

What Does the Lord's Supper Commemorate?

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Habits can become so strong that they may lead us to do or say things without thinking about them. This can even happen to us relative to worship. We may have sung a particular hymn for so many years that we can sing both words and music without thinking about them. The same is true concerning prayer. Sometimes one who leads prayers in the assembly will fall into a habit of using terminology that he has not really thought through (perhaps borrowed from a prayer he has heard someone else pray).

As I travel about, I frequently hear the following phrase in prayers at the Lord's table: "We thank Thee for this bread [or fruit of the vine, or the Lord's supper] which commemorates the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord." But, is the supper a memorial of all three of these? Just what does the Lord's supper commemorate when Scripturally observed?

Granted, the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God are sometimes spoken of together, in the same context. Perhaps the best-known such passage is 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 where Paul stated that these three events constitute the very foundation of the Gospel. This trio of Gospel facts serves as the "form [pattern] of doctrine" which one must obey in order to be free from sin (Rom. 6:17-18; 2-5). However, neither in these contexts nor in any others in which the death, burial, and resurrection are mentioned together, is the Lord's supper under consideration.

Contrariwise, in the passages that give us information concerning the aim of the Lord in establishing His memorial supper, it appears unmistakable that he had in mind His **death alone** as the object of it. The bread and fruit of the vine are (represent, symbolize) His body and His blood, respectively (Mat. 26:26-28a; Mark 14:22-24a; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:24-25). The Lord distinctly connected the fruit of the vine with the blood which He would (and did) soon shed in His death on Calvary (Mat. 26:28b; Mark 14:24b; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25). It would therefore seem that the symbolism of His body in the bread would likewise relate to the sacrifice of that body in His death on the cross.

However, that He had His sacrificial **death and that alone** in mind as the end of His memorial supper is conclusively seen in Paul's words: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's **death** [not "death, burial, and resurrection"] till he come"

(1 Cor. 11:26, emp. DM). Let us take care to pray “with the spirit, ...and with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15).

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