

The Significance of the Lord's Supper - A Major Reevaluation

Special Topical Lesson

I. Overview of This Lesson

- a. Recently, while reading a book that discussed Christian church history, I stumbled across a comment that I found rather surprising and disturbing. The author made the point that the modern practice in Protestant churches to put the greatest emphasis in the Sunday gatherings on the sermon was a fairly recent innovation in Christianity. He said that it stemmed from the First and Second Great Awakening in the U.S., in the 18th and 19th centuries.
 - i. Prior to that time, for virtually all of Christian history, the primary emphasis when Christians gathered on the Lord's Day was celebrating the Lord's Supper (sometimes referred to as 'communion' or 'the eucharist' (from a Greek word that means 'giving thanks')).
- b. I found this disturbing because I have attended (and even co-led) churches for many decades where the primary emphasis clearly was on the sermon. While we did respectfully celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday, I think everyone would admit that the most time and attention was on the sermon that was given by one of the brothers. That assessment was the same regardless of whether the church held the "real presence" view of communion or that it was (merely) "a memorial, to remember what Jesus did".
- c. What I had assumed was 'normal Christian practice' (primary emphasis on the sermon during our Sunday gatherings) was a modern innovation (or perhaps a degradation?) that started in America only within the past three hundred years. What I had become used to was not the historic Christian practice!
 - i. Therefore, if we wanted to follow "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (**Jude v. 3**) we should take a fresh look at the Scriptures and consider completely restructuring how we conduct our weekly Sunday church gatherings!
- d. The current message attempts to take a fresh look at the Lord's Supper and restore its proper prominence when we gather on Sundays. Opening up this topic may be disturbing or disruptive to some, but I believe we should always be open to reconsidering what we may be missing through ignorance or spiritual blindness!

II. Protestants Tend to De-emphasize the Importance of Physical Things

- a. Coming from a Roman Catholic background, and from being a student of church history, one of the patterns I noticed was that Protestants tended to de-emphasize or reduce the importance of physical elements. A few examples:
 - i. Most Protestants today see salvation as something that only involves our soul/spirit (not our flesh). Therefore, they tend to discount the resurrection of the flesh and see the afterlife as bodiless spirits enjoying heaven with the Lord.
 1. In contrast, the historic Christian view is that just as Jesus was bodily raised from the dead, our bodies will be raised as well on the Last Day, prior to Final Judgment (**John 5:28-29**). Since man was created by God as body, soul and spirit in the beginning, God's plan is to save the entire man as created (our flesh, as well as our spirit and soul). The grave will be empty in the end, as Paul explains in detail throughout **1 Corinthians 15**.
 2. Belief in the physical resurrection of our bodies was considered one of the six foundational, elementary teachings of the faith (**Hebrews 6:1-3**). An affirmation of that also is included in the *Apostles' Creed*, an ancient summary of the Christian faith used as a baptismal confession.
 - ii. Likewise, most Protestants tend to think of the process of "being saved" as something that involves only the spiritual part of us (our soul/spirit). Therefore, all we have to do is believe, or perhaps say a prayer, in order to be saved.
 1. In contrast, the historic Christian view is that since God's plan is to save a person's body as well as his/her spirit, the body (which is often involved in sin along with the spirit) needs to participate in the conversion process as well. The historic practice of conversion involves a physical element, namely our bodies being buried in water, in baptism (**John 3:3-5, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Mark 16:15-16, Roman 6:4**, etc.)
 - iii. Starting perhaps with Zwingli, most Protestants have rejected the idea that the body and blood of Christ are physically present in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In contrast with the older churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, etc.), most Protestants do not believe that the bread and wine somehow become the body and blood of Christ or that they are present in the physical elements during communion. As a result, many Protestant (and Anabaptist) churches observe the

Lord's Supper only occasionally, rather than every Sunday, and have a "lower view" of communion than the older churches.

