



# The Lord's Table & the Lord's Supper

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**The distinction between the  
Lord's Table and  
the Lord's Supper**

- Doctrinally
- Dispensationally
- Practically

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The **Lord's Supper** and the **Lord's Table** are familiar terms to most Christians. Many use these terms interchangeably believing they refer to the same thing. The Lord's Supper we know to be the “breaking of bread” or the “remembrance meeting.” The bread and cup which are central to the Lord's Supper are placed before the congregation on a “table” – hence the expression the “Lord's Table”, as it is seen by some. We hear people referring to their participation in Lord's Supper as “observing the Lord's Table” or “partaking at the table or altar to celebrate the Eucharist (thanksgiving).” But is it biblically correct to refer to the Lord's Supper as the Lord's Table? If these terms do refer to two different things, then not only is it wrong and confusing to use them interchangeably, but we miss out on vital spiritual truth and blessing by not distinguishing between them. When we examine these terms as they are used in Scripture, we will find that they do in fact refer to different things, and that there is a vital distinction between the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Table to be observed – though they are blessedly connected in a practical way.

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Chapters 10 and 11 of 1 Corinthians are part of Paul's corrective ministry to the Corinthian assembly. They bring before us certain matters concerning the **Lord's Table** and the **Lord's Supper**. The Lord's Table and His Supper are related but distinct truths. The failure at Corinth in regard to the Lord's Table is first taken up by Paul in chapter 8 although the term is not used in that chapter. Some of the Corinthian believers were visiting temples devoted to idols and while there they were eating the meat offered to those idols. Some "weaker" Christians may see this, and it may encourage them to do like wise and be stumbled spiritually. Paul warns against this. In chapter 10 the error and danger of partaking at the table of demons is broadened to include all Christians.<sup>1</sup> Paul now declares this activity to be incompatible with the sanctified life of one who owns Christ as Lord and partakes of His Supper. The believer's proper portions are to be found at the Lord's Table.

## The doctrinal distinction

We begin where Scripture always begins when spiritual failure occurs – doctrine. The distinction between the Lord's Table and the Lord's Supper is evident in their *doctrinal* aspects. We may view these distinctions under three headings – their *purpose*, *participants* and *practice*.

**The doctrinal distinction seen in their purpose, receiving v remembering**  
The word "table" in verse 21 of chapter 10 is *trapeze*. It generally means a place upon which food or a meal is offered. According to the context it can refer to a literal or physical table as in Luke 16:21, where the poor man desired "to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table." In some cases such as the Lord's Table in chapter 10 it is figurative – a metaphorical table upon which "spiritual food" is provided. In another instance the word table is translated "meat" signifying that it is associated with a meal. "And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat [*trapeze*] before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house" (Acts 16:34). There is more however to the sense of a table. A table refers to

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<sup>1</sup> This is a different case to food purchased in the "shambles" (market place) that has come from the table of idols (v 25); it is also different to the case where such food is served to the believer who is a guest in another's house (v 27). The case in point refers to believers partaking of the food dedicated to idols within the temples, as this is an expression of fellowship with idolatry.

a place of *fellowship*. The provider or host sits as the head of the table having invited those present to partake of his provision. We have then three elements in the notion of a table - the provider, the guests and the food all of which are encircled by fellowship. In this dispensation – the Church age, the Lord Himself is the Provider, the saved in Him are the ones invited by Him to His Table. The food He provides is spiritual food. The Lord's invitation is motivated by His desire for fellowship with His redeemed while providing for their spiritual sustenance. The ground of this invitation is His gracious work at Calvary – His shed blood as noted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10. We have a beautiful glimpse of this in the table of David in regard to Mephibosheth, “And thou [Mephibosheth] shalt eat bread at my table continually” (2 Sam 9:7). Mephibosheth, lame in both feet and of the outside place being of the line of Saul, is given a seat at David’s table. Grace placed him in the very *presence* of David and enabled him to *partake* of the food from his table in perpetuity. We too who are the Lord’s were once in the outside place but are now invited to His table to partake of its bountiful provision through divine grace. The Lord’s Table is to do with being in the *presence* of the Lord and *receiving* from Him.<sup>2</sup>

