Acts 2:42 and 20:7 this sacrament is called the breaking of bread, which is really a term for the love feast, which included the Lord's Supper.

In 1 Corinthians 10:16 this sacrament is called an Eucharist, which means thanksgiving.

2. Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper during the Passover festival. See manual 6, supplement 5. We read about this in the first three Gospels, for example in Matthew 26:26-29, and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. During the Passover festival¹ on Thursday evening the fifteenth of Nisan the day before he was crucified, Jesus took bread, gave a blessing 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." During the Passover festival on Friday morning the fifteenth of Nisan Jesus was crucified.

¹ The Passover, 15th Nisan, began on Thursday evening 1800 hours and ended on Friday evening 1800 hours.

3. The explanation of John 6:54-55.

In John 6:54-55 Jesus says, “Whoever *eats* my flesh and *drinks* my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.” John 6:48-59 does not speak of the Lord’s Supper, but in figurative language about believing in Jesus Christ for the first time! The tenses of the verbs “to eat” (Greek: *esthió*, *efagon*) and “to drink” (Greek: *pinó*) in verse 50 to 53 are in the aorist tense pointing to a once for all time receiving Christ by faith into one’s life. The tenses of the verbs “to feed” (Greek: *trógó*) and “to drink” (Greek: *pinó*) in verses 54 to 56 are in the present continuous tense pointing to the abiding relationship of faith and remaining in Christ (John 6:40). Jesus himself explains what he means in verse 40, 47 and 54, “Everyone who *believes* in the Son shall have eternal life, and I (Christ) will raise him up at the last day”. Jesus does not teach that the bread and the wine in some magical way become the body and blood of Christ.² He teaches that *eating bread and drinking wine* are words symbolising *believing and receiving* Christ into one’s heart and life! In the context, Jesus was speaking to unbelievers about faith in him (John 6:41-42) and he was not speaking to believers about the Lord’s Supper.

The physical body of Jesus Christ is not in some mystical way present in the Lord’s Supper or anywhere else on earth. With respect to his glorified physical body, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father (Acts 1:9-11)! Therefore, nobody on earth can do anything with the glorified physical body of Jesus Christ in heaven.

4. How the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated.

The apostle Paul teaches five significant things about how the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated.

(1) The Lord’s Supper is a command.

The Lord’s Supper was *a command* that Paul had received from the Lord Jesus and that should be passed on to all Christians. Christians should celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

(2) The Lord’s Supper is a blessing and thanksgiving.

While Matthew speaks of Jesus *giving a blessing* for the bread, Paul speaks of *giving thanks* for the bread. “To bless” means to call down God’s powerful grace and “to thank” means to send up a grateful acknowledgement of God’s grace. In all probability the two words were used interchangeably and refer to a blessing and thanksgiving combined.

(3) The Lord’s Supper is a remembrance.

The Lord Jesus taught Christians to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in *remembrance* of him.

(4) The Lord’s Supper is a proclamation.

Whenever Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper, they *proclaim* the Lord’s death until his second coming.

(5) The Lord’s Supper is a solemn celebration.

The Lord’s Supper must be celebrated in a worthy manner. Therefore, every Christian ought *to examine* himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. The Christian ought to be able *to recognise* the body of the Lord, that is, really understand what he is doing in the Lord’s Supper. If he doesn’t, he will eat and drink a judgement on himself.

B. THE MEANING OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

Introduce. The Lord’s Supper is a sign and a seal given by Jesus Christ to Christians. The partaking of the Lord’s Supper is a real fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Read Matthew 26:26-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

1. The Lord’s Supper is a sign.

Like the Old Testament circumcision was *a sign and a seal* (Romans 4:11) of the circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28-29), so the baptism with water is a sign and a seal of the baptism with the Spirit (Acts 10:47-48) and the Lord’s Supper is a sign and a seal of Christ’s death and its present benefits for believers (the atonement of sins and the redemption of God’s wrath against sin)(Matthew 26:28).

(1) A sign is an outward visible symbol that has spiritual meaning.

The characteristic of a sacrament is that it represents one or more spiritual truths by means of outward and observable signs.

(2) The symbols in the Lord’s Supper.

The outward visible symbols in the Lord’s Supper are the elements of bread and wine, the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine, the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine, and doing all this in fellowship (communion) with other Christians.