1. In contrast, the historic pattern of the church was to observe the Lord's Supper every Sunday, to have it as the central focus of the weekly Sunday gathering, and to accept that the body of Christ is somehow present in the bread, and the blood of Christ is present in the wine. A miraculous transformation occurs; this is more than simply a memorial observance to remember something that happened in the distant past.
 2. The focus of the current message will be to review the relevant Scriptures that shed light on the historic understanding of the Lord's Supper, to help us re-evaluate how we should be observing this in a way that is more consistent with the original practice.
- b. It seems to me that the position of many Protestants of denying the importance of physical elements (and focusing only on the soul or spirit) is similar to the Gnostics of old, who denied the importance of the flesh and of physical things as well.
- i. Christians in the beginning understood that *physical elements* (water in baptism, our flesh in the resurrection and ultimate salvation, bread and wine/body and blood of Christ in communion) were all extremely important.
- c. Those from a Restoration Movement background (including most Churches of Christ) tend to be more like the early church regarding the importance of physical elements in baptism, but less so regarding the Lord's Supper. Most Churches of Christ observe the Lord's Supper every Sunday, at their weekly gatherings. However, they view it as more of a memorial observance (rather than the actual body and blood of Christ being taken). Also, while the Lord's Supper is observed regularly, it tends to be overshadowed by emphasis on the sermon.

III. What Did Jesus Say About This?

- a. **Critical Question:** Regarding statements related to the Lord's Supper (such as Jesus saying "this is my body"), were these things meant to be taken *literally*, or just *figuratively*?
 - i. The critical question is not "What does my church denomination teach on this?" but rather, "How did Jesus and the apostles mean for this to be understood?". The challenge is to strive to uncover the original faith, the historic faith handed down from the apostles.

ii. In the course of this lesson, our approach will be to answer that question by considering the following:

1. The relevant New Testament passages (from the gospels and letters).
2. Foreshadowings of the Lord's Supper from the Old Testament.
3. Early Christian writings that shed light on how Christians understood these teachings from the beginning, and how they put them into practice.

- a. While early Christian writings are not inspired by the Holy Spirit (unlike the writings of the apostles and prophets), they can be helpful, especially where a Biblical passage may not be clear to us.
- b. The early Christians had the advantage over us of being able to read and speak Greek as their native language. Also, in some cases they either had been taught by the apostles directly, or perhaps they had been taught by disciples who had known and been taught by the apostles. Also, the earliest Christians were not tainted by exposure to many of the fads and innovations that would plague the church in later centuries.

b. Let us begin by reviewing Jesus' words. We will start with the things He said the night before He was crucified when He instituted the Lord's Supper.

i. Read **Matthew 26:26-30**.

1. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (**Matthew 26:26-30**, NKJV)

ii. Read **Luke 22:14-19**.

1. "When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and

said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; *do this in remembrance of Me.*'" (**Luke 22:14-19**, NKJV)

2. The statement here in Luke's account, "*...do this in remembrance of me*", is an important additional part of the narrative that reveals Jesus' desire that this act be repeated by His disciples in the future. That statement also appears in the directions Paul gives in **1 Corinthians 11:24-25**.

iii. Read **Mark 14:22-25**.

1. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'" (**Mark 14:22-25**, NKJV)

iv. When we combine all three of these gospel accounts, we have the following elements in Jesus' Last Supper:

1. Jesus said, "This is My body...take and eat".
2. He also said, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many... drink from it."
3. He told his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me."
 - a. He directs the apostles that this is something He expects them to do in the future.
4. The observance involved the one presiding over the meal giving thanks to God.
 - a. Note that the English word 'eucharist' comes from the Greek word that means 'to give thanks.'

c. Jesus in **John 6**.

- i. Note the parallel between the controversial things Jesus said in **John 3:3-5** and **John 6:48-58**. In both cases, the Jews who heard Jesus found His teaching difficult to accept. However, in both cases, whatever Jesus meant in those puzzling statements, what He said appears to be extremely important. In both cases, Jesus appears to be

laying out a requirement that will apply to all who want to follow Him, if they want to be saved.

1. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' ...'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'" (from **John 3:3-5**, NKJV)
 2. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ...He who eats this bread will live forever.'" (from **John 6:53-58**, NKJV)
- ii. How different groups of Christians have interpreted and applied these two statements by Jesus in **John 3** and **John 6**:
1. *Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and members of other ancient churches* understand the **John 3** passage to be referring to water baptism, and the **John 6** passage as referring to the Lord's Supper.
 2. *Most modern Protestants* and many others who have been influenced by the Protestant Reformers tend to maintain that Jesus was NOT referring to water baptism in **John 3** in His teaching about the need to be "born again". Also, they do NOT believe Jesus was referring to the Lord's Supper in his statements in **John 6**.
 3. In the *Churches of Christ (Restoration Movement)*, they agree with the early Christians that Jesus is referring to water baptism in **John 3**. However, they do not tend to agree with the early Christian witness on the **John 6** passage. Rather, they side with the Protestants in holding that Jesus is NOT referring to the Lord's Supper in the **John 6** discussion.
 4. However, the early Christians understood the **John 3** passage as referring to water baptism for Christians, and the **John 6** passage as referring to the Lord's Supper. They understood both to be necessary for salvation under normal circumstances.
 - a. For more on the early Christian (pre-Nicene) view on baptism and the Lord's Supper, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, articles on 'Baptism' and 'Eucharist'.

iii. Read **John 6:30-60**.

1. **Backdrop for this teaching:** This teaching by Jesus is right after He miraculously feeds the 5,000 with bread. It naturally reminds them of how Moses miraculously fed thousands in the Wilderness with manna. They then ask Jesus for a sign to confirm that He is the one they have been waiting for. Jesus uses this discussion to explain that He is the true bread from heaven.

IV. Paul's Teaching on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10-11.

a. Paul's illustration from the Exodus journey.

i. Read **1 Corinthians 10:1-5**.

- ii. In this passage and the verses that follow, Paul uses the Exodus journey, detailed in the books of **Exodus** and **Numbers**, as a foreshadowing or map of the Christian life.
 1. The Israelites in the Wilderness corresponded to the Christians on our own spiritual journey, seeking our inheritance in 'the Promised Land'.
 2. Crossing the Red Sea, with the pillar of cloud and fire present, foreshadowed baptism (spiritual rebirth by "water and the Spirit"). (**1 Corinthians 10:1-2**)
 3. The food and drink miraculously provided by the Lord, to sustain the Israelites during their journey through the Wilderness, foreshadowed our own spiritual food that sustains us (the body and blood of Christ).
 - a. Paul speaks of the people who drank water that came from the rock. He says that the rock was (represented or foreshadowed) Christ. The people, therefore, were figuratively drinking from Christ. (**1 Corinthians 10:3-4**)

iii. The point Paul is making to the Christians in Corinth:

1. *Just because you have been baptized, are within the church community, and are taking the Lord's Supper* does not provide an unconditional guarantee that you will make it to heaven, our promised reward.
2. After all, the Israelites in the Wilderness were all 'baptized' and all 'ate the spiritual food and drank the spiritual drink', yet God was not pleased with most of them.

3. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, that entire generation of about 600,000 men fell in the Wilderness due to their sins and never made it to the Promised Land!
 4. We Christians who have been baptized, are part of the church, and are being spiritually fed (by the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper) can fall during this time of our own testing if we fall to the five sins mentioned in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**.
 - a. Those sins included idolatry, sexual immorality, testing/tempting the Lord, and murmuring/complaining.
 5. The encouraging news is that God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. He is faithful. He will provide a way out so that we can be able to stand in the face of temptations.
- b. Paul continues his argument, developing his point further from what he had just said about the sin of idolatry.
- i. Read **1 Corinthians 10:14-22**.
 - ii. Consider the logic Paul uses to make his case to the Corinthians. He explains to them that they cannot possibly eat things given to idols, BECAUSE:
 1. The cup that we partake in, "the cup of blessing", is "the communion of the blood of Christ." (**1 Corinthians 10:16**)
 2. The bread we break is "the communion of the body of Christ." (**1 Corinthians 10:16**)
 3. We cannot drink "the cup of the Lord" and the cup of demons. and we cannot "partake of the Lord's table" and of the table of demons. (**1 Corinthians 10:21**)
 4. Consider the Jews, "Israel after the flesh" in the Old Testament. Those who "ate the sacrifices" were the ones who were "partakers in the altar", referring to the priests. (**1 Corinthians 10:18**)
 - a. This reminds me of the passage in **Hebrews 13** where it says that we Christians are the ones now entitled to eat from a special altar that the Jewish priests are unable to eat from.
 - b. "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." (**Hebrews 13:10, NKJV**)