When Paul therefore speaks of the Lord’s Table in 1 Corinthians 10, he refers to the place where believers in Christ receive and partake of spiritual food. It is pre-figured in the **Table of Shewbread** within the Tabernacle (Ex 25; Lev 24:5-9; Matt 12:4). The priests ate the bread upon it, that bread which was before the face of Jehovah. It was especially allocated to sustain them in their priestly duties for they had no provision of their own in the Land. As the redeemed in Christ we are all priests with a ministry manward (a royal priesthood) and Godward (a holy priesthood) (1 Pet 2:4-9). We have continual access into His presence and to His Table laden with spiritual provisions garnished with grace to equip us in our priestly worship and service. This provision is on account of His shed blood and Person symbolized by the cup and the bread in chapter 10. We too need to be especially fed by the Lord, because we have no priestly food in the land here

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<sup>2</sup> We have other examples in Scripture of the table being a place of *provision*. The table of Nehemiah (Neh 5:17); “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (Psalm 78:19). “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Acts 6:2). There is the table of the local assembly where material provision is made for those in need (i.e., widows and elders that rule well), 1 Tim 5:3.

below. We have here a distinction yet a connection between the Lord's Table and the Lord's Supper. When we come together at the Lord's Supper we are in the presence of the Lord as priests and are occupied with Him. What we *render* in worship and praise depends on what we have *received* as a result of abiding at His Table. The Lord's Table is the appointed abiding place for the believer-priest; believers are **not to be** at the table of demons. There the food of idolatry is served and fellowship is had with the profane. "Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table, and of the table of devils [demons]" (v 21).

There is a further truth in relation to the Lord's Supper to be noted here. The word for supper is *deipnon* which means "a dinner" or "a meal." But the Lord's Supper it is not a meal intended to satisfy hunger – physical or spiritual. Our spiritual appetites are to be satisfied at the Lord's Table. The Supper is a meal that is purely celebratory and Godward. The Passover, after it was instituted was such a meal. It was solely for the purpose of *commemorating* Israel's deliverance out of Egypt. This was in fact a failing among the Corinthians, earning Paul's stern rebuke. They forgot the commemorative purpose of the Lord's Supper and partook of the bread and wine to satisfy their physical cravings. "For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not" (1 Cor 11:21-22).

The doctrinal distinctions then are clear. When at the Lord's Table we are in fellowship with Him and we **receive from** Him - food to refresh and strengthen us in our spiritual walk. It is a distinct and a much wider principle than the Supper. When we are at the Lord's Supper we are also in fellowship with the Lord but in a different way. Here we partake of the bread and wine commemoratively to **remember** Him - in an act of remembrance, the Spirit of God leading us into the celebration of His Person and work. The Lord instituted the Supper with this very object expressed. "This do in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19-20). Paul reiterated this truth in chapter 11. "And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, 'Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.' After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me'. The food and wine upon the physical table are

symbolic. The Supper is an opportunity for us to corporately *render* to Him – to present that which is due to Him – the sacrifice of praise and fruit of our lips (Heb 13:15) – our baskets full as a result of abiding at His Table.

### The doctrinal difference seen in the moral argument

To emphasize the spiritual necessity to separate from the table of demons Paul turns in chapter 10 to the Lord's Supper. He uses the believer's *participation* in the Supper as the *moral* basis of His argument. He draws upon the meaning of the symbols of the Supper – the cup and bread in order to do this. “The cup of blessing [of the Supper] which we [all believers] bless, is it not the communion [the fellowship] of the blood of Christ [His shed blood]? The bread [of the Supper] which we break, is it not the communion [the fellowship] of the body of Christ [His body given]?” (v 16). Our participation in the Supper shows that we *all* (in the *mystical* Body, the Church v 17) have *fellowship* in and with Christ – through His blood (the cup) and through His body (the bread).<sup>3</sup> *Because* of what our participation in the Supper means we cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of demons. Paul presents an OT illustration of the moral incompatibility. Eating of the Levitical sacrifices gave all Israelites fellowship in the altar (the sacrifice) and with God-Jehovah (v 18). *Because* of this fellowship it was morally incompatible for them to partake of idolatry. The Christian who participates in the Lord's Supper cannot therefore have fellowship with the table of demons – it is a spiritual contradiction and offends a jealous God. “And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part [fellowship] hath he that believeth with an infidel?” (2 Cor 6:15).<sup>4</sup> In verse 8 Paul noted the failing of Israel. “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them

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<sup>3</sup> In verse 16 the *cup* and *bread* symbolize the *physical* blood and body of Christ. In verse 17 the bread is the focus; the *one bread* represents the unity of Christ's Body, the Church, which is expressed in that all partake of that one bread (*mystical* Body). In verse 16 we have the physical or literal body; in verse 17 the *mystical* body – the Church.

