

How the Lord's Supper Fuels Us to Love One Another

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by David Schrock

This Sunday we will take the Lord's Supper. And instead of coming in unprepared (as is so easy to do), let us consider how the Lord's Supper fuels Jesus' New Commandment to "Love One Another."

The Lord's Supper

In Luke 22 Jesus serves the Passover and calls it his new covenant meal: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (v. 20). Fulfilling the words of Jeremiah 31, Jesus as God's priestly mediator brought an end to the old covenant and inaugurated the new when he went to the cross (see Hebrews 9:15–17). Anticipating his crucifixion on the next day, Jesus transformed the Passover from an old covenant shadow to a new covenant reality.

When we take the Lord's Supper, we look back to the legal transaction that resulted in our pardon, and looking forward we see what Christ's death accomplished— an international multitude gathered around God's throne. In the immediate, this future reality is lived out in our local fellowship. As members of Christ's body, we are unified to Christ and to one another.

For this reason, the Lord's Supper can never be taken alone. It is the church's meal. Regardless of what the modern elements look like, the symbolism of Jesus is unmistakable. The one loaf represents the unity of the messianic community, while the broken pieces portray the need for every member to receive Christ's life (Luke 22:19). Likewise, the cup was "divided" such that the Upper Room communicants enjoyed the same wine (Luke 22:17).

For us, the Lord's Supper reminds us of our partnership together in Christ. As such it marks out those who are his and those who are not. It is a regular reminder of our Savior's atoning death and of our Savior's decided accomplishment—the community created by his shed blood. As 1 Corinthians 11:25 says, it proclaims the death of Christ until he comes. But because it is taken by the saints made alive by his cross, it also proclaims the life given to us—a life lived one with another.

Love One Another

We will take the Lord's Supper this Sunday on the heels of hearing John 13, a passage which moves from the Passover to Jesus' new commandment. Whereas Luke records the new covenant, John's Gospel focuses attention on the command to love one another.

In this Passover setting, Jesus stresses the new way in which his disciples must relate to one another. What's interesting about his command is that he calls it "new." Clearly, the idea of

loving one another is not new (see Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18). And neither is the idea of being God's covenant people. So what is new?

I would suggest it is the newness of the new covenant. As Jeremiah promised, the new covenant comes with a new inner relish. Whereas the old covenant wrote laws on external tablets of stone; the new covenant writes its law on the heart. Likewise, as Ezekiel foresaw, the new covenant comes with new power. Whereas men of flesh failed to obey the Law of Moses, the new covenant with its gift of the Spirit causes men and women to walk in God's statutes (Ezekiel 36:26–27). Also, the new covenant comes with a new kind of community. Instead of being tied to a particular nation (Israel), the new covenant conjoins Israel with all the nations. As Joel prophesied, the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, enabling men and women of all nations to call upon the Lord (Joel 2:28–32).

The new commandment comes, therefore, with new affections to desire God's law, new power to obey God's commands, and a new messianic community that is based on the Spirit not the flesh. It's for these reasons, that Jesus says that he gives us a new command. Creating one new people gathered in local assemblies, Jesus' death gives us both the resources to love and the example to follow, which is why the Lord's Supper is so vital for loving one another.

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Without the new covenant we would not be able to obey Jesus' new commandment. But with gifts enjoined by the new covenant, the most diversified church can learn to love one another. For loving one another depends on Christ loving us, not us working to love him.

To get more specific, as he died for our sins—past, present, and future—we have the freedom to fall forward in loving others. By bringing us into his covenant community, we have direction in knowing where to direct our commitments—first to one another and then with them to the lost world. By giving us his Holy Spirit (a gift of the new covenant), we have the power to love the unlovable, forgive the unpardonable, and welcome the unseemly.

As we, figuratively speaking, feed on the body and blood of Jesus Christ we are reminded afresh of God's cruciform love, which strengthens us to love others. At the same time, the command to love one another increases our hunger for the truths of the gospel portrayed in the Lord's Supper. That Jesus Christ died for our sin so that we might put to death our indifference and instead lay down our lives in loving service to others.

When the church made up of divergent peoples loves one another in this way, it displays the fruit of Christ's death. Like the bread and body which proclaim the death of Jesus, so the local gathering of new covenant believers loving one another dramatizes the gospel. And thus to love one another, we must feed on God's love poured out in Christ.

This Sunday we'll take the Lord's Supper to remind us of new covenant relationship with God in Christ. May it strengthen us to better know him and love one another.

For His Glory and your joy, Pastor David