² The doctrine of transubstantiation in which the bread and wine is miraculously transformed into the literal body and the literal blood of Christ is NOT a biblical teaching!

The spiritual truths symbolised in these outward signs are the following:

- The *bread* and *wine* symbolise the body and the blood of Jesus.
- The *breaking* of the bread symbolises the body of Jesus, which was broken on the cross. The *pouring* of the wine symbolises the blood of Jesus which was shed when he was nailed to the cross. They symbolically represent the death of Jesus Christ as atonement for our sin and redemption from the punishment for sin.
- The words of Jesus that instituted the Lord's Supper teach that his death was a *substitution*. When Jesus says, "This is my body, which is *for you*" (1 Corinthians 11:24) and "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out *for many* for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28), he teaches that his death was a sacrifice *in the place of his people*.
- The *eating* of the bread and the *drinking* of the wine symbolise that the Christian actually participates in Jesus Christ and that he symbolically takes to himself the benefits, which Christ secured by his death, and makes them his own. Just as eating ordinary bread and drinking ordinary wine nourishes the physical body, so participating in the Lord's Supper sustains and renews the spiritual life.
- *Celebrating* the Lord's Supper *together* as Christians symbolises the union of believers with one another.
- 1 Corinthians 10:17 teaches that partaking of *the one piece (pancake or loaf) of bread* symbolises that all Christians are members of the one Body of Christ, the worldwide Christian Church.

2. The Lord's Supper is a seal.

(1) A seal is an outward visible symbol that guarantees genuineness and certainty of the spiritual truth.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not only the sign of Christ's death, but also the seal that guarantees the benefits of Christ's death.

(2) The certifications (guarantees) of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper certifies to the Christian that he is the personal object of Christ's love.

The Lord's Supper solemnly promises the Christian that he has a personal claim on all the benefits of Christ's death, like forgiveness of his sins, being set free from the punishment for his sins and given a clean conscience.

The Lord's Supper assures the Christian that the blessings of salvation are his actual possession for eternity (cf. Ephesians 1:3-5).

The baptism with water is the distinctive mark of a Christian.
Likewise the Lord's Supper is the distinctive celebration of the Christian.

Every time a Christian eats the bread and drinks the wine, he professes his faith in Jesus Christ as his Saviour and his allegiance to Jesus Christ as his King. Thus, he solemnly promises to obey Jesus Christ and his Word. Every time a Christian celebrates the Lord's Supper, he *proclaims* the gospel that Jesus Christ died for sin and that whoever believes in Jesus Christ will not perish, but have eternal life (including forgiveness).

3. The Lord's Supper is a means of grace.

(1) The beginning of God's work of grace.

God does not begin his work of grace in the hearts of sinners by means of the Lord's Supper. God begins his work of grace in the hearts of sinners *before time* by choosing them in a sovereign way (Ephesians 1:4), and *in time* by calling them through the gospel, by regenerating and sanctifying them through the Holy Spirit and by justifying them through belief in the truth (John 3:3-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

(2) The continuation of God's work of grace.

God *continues* his work of grace in the hearts of Christians by means of the proclamation of his Word, by means of the baptism with water and by means of the Lord's Supper.

The cup points to "Christ's blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28; Ephesians 1:7). Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). Without the shedding of blood, there can be no covenant, that is, no special friendship relationship between God and his people. Reconciliation with God always requires blood, an atoning sacrifice. And since man himself is unable to bring such a sacrifice, God requires that man accepts by faith the sacrifice of atonement which he demands and provides in Christ.

By Christ's substitutionary death, the new covenant comes into being. The covenant of grace results in the forgiveness of sin (justification) and the redemption (salvation) from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9). The Lord's Supper *increases the Christian's assurance* of his personal salvation and of the ultimate salvation of the whole Christian Church.

However, this strengthening of grace does not happen automatically. The Lord's Supper is not a magical rite. The understanding and attitude of the Christian with regard to the Lord's Supper are important.

4. The Lord's Supper is a real fellowship (a communion, a participation).

Read John 16:7,12-15; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 5:5.

Discover and discuss. In what way is Christ present during the Lord's Supper?

Notes.

(1) The blood is a symbol of sharing the life of Jesus Christ.

During the Old Testament revelation "blood" was a symbol of life that was shed, but *may not be shared* (eaten). In Leviticus 17:10-11 God says to Moses, "I will set my face against any person (Israelite or alien) who eats blood. I will cut him off from his people. The life of a creature is in the blood. And the blood is given to believers to make atonement for their sins so that their lives are preserved."