<sup>4</sup> We may view Paul's illustration another way. There are 3 activities A, B and C, the *Lord's Supper*, the *Lord's Table* and the *table of demons respectively*. B and C are both places of provision yet incompatible. A and B are not both places of provision but they are compatible. If we participate in activity A (the Lord's Supper) then morally we are precluded from participating in activity C (the table of demons). Participating in activities C and B together is morally incompatible because of our participation in activity A. “You cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table (B), and of the table of devils (demons) (C) *because* you participate in the Lord's Supper (A)” – it creates a moral contradiction.

committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand” (cf Num 25). Israel partook of the table of Baal which drew the nation into idolatry. “Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings” (Deut 32:38).

There is another moral aspect here – an implicit one. Separation is not only “away from” but “unto.” The mention of the symbols of the Supper in chapter 10 would prompt the Corinthians to consider their moral obligation **to be** at the Lord’s Table. They are to be there as *members of Christ’s Body* (v 17) and as *recipients of blessing* though His death. We are careful to observe that in this passage where the Lord’s Table is mentioned the cup is noted *before* the bread. This brings before us the truth that it is through the Lord’s *shed blood* that we are all brought into the blessed fellowship and provisions of His Table. Having come into the Church which is His Body by virtue of His shed blood which settled the matter of our sins, we can have fellowship with Him at His Table. His blood is the *establishment* (or means) of that fellowship and of His provision. He is the *Source* and *Substance* of it – the Bread.<sup>5</sup> The cup is a token of the blood-bought communion with the Lord which should cause us to covet being at His Table. Such fellowship is incompatible with communion with idolaters in their feasts – the table of demons. He is a God who should not be provoked to jealousy (v 22).

Now when we come to the Supper we note a difference in this order. It serves again to distinguish the Lord’s Table from the Lord’s Supper. When the Lord instituted His Supper He placed the *bread* first, followed by the *cup* (Matt 26:26-27; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26). This means that our daily fellowship with Christ and our provisions in Him are not principally in view. It is, rather, the Lord’s *Person* and *work* that is the focus of the Supper.<sup>6</sup> Appropriately in chapter 11 the bread and cup *symbolize* the Lord’s *physical body* and *blood* given and are placed in the context of the local assembly – a collective responsibility. We are to collectively remember *Him* and show forth His *death*. We are to remember Him as the man – Jesus Christ, God incarnate and proclaim His efficacious work on the cross, the shedding of

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<sup>5</sup> Some add that the cup of blessing mentioned first refers to His crucifixion; the bread second refers to His glorification evinced in the coming of the Church – the one body - at Pentecost after His exaltation. There is then a chronological as well as a doctrinal order presented in these verses in chapter 10 (cf Eph 2:16).

<sup>6</sup> Refer to the booklet *The Lord’s Supper*.

His blood without which there can be no remission (Heb 9:22). “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt 26:28).

### **Their doctrinal distinction seen in regard to the participants**

In 1 Corinthians 10 where the Lord’s Table is in view the participants are identified by the collective pronoun **we** – “the cup of blessing which *we* bless”; “*we* are all partakers of that one bread” (vv 16-17). This included Paul, the believers belonging to the church at Corinth and every other believer at that time. It also applies to every believer in Christ today until the Rapture. Paul is addressing an *individual* responsibility and privilege in regard to *all* believers, experienced each day in their sanctified walk before God as members of the Church seen in its **totality**. The context is not the local assembly meeting for the Lord’s Supper. The cup and bread are employed here in regard to those in the *mystical body* of Christ – the Church.

When we come to the Lord’s Supper however it is not “*we*” but **ye** (*you*). The context is not individuals in the Body of Christ in its totality, but the believers in the Body of Christ gathered in fellowship in a certain **locality** – as pointed out earlier. We have a similar use of these pronouns throughout the epistle: “Now **ye** [the local church at Corinth] are body of Christ, and members in particular”, 1 Cor 12:27). So too in chapter 11, “when **ye** [the local church at Corinth] come together in one place” (v 20; see also vv 17, 33, 34). The participants in the Lord’s Supper are those gathered in local testimony. At the Lord’s Supper they are not individuals partaking of a divine provision, but corporate *proclaimers* in a *profession* of the *Person* of Christ and His *work* (1 Cor 11:26). It is important to note that the Lord’s Supper refers to the *act* of eating and drinking of the bread and cup respectively. It was *this* that the Lord instituted as a remembrance of Him and the showing forth of His death – “do this in remembrance of me” - not the prayers, the hymns or any oral ministry, fitting though they are. It was the *eating* and *drinking* of the emblems unworthily by the Corinthians that brought rebuke from Paul. This is not to say that there is no spiritual blessing to be had from *being* present at the *occasion* of the Lord’s Supper, and that the Lord’s Table and His Supper are mutually exclusive. It is indeed a spiritual blessing of the deepest kind to render concerning Him and His work

on the occasion of remembrance. But such rendering is directly proportional to the time we have spent at His Table.

### **Their doctrinal distinction seen in regard to their practice**

As noted, the Lord's Table is a daily **on-going** activity of the believer. The Lord's Supper however is observed on the **first day of each week** collectively by believers gathered locally unto Christ. It is not an on-going activity and limited to when the local church is gathered together.

We have then clear doctrinal distinctions between the Lord's Table and His Supper presented in Scripture, relating to their purpose, participants and practice. There is a further corroborating distinction between them which we now take up.

### **The dispensational distinction**

God provides a table of food for His people in all ages though distinctively seen in each. The Lord's Table is a divine spiritual provision in this present age – the **Church age** as we have observed. Paul explicitly speaks of it as being available to believers in Christ today (1 Cor 10:21). Here it is peculiarly the **Lord's Table**, which brings before us the **lordship of Christ**, a truth so prominent in this epistle and in this dispensation. A table of provision from God is evident in the **OT dispensation**. There it was the table of *Jehovah* in keeping with the relationship between Israel and God in the OT days. It is seen for example as a physical provision in the Table of Shewbread noted above and in the provision of the manna in the wilderness. A table of gracious provision will be available to the faithful remnant in the **Tribulation** – the day of Jacob's Trouble. The godly remnant will be comforted in that terrible day of persecution by Jehovah's provision. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" (Ps 23:5).<sup>7</sup> The Lord's Table as a divine provision will also exist in the **Millennial Kingdom** under the benefaction of Christ in His royal and priestly ministry as the Antitype of Melchizedek. Speaking prophetically to His disciples the Lord promised that "ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30). We see then that

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 23 as viewed in its dispensational aspect, presenting the assurance and comfort to the faithful Jews amidst the persecutions of the Antichrist. They are the flock of the Lord's inheritance (Mic 7:14)

the Table of the Lord or the Lord's Table as it is called in Corinthians is a truth not confined to the Church age. We can refer to it perhaps as a *trans-dispensational* truth.

The *Lord's Supper* however is unique to the Church period. It was instituted by the Lord for all within the Church, His Body (Matt 26:26-27 etc). The *celebration* of the Lord's Supper could not take place until the Church had come into being through the baptism of the Spirit which occurred on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Supper was never celebrated before that event although it was *instituted* before it. The Lord's Supper will cease to be celebrated when the Church dispensation closes (at the Rapture of the Church). Paul declared this explicitly. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death **till he come**" (1 Cor 11:26).<sup>8</sup>

We find then that the Lord's Table or the table of the Lord is a divine provision not confined to the Church period. In this alone it is quite distinct to the Lord's Supper.

### **Two different aspects but not two different things?**

As noted some believe that the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Table both refer to the same thing – the "breaking of Bread" or "remembrance meeting." It is claimed that the former term in chapter 11 refers to the *internal* moral aspect of it; the latter term in chapter 10 to the *external* moral aspects of it. The former relates to that which is within the church and thus carries the moral imperative of *self examination* by the believer (1 Cor 11:28). The latter is to do with what takes place external to the church and carries the moral imperative of *separation* from profane practices by the believer (1 Cor 10:14). These moral imperatives indeed stand true, but we suggest respectfully that they do not require equivalence between the Lord's Table and the Lord's Supper to be true and to flow from the passages concerned. The principal contrast in chapter 10 is between the *Lord's Table* and the *table of demons* – not between the table of demons and the Lord's Supper. This is seen in that the moral contrast is between the acts of fellowshipping with and feeding upon the food dedicated to demons and fellowshipping with and feeding upon Christ. The *Supper* is not about feeding upon Christ; we come having fed on Christ – having been at His table. In chapter 10 Paul

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<sup>8</sup> See the booklet *The Lord's Supper*.

simply uses the symbolic sanctity of the cup and bread of the Lord's Supper to underscore the profanity of partaking of the table of demons, and to implore the moral imperative of abiding at the Lord's Table – the Lord is not to be provoked into jealousy (v 22). We can fairly suggest too that the moral imperatives noted above – self examination and separation could have been sufficiently implored without even mentioning the "Lord's Table." However, Paul introduces it because he wants to bring out the truth of the Table of the Lord. There are two tables in chapter 10 that stand in marked contrast to each other – the table of demons and the table belonging to the Lord. Finally, if Paul was only referring to the Supper in chapter 10, then why did he not use the term Lord's Supper – especially in view of the fact that Supper is a major subject of correction in the following chapter? If he was referring to the same thing in both instances the use of the term "Lord's Table" serves no purpose.

