

WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER?

by Richard D. Phillips

TO THE GROUP LEADER: This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the "Basics of the Faith" booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. If someone asked what you believe about the Lord's Supper, what would you tell him or her?
Take a minute at the beginning of the class to see what variety of responses to this question the students wrote down before they read the text.
2. What do you know about the different views of the Lord's Supper held by different denominations? [5-8]
See if you can work them through the four positions held by the Lutherans, Catholics, Reformed, and the other Protestant churches.
3. The Lord's Supper has an Old Testament background in the Passover. How many details do you recall of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and the Passover account? (Exodus 12) [8-10]
There are many details given in the text. Emphasize the ones that have direct bearing on what we do today in the Lord's Supper.
4. Read Exodus 12:26; 13:8,14. Why did God emphasize recounting this event to the children? [9]
Later in history, when the Jews (even today) celebrate the Passover, it is always the youngest child who is privileged to ask the question: "Father, why is this night different from all others?" At this point the father tells the whole story to the family. The purpose is to never forget what the Lord did for His people.
5. The Westminster Confession tells us this sacrament is "a holy sign and seal of the covenant of grace." What "sign(s)" does the Lord's Supper point to and in what way(s) does it "seal" us? [10-13]
There are a number of signs and seals listed in the text. Be sure you bring them out and explain why they are so important to understand each time we participate in the Lord's Supper.
6. All the major views on communion try to answer the question, "In what sense is Christ present in the sacrament?" How would you answer this?[13-17]
This section might take some time to explain. Be sure you understand the different views mentioned in the text before you get to class. If you don't feel confident, consider asking the pastor to join you at this point.
7. What benefits can you expect to receive when you take the Lord's Supper? [18-19]
The Lord's Supper is one way God conveys His grace to us for the strengthening of our faith and for giving us the assurance of our secure position as His children.

8. We say the sacraments are a *means of grace*. How is this grace given to us? [19-20]
We receive God's grace through the administering work of the Holy Spirit when we take the elements by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross and our anticipation of His return.
9. Christ commanded us to partake of His supper. Does that mean it is necessary for our salvation? [20-21]
Our salvation is dependent on neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper. No infant is saved when baptized. An adult who comes to faith is baptized only *after* coming to faith. The Lord's Supper is supposed to be taken *only* by those who are already Christians. All things commanded by Christ are to be done, but the consequences for not doing what we are told do not mean we are no longer part of His family.
10. How often do you think the church should serve communion? Why? [21-24]
Be careful on this one. It is added here only because it is in the text. You may not want to even bring it up, as it could begin to cause division. The author only states one side, along with his reasons. Weekly communion is not the practice in many Reformed churches, and that is not wrong. If you do discuss this question, don't let it get to the point where people argue too strongly. However, do be clear as to why your church follows its practice.
11. Who should participate in the Lord's Supper? Who should not? [24-30]
This question is important. Just what are the qualifications we should follow? What are the practices in your church? For the question about children, simply explain the practice held by your church, and, again, don't let it get to the point of argument.

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

1. **For the class:**
Consider drawing up a list of things you can do to be prepared to participate in the Lord's Supper, both during the week before and on the day.
2. **For the church:**
If your church doesn't allow children to take the elements of communion, consider this: In the Old Testament Passover, it was a child who was given the privilege of asking the question, "Why is this night different from all others?" Why not consider giving a different child each time a chance to ask, "Why is this supper different from all others?" Then the pastor, just like the father in the Jewish home, would explain the reason to the child. If the child can understand, then the rest of the church will too.

For Further Study

Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper, by Keith A. Mathison. P&R Publishing, 2002.
The Lord's Supper: Eternal Word in Broken Bread by Robert Letham. P&R, 2014.

Find this and more at www.pcabookstore.com.