However during the New Testament revelation "blood" (the symbol for "life") was not only literally shed (poured out) on the cross, but also had to be symbolically shared (eaten and drunk) during the Lord's Supper! Blood was really shed on the cross and symbolically drunk at the Lord's Supper. In John 6:56 Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (cf. John 15:5). And during the last Passover feast in Matthew 26:27-28 he says, "Drink from it (the cup of wine), all of you (believers). This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" By doing this, namely, by symbolically eating his (symbolic) body and symbolically drinking his (symbolic) blood the real life of Jesus Christ enters the believer! Jesus commanded his disciples, not merely to pour out the wine (that symbolised his blood), but to actually drink it. Jesus intended the Lord's Supper not only to be a remembrance of his death, but an actual realisation of his life that is present. Believers cannot live without the nourishment which his life provides. The *blood* which Jesus shed on the cross (that is the life he lays down in death) does much more than atoning and removing sins. When a believer receives Jesus Christ for the first time he begins a new relationship with Jesus Christ that never ends. In this relationship the believer participates in the life of Jesus Christ: in his resurrection life (Romans 6:4-5) and in his divine life (cf. 2 Peter 1:3-4).

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks *a participation* (Greek: *koinónia*) in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break *a participation* in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). The (symbolic) blood, and thus the life of Jesus that is drunk during the Lord's Supper nourishes the believer spiritually (and rationally, emotionally, etc.) "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" (John 6:55).

Jesus himself explains. The eternal life (the new born-again life) now and the perfect life at the resurrection from the dead later is really received by believing in Jesus Christ (John 3:16; John 5:24; John 10:28): "Whoever believes in me shall have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40)! That life is really strengthened by symbolically eating the flesh/body of Jesus Christ and drinking his blood: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood (that is, once for all believes in Jesus Christ)(John 6:40) has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54)!

The symbols eaten and drunk at the Lord's Supper are not simply a fellowship (Greek: *koinónia*, communion, participation) with the bread and wine, but *a real fellowship* (Greek: *koinónia*, communion, participation) with Jesus Christ who himself really exists and is present! During the Lord's Supper he continues to share his life with believers! From the time that the believer received Jesus Christ for the first time he shares in the spiritual and eternal life of Jesus Christ himself. During the Lord's Supper Jesus Christ continues to give his righteousness, his holiness, his wisdom and his perfect salvation to the believer (1 Corinthians 1:30)! This truth pleads for a regular or weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper!

(2) The physical body of Jesus is in heaven.

Jesus Christ with respect to his human (and now glorious) physical body in heaven (John 16:7; Acts 1:9-11).

(3) The spiritual virtues and effects of the completed work of salvation in his human nature are present on earth.

Nevertheless is Jesus Christ with respect to his Divine Nature in and through the Holy Spirit present on this earth" "I am with you always to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20; cf. John 14:16-18). The Holy Spirit guides the Christian into all the truth and he glorifies Jesus Christ in the midst of the Church (John 16:13-15) – also when the church celebrates the Lord's Supper. The Holy Spirit guarantees the inheritance of the Christian (Ephesians 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit is God's seal that he owns us. And the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of Jesus Christ that he is in the process of completing what he has started in our lives (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Philippians 1:6).

Wherever the Lord's Supper is celebrated, there Jesus Christ is really present and continues to do a spiritual work in the lives of Christians. The Lord's Supper has been instituted to give assurance to Christians that Christ is carrying on the good work he began in Christians to completion (Philippians 1:6). Through the Holy Spirit, he makes *all the virtues and effects* of the sacrifice of his body and blood *a present reality and blessing* in the Lord's Supper and strengthens and encourages Christians through it. The Lord's Supper is a sign and seal that the complete salvation work of Christ in the past belongs here and now in the present time to the Christian! The Christian may continue to claim this, continue to receive this and continue to live by it. The Lord's Supper assures the Christian that all his sins are atoned for and thus forgiven. It guarantees that the Christian saved and remains saved! Christians celebrates these facts with joy in the Lord's Supper!

The Lord's Supper is not merely a *commemoration* (remembrance) of the Lord's death in the past, but also a *communion* (Greek: *koinónia*, communion, fellowship, participation) with the resurrected Christ in heaven in the present. During the Lord's Supper Christ through his Spirit heals the sick (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:30) and renews, strengthens and sustains the spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual life of the believer on earth!

C. THE PRACTICE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. The people who may properly participate in the Lord's Supper.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

Discover and discuss. Who may participate in the Lord's Supper?

(1) Only Christians who are able to recognise the body of Christ, may participate in the Lord's Supper.

From these words it is clear that non-Christians and generally too young children of Christians may not participate in the Lord's Supper, because they are not yet able to know (understand) what is happening during the Lord's Supper. Whoever behaves in an unworthy way and cannot distinguish between an ordinary meal and the Lord's Supper may not participate in the Lord's Supper.

(2) Only Christians who examine themselves may participate in the Lord's Supper.

From these words it is clear that people who have not yet repented of their sins may not participate in the Lord's Supper. But people who confess that they are lost without Jesus Christ, believe in the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ, have examined (tested) themselves and have seriously repented from their sins may participate in the Lord's Supper. Christians who believe that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed them from all sins and long to grow in faith, righteousness and holiness may participate in the Lord's Supper.

2. The manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper.

(1) How often should congregations celebrate the Lord's Supper?

Jesus or the apostles did not say. Therefore, some congregations celebrate the Lord's Supper every week. Cf. B4 "the Lord's Supper as a real fellowship with Christ. Most congregations celebrate it once a month or even once a quarter.

(2) What kind of bread and wine should be used?

Jesus and the apostles did not say. They also did not say who (the offices or ordinary Christians) should produce the bread and wine. Therefore, some congregations use unleavened bread and others use ordinary bread. Some congregations use real wine, while others use wine diluted with water, grape juice or any local drink. The bread and wine may be produced or bought. What is important is not the elements of bread and wine, but *what they signify*.

(3) How should the one loaf of bread and the one cup of wine be divided among Christians?

Jesus and the apostles did not say. Therefore, some congregations break the one loaf of bread into small pieces and divide the one cup of wine into small cups of wine before or during the Lord's Supper. Others let people break their own piece off the one loaf of bread and let all people drink from the one cup during the Lord's Supper. What is important is not how many pieces of bread and how many cups of wine are used, but that people understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper and participate with the right attitude. The right attitude certainly excludes a critical attitude towards other Christians in the one Body of Christ. Christians must accept one another in love!

(4) Who may lead in the administration of the Lord's Supper?

Jesus and the apostles did not say. Therefore, some congregations allow every mature Christian (brother or sister) to minister, while most congregations traditionally limit the administration of the Lord's Supper to the elders or the pastor of the congregation. They believe that the teaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments belong together.

However, the teaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments are nowhere in the Bible explicitly reserved for a certain class of Christians, for example limited to pastors and teachers (cf. Matthew 28:20; Colossians 3:16). Nevertheless, in order to control false teaching and the abuse of the sacrament, it is advisable to administer the Lord's Supper under the supervision of the elders.

(5) Which robes, postures, words and gestures are prescribed during the Lord's Supper?

Jesus and the apostles did not say anything. Churches celebrate the Lord's Supper in different ways. Some churches bless the bread (that is, they *call down* God's grace). Others thank God (that is, *send up* a grateful acknowledgement of God's grace). During the celebration of the Lord's Supper, some congregations remain seated, while others stand or kneel in the front. And some congregations walk to the person administering the Lord's Supper.

The majority of congregations read the words of Matthew 26:26-29 or 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 to the Christians and then explain the meaning of the Lord's Supper to them. They usually give some time for the Christians to examine their own lives and to confess their sins to the Lord.

Then they use the words of Jesus or Paul when they distribute the elements of bread and wine to the Christians participating in the celebration: "The bread is (symbolises) the body of Christ. Eat it in remembrance of Christ." "The cup is (symbolises) the new covenant in Christ's blood. Drink it in remembrance of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

Some Christians eat and drink the elements as soon as they receive them, while other Christians wait for one another and eat and drink the elements together. Some Christians combine the Lord's Supper with an ordinary meal.

Finally, they thank God for his many blessings in Jesus Christ, either through prayer or singing.

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.

Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of "The Lord's Supper" together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Ephesians 2 – 5** each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (4) Proper timing: **Ecclesiastes 8:5b-6a**. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. **John 6**. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.