

The Sacrament

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Before his ascension, Jesus Christ had a great desire for us to remember his atoning sacrifice and to remain true in keeping his commandments. To accomplish this, Jesus brought together his apostles before his crucifixion to partake of the Passover supper. The apostles did not understand that Christ would die soon in the great Atonement, and Jesus wanted to instruct them on the sacrament so they would remember him and remain faithful to their covenants.

The Institution of the Sacrament

During the Passover supper Jesus broke bread into pieces and recited the stirring words that amazed the apostles: "...This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

After the supper Christ took a cup of wine, blessed it in a like manner, and spoke the words: "...This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20).

By providing this astounding instruction, Christ instituted the Sacrament: bread and wine (or water) that are blessed by the holy priesthood and consumed by all worthy members of the Lord's Church. The bread and water of the sacrament are to help us remember the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ given up as a sacrifice in atonement for our sins.

The Sacrament and Catholic Transubstantiation

Perhaps the most well known version of the sacrament in all of Christianity today is the Catholic practice of the Eucharist. To Catholics, the doctrine of the Eucharist is extremely sacred, as is the Mass in which it is fulfilled. The Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist calls for the bread and wine to be transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ through the process of transubstantiation. The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is supported by some early church fathers, such as St. Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr who believed in it.

While the Catholic practice of the Eucharist creates a literal interpretation of the aforementioned scriptures from Luke, other Christian sects interpret the scriptures more metaphorically pertaining to the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Did Jesus mean the sacrament to be a remembrance of his atoning sacrifice, or did he mean there was to be a mystical transformation of wafers and wine into his literal body and blood? This is truly a matter left to faith.

Administering the Sacrament

While various Christian sects may administer the sacrament differently, most use emblems that symbolize the body and blood of Christ. Christians are called to meet each Sunday (the Sabbath day) for worship services and to receive the sacrament in remembrance of Jesus Christ.

For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints institutes the sacrament as a holy ordinance in a ceremony that closely resembles that of the last supper. The bread of the sacrament is administered by the priesthood by breaking the bread into small pieces and then reciting on bended knee these words: "O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen" (D&C 20:77).

The water of the sacrament (previously wine) can be placed in small disposable cups in elegant trays. A holder of the priesthood, typically a priest, on bended knee recites these words: " O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine [water] to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen" (D&C 20:79).

After the bread and water are blessed, they are passed reverently to the congregation by the priesthood. The blessing and passing of the bread and water is done separately so as to create a time of reflection in-between receiving each.

Spiritual preparation to partake of the sacrament is important, along with ensuring we are in a state of worthiness (void of serious sin and with a repentant heart). Perfection is not required to partake of the sacrament, only a desire to love and serve the Lord and to receive his blessings.

The Sacrament Renews our Baptismal Covenants

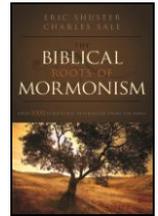
The sacrament includes renewal of the covenants we have made with the Lord made at baptism. As the sacrament prayer so eloquently states (Moroni 4:3), we covenant to "take upon [us] the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given [us]." In return we are promised that we "may always have his Spirit to be with [us]." By keeping these covenants we will have the Spirit of the Lord and be given "knowledge, faith, power, and righteousness to gain eternal life" (Gospel Principles, 155).

Conclusion

Each week Christians are encouraged to partake of the bread and water in remembrance of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and in doing so to renew those covenants which were made at baptism. For those who have not been baptized, the sacrament can still be a remembrance of the Atonement, focusing on the love that Jesus Christ has for us and the depth of that love that flows from the savior and our Heavenly Father.

About The Sword Series™

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The Foundation for Christian Studies is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study, teaching, and practice of Christianity with an emphasis on the doctrines and principles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism).