

# OBSERVING THE LORD'S SUPPER

Virgil Warren, PhD

## INTRODUCTION

The Lord's Supper is among the acts of worship (1 Corinthians **11**: 23-29;  
cp. Matthew **26**:26-29; 1 Corinthians **10**:16-21).

Representation (emblems): in the mind, so to speak, bread and grape juice are  
transformed into the body and blood of the Lord.

Symbols mean only what we mean into them. Without conscious involvement, the  
Lord's Supper is just eating bread and drinking grape juice.

### Five directions we look in observing the Lord's Supper

I. We look backward in memorial (1 Corinthians **11**:24, 25).

A. A memorial connects the past and the present.

1. The Sabbath was a weekly memorial of the exodus (Deuteronomy **5**:12-15).
2. Passover was an annual memorial of the exodus (Exodus **13**:3-10).
3. A pile of rocks was a memorial of crossing the Jordan (Joshua **4**:6, 7, 19-24).
4. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of the crucifixion (1 Corinthians **11**:24-25).

B. A memorial gives identity and meaning to "me" by placing "me" in a context.

II. We look inward in self-examination.

A. Discerning the body (1 Corinthians **11**:29) leads to discerning ourselves (**11**:31).

It is a comparison of ourselves with what the supper means.

B. Self-examination is like working awhile and then looking up to see how to go or  
stepping back to see how it looks.

C. "*In a worthy manner*" corresponds with others being hungry while we are  
overeating (**11**:21-22).

It is not superficial.

It is not a gluttonous feast.

It is not an insensitive meal.

We need to use the Lord's Supper as a time of sensitivity (1 Corinthians **11**:30).

Changing a sensitive time (*agape*) into debauchery brings condemnation.

Note: “Worthy manner” refers to the way communion is observed, not the quality of the person observing it, as in the comment a person might make, “*I am not worthy to take the Lord’s Supper.*” That would be true of everyone if such a thing were the point of the verse.

### III. We look upward.

A. A memorial causes appreciation (“*is given for you*”).

It causes us to remember what it took to get things the way they are.  
Not remembering is a form of self-centeredness.

B. A memorial provokes commitment, motivation, identification; it affirms who I am subjectively (1 Corinthians **10:16, 18-21**).

It causes us to continue the behaviors that make the present possible for others.  
As a rite, communion means ingesting the emblems as a re-enactment within us (not as in Jesus Christ of the mass); communion means ingesting the values they represent.  
Baptism is an act of identification; communion is an act of re-identification with Christ.

Communion is a pledge of allegiance: Christ is not a dead founder, but a living Lord.

Communion indicates a high degree of commitment: blood means violent death, not death from old age or sickness or accident. It is a way to affirm our willingness, if need be, to take up our own cross and follow him.

Communion is a participation with Christ.

### IV. We look outward.

A. Proclamation: we can observe communion in gathered worship.

We say to other believers present, “I believe these things.”  
Perhaps we speak also to other people outside the community of believers, as when we drive a company car with a logo on it.

B. Plea for unity: 1 Corinthians **10:17**

Leave the gift at the altar and reconcile matters with someone we have wronged.  
It is a participation with the church.

### V. We look forward in anticipation.

Jesus is not a dead founder, but a living Lord who will return for his people.

A. As an interpersonal act, communion avoids being an outward ritual.

- a representation
- a memorial
- a time of self-examination
  - commitment
  - plea for unity
  - proclamation

B. The commitment we make to the Lord is . . .

- total: *“to the point of death”*
- permanent: *“till he comes”*
- exclusive: *“not the table of demons”*