

Symbols point beyond themselves to something deeper.

So it is with communion - Jesus' very special three-part symbol of love. The meaning is deeper than the simple elements of washing feet, eating a meal, breaking the bread and drinking the cup.

It symbolizes Jesus saying, "I love you," to His bride, the Church.

It's meant to cause us to worship Jesus and to love Him more in return. It reminds us of His daily cleansing in our lives, the celebration awaiting us in heaven and the price he paid so we could have eternal life.

Washing Feet

This first part of communion, the feet washing, reminds us of our need for daily cleansing from sin. It's a time of introspection and self-examination.

Jesus wants us to remember that even though believers have been forgiven for all sin - past, present, and future - we must appropriate His cleansing power and forgiveness on a daily basis.

Theologians call it "present, progressive sanctification." "Present" means it's happening now. "Progressive" means it will continue throughout our lives on earth. "Sanctification" is the process by which Christ sets us apart for the special treatment of being transformed into His likeness (Romans 8:29).

Washing feet as a symbol of present progressive sanctification wasn't something thought of by the Church or the Apostles. It's something

Jesus asked us to do. "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He gave an example. It was an example to be followed in practice, not merely known (John 13:12-17).

There's more to this symbol than first appears.

It is more than an oriental custom.

Jesus said, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand" (John 13:7). The disciples understood the custom, but not the new meaning.

It is more than an example of humility.

Although feet washing is an example of humility, it is more than that. When Peter refused to allow Jesus to wash His feet, Jesus gave a curious answer: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me... A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet, his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you" (John 13:8,10). Judas wasn't clean.

There is a cleansing of feet and there is a bath. The disciples had the bath, but needed their feet washed. "Saved" they were, to use our terminology, but not clean from the contamination of daily sin.

It is more than an outward cleansing.

Scripture presents water and cleansing as word pictures of true cleansing by the Word (Ephesians 5:26). Feet washing is a symbol. It's a symbol of love. It's a statement that the people of a church make together, as they have communion, that Jesus is the one who does the real cleansing on the inside. He does that constantly, as we appropriate His forgiveness. At a church communion service, this is pictured in a very meaningful, Christ-like way.

The Love Feast

The Love Feast, the second part of communion, reminds us that Jesus will welcome us to His celebration in heaven without sin. It is also a reminder that we are now, as a group of His believers, His loved ones... His bride.

Theologians call it "glorification" - seeing and sharing the glory of Christ (1 John 3:2). This part is in the future. When it happens, God's special plans for us will be brought to completion (Romans 8:29-30).

It's appropriate that a meal, shared in Christian fellowship, be one of the symbols Jesus left behind. Scripture promises a special future occasion, the ultimate love feast, with Jesus Himself as host (Revelation 19:7-9).

We practice the love feast because Jesus included it in the "communion service" He had with His disciples (John 13) and because the early church perpetuated its inclusion (1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Jude 12). The meal is a fellowship time characterized by His love. Eating together reminds us of our special bond to Christ and with each other.

We feel some of the secure love those early believers must have felt as they ate together and talked about His love and His plans.

The Bread and Cup

Sometimes called the Eucharist (the Greek word for "thanks"), the bread and cup isn't complete without remembering the price Jesus paid to secure eternal life for us.

Because of His sacrificed body and shed blood, God the Father declares us righteous. Theologians call it "justification."

The pierced body, the shed blood, the grotesque death they represent was endured by God's perfect Son. Because of that, when people become Christians a great exchange takes place. God considers the penalty of our sins to be paid by Jesus' death, and He considers the righteousness of Jesus to be ours (2 Corinthians 5:21).

It's a wonderful gift, but very costly.

The bread and cup, symbols of His body and shed blood, also symbolize a unique way of relating to God. No more animal sacrifices are required. No more priests are needed to intercede. Instead, we have direct communication with the Creator because of the body and blood of His Son (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Jesus asks us to continue observing this symbol of love until He returns (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). This is to serve as a reminder to each believer of the price He paid.

The symbols of communion are solemn and holy, yet joyful and peaceful. So serious are they that we are warned to examine our own lives and thoughts before participating in communion, making sure we are in fellowship with God and properly remembering these symbols (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

Communion... The word means fellowship, sharing, holding something in common. For Christians, it's a special time of worship when we remember Jesus' great love. Anyone who shares our faith in Christ is welcome to participate. We also welcome people who would like to observe the symbolism without participating.

"For whenever you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." 1 Corinthians 11:26

Biblical Teaching on Communion

- 1. Feet Washing:** The symbol of Christ's ministry of sanctification:
Where it's mentioned - John 13:1-17; 1 Timothy 5:10
Authorized by Christ - John 13:3-16
Its meaning - John 13:7-11
Command to continue - John 13:13-15
- 2. Love Feast:** The symbol of Christ's future ministry of glorification:
Where it's mentioned - John 13:2,4; 1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 33-34; Jude 12
Not the same as the bread and the cup - Matthew 26:20-29; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Corinthians 11:20-22
Apostles continued to practice the meal - 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Jude 12
Its meaning - 1 Corinthians 11:34; Revelation 19:7-10
- 3. The Bread and Cup:** The symbol of Christ's past ministry of justification:
Where it's mentioned - Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:23-25
Authorized by Christ - 1 Corinthians 11:23-25
Its Meaning - Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:25-27
Command to continue - Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25

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What is Communion?