- c. In the next chapter in **Corinthians** Paul again brings up the subject of the Lord's Supper. Here, he is rebuking the Corinthians for the way they are conducting themselves when they come together to eat the Lord's Supper.
 - i. Read **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**.
 - ii. Significant points made by Paul here include the following:
 - 1. When we take the Lord's Supper, we are "proclaiming the Lord's death, till He comes." (**1 Corinthians 11:26**)
 - 2. We must not eat this in an unworthy manner.
 - 3. We should judge ourselves, examining our lives, before we partake in the Lord's Supper.
 - 4. Some who had taken the Lord's Supper had become sick and even "fallen asleep" (an expression used as a metaphor for death throughout the Scriptures).
 - iii. **Question:** Paul says that people who have taken the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner have become ill *and even died* as a result! *Does this sound like it is just a "memorial meal"?*
 - 1. **Obvious Answer:** No. It appears that something much greater is taking place, that we enter into grave danger by taking this meal in an unworthy manner!
 - iv. **Related Question:** When Jesus said, "Take and eat, this is My body", at the Last Supper, and the statements about "eating My flesh" in **John 6**, did He mean for those statement be understood literally, or only figuratively?
 - 1. **Approach to Answering This:** How did the church understand these statements in the beginning?

V. Very Early Christian Writings that Discuss the Lord's Supper

- a. From *The Didache*, also known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.
 - i. Note that this is one of the earliest Christian writings outside of the Scriptures. Some scholars believe it was composed sometime between 80 AD and 120 AD. It is a practical manual for the Christian life, including basic theological beliefs and religious practices.
 - ii. From chapter 9 of *The Didache*, which is on the *eucharist* (from a Greek word that means "thanksgiving", a term often applied to the Lord's Supper):

1. "Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks as follows. First, concerning the cup:
2. "We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of David, your servant, which you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever.
3. "And concerning the broken bread:
4. "We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge that you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever.
5. "Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and became one [*alluding to John 6:1-13*], so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.
6. "But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord, for the Lord has also spoken concerning this: 'Do not give what is holy to dogs. (**Matthew 7:6**)'"
 - a. (Source: *The Apostolic Fathers*, 3rd edition, ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes; *The Didache*, chapter 9, pp. 356-359)
 - b. Note from the last statement quoted above that the Eucharist was only open to baptized believers.
 - c. Also note that in chapter 10 of *The Didache* is an ancient prayer of thanksgiving that was given by the presiding brother after the Lord's Supper was distributed to members of the church.
- b. From Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, written c. 160 AD.
 - i. Note that Justin was a Samaritan who converted to the Christian faith after being convinced by the evidence of the prophecies in the Old Testament. He was writing his First Apology in Rome, addressed to the emperor, along with the other rulers and philosophers in that city, to urge them to stop persecuting the Christians. In his letter, Justin explains to these unbelievers what the Christians believe, and what the Christians did when they gathered together at their weekly meeting each Sunday. When describing what happens at that weekly meeting, Justin writes the following:

1. "When we are finished praying, we greet each other with a kiss [*the 'holy kiss'*, **Romans 16:16**]. Then bread and a cup of wine mixed with water are brought to the presiding brother. Upon taking them, he gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And he gives thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at God's hands.
2. "When he is finished praying and giving thanks, all the people who are present express their assent by saying 'amen'. This word *amen* means in the Hebrew language, 'So be it.' After the presiding brother has given thanks and all the people have given their assent, the ones called servants [deacons] give to each person who is present the bread and wine mixed with water, over which the thanksgiving was given, so they can partake. They also take a portion to those who are absent.
3. "We call this food 'thanksgiving' [Greek: *Eucharistia*]. The only ones allowed to partake of this are those who believe that the things we teach are true, who have been washed with the washing that is for the forgiveness of sins and for spiritual rebirth (**Acts 2:38, John 3:3-5**), and who live by the teachings of Christ. For we do not receive these as just ordinary bread and drink. But Jesus Christ our Savior became human by the word of God – having both flesh and blood for our salvation. So we have been taught that the food that is blessed by the prayer of his word is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. Our blood and flesh are nourished from it by transmutation.
4. "The apostles, in their memoirs which are called 'good news' [gospels], have passed on to us the things Jesus commanded them. They relate that Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks, said, 'This is my body. Do this in remembrance of me.' And in like manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, he said, 'This is my blood,' and gave it to them alone. (**Matthew 26:26-28, Luke 22:19**)"
5. "...After these things are done, we continually remind each other of these things. The wealthy among us help the needy. And we stay together. We thank the Maker of all, through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit, for all the things he has given us. On the day called Sunday, all who live in the cities or in the country gather together to one place. There the memoirs of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read, for as long as time permits. When the reader is finished, the presiding brother verbally instructs us and urges us to

imitate the good things that were read to us. Next we all rise together and pray. And as I related before, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought. In like manner, the presiding brother offers prayers and thanksgiving according to his ability. And the people assent, saying, 'Amen.' Then the bread and wine are distributed to each person, and each partakes. The servants [deacons] take a portion to those who are absent.

6. "...Sunday is the day on which we hold our common meeting, because it is the first day on which God made the world, having worked a change in the darkness and matter. On this same day, Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead."
 - a. (Source: Justin Martyr, *First Apology*; from modern translation in *We Don't Speak Great Things - We Live Them*, part 2, chapter 6, pp. 92-94; original found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 185-186)
 - b. Justin explains to the pagans in Rome what Christians do when they gather every Sunday.
 - c. The presiding brother offers the mixed cup of wine and the bread, with thanksgiving to God. Those who believe in Christ and who have been baptized partake in this special meal.
 - d. The Christians believe that the bread and wine are changed; and become the body and blood of Christ.

VI. Old Testament Foreshadowings of the Lord's Supper

a. Foreshadowing No. 1: The Food in the Wilderness.

- i. As Paul explained in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**, the entire exodus journey (detailed in the books of **Exodus**, **Numbers** and **Deuteronomy**) foreshadowed the Christian life.
- ii. The Israelites were all "baptized" when they crossed the Red Sea.
- iii. While they were in the Wilderness for 40 years during the time of testing (corresponding to our life as Christians), they were sustained by the "spiritual food and drink" provided by the Lord.
 1. That food and drink correspond to the body and blood of Christ (in the Lord's Supper), which sustains us on our own spiritual journey.

2. They ate the bread provided from heaven by God (the manna) and drank the water that came from "*the Rock*", which Paul said was Christ (**1 Corinthians 10:4**).

b. Foreshadowing No. 2: The Passover Lamb

- i. In **Exodus 12**, the details regarding the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ, which would occur about 1400 years later.
 1. One male lamb "without defect" selected for each family.
 2. Sacrificed at twilight, on the day of the Passover.
 3. The blood of the sacrificed lamb saved those protected by it from death.
 4. God's people eat a memorial meal of the flesh of that lamb regularly thereafter.
 5. None of the bones of the Passover Lamb could be broken.
 6. The people must get rid of all the yeast (representing sin, which spreads) after the Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.
- ii. From Paul: "...For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." (**1 Corinthians 5:7**, NKJV)
- iii. From Peter: "...knowing that [*you were redeemed*] ...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (**1 Peter 1:18-19**, NKJV)

c. Foreshadowing No. 3: Melchizedek

- i. In **Hebrews**, it says that Jesus has become our "High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (**Hebrews 6:20**).
- ii. **Genesis 14:18** speaks of Melchizedek in his encounter with Abraham; that he "*brought out bread and wine*; he was the priest of God Most High".
 1. Jesus is a priest similar to Melchizedek in several ways. One of those is that He offers the bread and wine.

d. Foreshadowing No. 4: The Tabernacle / Temple

- i. **Exodus** and **Leviticus** discuss the tabernacle (later replaced by the temple, under Solomon). Sacrifices were made there, and the priests were authorized to eat from those sacrifices.

- ii. **Leviticus 24:5-9** discusses the showbread. That special bread would be replaced *once a week*, every week, and eaten by the priests.
- iii. **Hebrews 13** uses similar language to describe our own ministry.
 - 1. "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." (**Hebrews 13:10**, NKJV)
 - a. Consider this statement from **Hebrews** in light of similar sacramental imagery used by Paul in **1 Corinthians 10:16-22**, in connection with the Lord's Supper.
- iv. Recall that Moses had been instructed that everything in the tabernacle had to be constructed exactly as prescribed by the Lord, since all those elements represented copies of things that would later be fulfilled when Christ came. (**Hebrews 8-9**)
 - 1. Jesus is the High Priest, who offers the one perfect sacrifice for all time: His own blood.
 - 2. The curtain or veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, which is torn in two when Jesus died, represented the body of Christ. (**Matthew 27:50-51**, **Hebrews 10:19-20**)
 - 3. Recall that the Holy Place, where the priests ministered daily, had three elements in it (and the priests were surrounded by the images of angels). Since we Christians have become members of a "royal priesthood" (**1 Peter 2:9**), we can look to the Holy Place to get a picture of the ministry that we are now called to be a part of. In the Holy Place of the tabernacle, the three things in that space were:
 - a. The lampstand, giving light;
 - i. perhaps pointing to the word of God, **Psalms 118/119:105**;
 - ii. or perhaps foreshadowing the seven-fold Spirit in the seven oil-fed lamps (**Isaiah 11:1-3**, LXX; **Revelation 4:5**)
 - b. The altar of incense (representing prayer; **Psalms 140/141:2**, **Revelation 8:4**); and
 - c. The table of showbread (I believe foreshadowing the bread that would be eaten weekly as the body of Christ).

- i. Only the priests could eat that bread (and we Christians have become members of a royal priesthood).
- 4. The three things in the tabernacle point to the main characteristics of our own priestly ministry, which feature:
 - a. The Holy Spirit and the word of God;
 - b. Prayer; and
 - c. The bread of life, the body of Christ.

VII. Conclusion: Where Does This Leave Us?

- a. It seems to me that when Christians get together on Sundays, the Lord's Supper (not the sermon) should be our primary focus.
 - i. This would mean a significant change in the way we conduct our meetings on Sundays!
 - ii. We can see from Justin Martyr's *First Apology* that in the beginning, when Christians assembled on Sundays, they also had readings and exhortations from the Scriptures, "as much as time permits". So, it is good for us to have a sermon, prayer and singing at our gatherings as well.
- b. If the bread and wine do, in fact, become the body and blood of Christ, then what we are participating in is a spiritual mystery of greatest significance. And this is something that Jesus Himself told us to do, in memory of Him.
- c. In my opinion, one of the most challenging things in the Christian life is to keep our focus on *the most important things*.
 - i. It is very easy to get occupied with doing things that may be *good*, while neglecting other things that are *even more important*.
 - ii. Things I most enjoy doing or am most familiar with doing (or happen to be good at doing) are not necessarily the things that are MOST IMPORTANT to do.
 - 1. Asking questions like this periodically is likely to be very disruptive to the comfort and routine of our spiritual lives!
- d. **Question:** When we drink the "fruit of the vine", should we be taking wine rather than (unfermented) grape juice?
 - i. It seems from **1 Corinthians 11:21** that Paul is addressing a group that is taking *wine* (as opposed to grape juice) in the Lord's Supper.

- e. **Question:** We usually follow the common modern practice of having many small cups in a communion tray. Should we consider having a single cup that all may drink from, as was done at the original Last Supper and is practiced in some of the older churches?
 - i. Some older churches have their members dip the bread into a cup and take communion that way. Might we consider that practice?
- f. **Question:** Rather than the presiding brother coming up with a new and different message each time we have communion, should we consider a more structured approach, where we bring everyone back to the same place (spiritually) every time we have the Lord's Supper?
 - i. An approach that follows a *set pattern* for the Lord's Supper observance every Sunday is sometimes referred to as being a *liturgical* observance of the Lord's Supper.
 - ii. A classic example of a traditional English-language liturgy for the Lord's Supper, which is based on ancient liturgies, is found in the *Book of Common Prayer (1928 Edition)*.