### **Some practical lessons in regard to the Lord's Table**

The Lord's Table refers to that place where we abide daily and receive spiritual food from Him. What then are the practical lessons for us?

1. The Lord's Table and the table of the heathen are incompatible to the redeemed in Christ. The Corinthians were carnal and they did not appreciate the gravity of partaking of the table of demons. They also failed to appreciate that when partaking of the Lord's Table they are in fact glorifying God. The provisions of God are not "optional extras." God intends us to partake of them because in so doing we glorify Him! The Spirit of Christ will take that upon which have been feeding and lead us into praise and worship.
2. This spiritual failing at Corinth in chapter 10 in regard to the Lord's Table was in part due to a lack of understanding of the sanctity of the Lord's Supper and what the emblems mean. If we partake of the table of demons how can we come with hallowed hearts and minds to remember Him at His Supper? To fail in regard to the proprieties of the Lord's Table is to fail in regard to the proprieties of the Lord's Supper.
3. Do we own that our God is a jealous God? If we abide at the table of demons and partake of its provision we provoke the Lord to jealousy (1 Cor 10:22). Can it be said of us that we are abiding at the Lord's Table – feeding upon Him? What of our appetite for the Lord's Table? "Thy

words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer 15:16).

4. Given that the Lord’s Table is the place of divine provision for believers, there can be no such thing as a believer being received to it or excluded from it by any other person or persons. The practice among some of “receiving to the Lord’s Table” has no biblical legitimacy. Biblical reception is always into the local church never to the Lord’s Table (or even to the Lord’s Supper).<sup>9</sup> Likewise the notion of “setting up a table” is as presumptuous as it is unscriptural.
5. If we blur the distinction between the Lord’s Table and the Lord’s Supper we can fall into the error of partaking of the Lord’s Supper in order to *receive* a blessing. Nothing strikes at the truth of the Supper more than the sacramental notion that there is personal spiritual virtue to be had from eating the bread and drinking of the cup. Such an idea lies at the root of the error of *transubstantiation*, *consubstantiation* and *Calvinism*.<sup>10</sup>

## The parable of the gracious father

This parable is better known to us as the “parable of the prodigal son” (Lk 15:11-32). There are however many lessons we can glean from this rich narrative, one of which is drawn from the prodigal’s father. We see him the ever loving, ever watchful father longing for his son’s return. He could have sent his servants to minister to his wayward son and make his life in the mire more “comfortable.” But no! The deep pangs of sin had to be left to take their course so as to bring the son to the point of repentance before God and man. This indeed transpired and the repentant son returned. The father instructed his servants to adorn his son with the “best” robe, to place a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. He then killed the fatted calf and invited his once lost son to the feast he had prepared. We have in this a beautiful cameo of the Lord’s Table. We who were once lost, having found pleasure at the tables of the world laden with husks, are now clothed with garments of salvation and been granted a place at the Father’s table. It is the place of

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<sup>9</sup> Refer to the booklet *Reception*

<sup>10</sup> Refer to the booklet *The Lord’s Supper*.

spiritual food and fellowship for all His sons. What grace! What exceeding joy to the Father! “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love” (Song 2:4).

## Comparative overview between the Lord’s Table and the Lord’s Supper

<b>Lord’s Table (1 Corinthians 10)</b>	<b>Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11)</b>
Trans-dispensational.	Confined to the Church dispensation.
We receive <i>from</i> the Lord.	We render <i>to</i> the Lord.
Context is the believer within the Church in its <b>totality</b> .	Context is the believer in the church in a <b>locality</b> .
Believers are <b>partakers</b> – <i>individually</i> , in fellowship with the Lord and of His provisions.	Believers are <b>proclaimers</b> – <i>collectively</i> , in fellowship with the local assembly.
The cup and the bread symbolize the Lord’s <i>mystical Body</i> – the Church, which is His Body.	The bread and cup symbolize the Lord’s <i>physical body and blood</i> .
The <b>cup</b> first, then the <b>bread</b> is mentioned. The cup gives the <b>ground</b> of our <b>provision</b> – His shed blood; the bread the <b>Source</b> of our <b>provision</b> – the Lord’s Person.	The <b>bread</b> first speaks of His incarnation; then the <b>cup</b> , speaking of His crucifixion – Christ Himself as the <b>Source of promise</b> ; then the cup, His blood, the <b>ground</b> of <b>propitiation</b> .

J W de Silva (2003/4)