

"ALWAYS BEING PREPARED..."¹

To explain our beliefs about communion, *1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

Certain beliefs and practices define us as a religious group in our thinking and other religious groups' thinking. Because we have a responsibility to be "prepared to make a defense" for the things we believe (*1 Peter 3:15*), we need to have a conversational understanding of our beliefs and practices that we can share with others. This lesson continues a series looking at some of the more apparent beliefs and practices that tend to define us, things like baptism, communion, and music in worship, and will offer a biblical explanation for them. In particular, this lesson explores our beliefs about the Lord's Supper:

We believe the Christian practice of communion follows the Jewish observance of the Sabbath while reinterpreting it through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus' resurrection, a new creation, and a new exodus

- The Law of Moses required the Jews to observe every Sabbath (Saturday) as a day dedicated to honoring God's sovereign relationship with them (*Exodus 31:16*).
 - Two reasons motivated the Jewish people's weekly observance:
 - First, God designed the Sabbath to offer the Israelites a reminder of His creation of the world and of His sovereign rule over all He made (*Exodus 20:8-11; cf. Genesis 1:1-2:3*); it reminded Israel that their lives and livelihood depended entirely on Him.
 - Second, God connected the Sabbath to His rescue of the Israelites from their Egyptian slavery and reminded Israel of their unique relationship with Him (*Deuteronomy 5:12-15*).
 - God emphasized the Sabbath command's importance by attaching a severe penalty to its violation – breaking the Sabbath command violated one's covenant with Him and merited a death sentence (*Exodus 31:12-17*).
- The transition from God's covenant with Israel to Jesus' new covenant includes a change in the day devoted to honoring God.
 - The New Testament records Christians meeting together on Sundays rather than on Saturday, shifting the required day to the first day of the week in response to Jesus' resurrection.
 - Jesus commanded his followers to observe the Lord's Supper (*1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 28:20*).
 - Christians met together every first day of the week (*1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 11:17-18, 20, 33; Hebrews 10:25*).

¹ 1 Peter 3:15. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- Christians called the first day of the week the "Lord's Day" because Jesus' resurrection occurred on Sunday (*Revelation 1:10; Matthew 28:1-6*).
- The church met on the first day of the week to observe the Lord's Supper (*1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Acts 20:7*).
- Paul's seven-day delay in Troas illustrates the importance of the Lord's Supper on Sunday (*Acts 20:6*); he purposefully delayed his trip so that he could observe the communion with the church in that city even though he was in a hurry to go to Jerusalem (*Acts 20:7, 11, 16*).
- The change in the required day of religious observance also reveals a change in activity – rather than dedicating Saturday to not working, Christians dedicate Sunday to a memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Just as the Sabbath set a precedent for Sunday by dedicating a day to honoring God's sovereignty and covenant relationship with His people, the day also introduced a pair of themes the New Testament connects to Jesus' death and resurrection.
 - The Israelites' observance of Sabbath focused on the creation and the exodus from Egypt (*Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15*).
 - As a memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection, the Christian observance of the Lord's Supper focuses on the hope of a new creation (*Romans 6:1-14; 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21-22*) and of a new exodus (*Romans 8:18-25*).

Applications

- Just as God expected Israel's observance of the Sabbath to be more than merely a religious ritual, so too does He expect our practice of communion to offer a meaningful practice.
- His expectation of a meaningful practice places responsibility on us who observe the communion every week. For example:
 - Our participation in the communion ought to remind us that our identity and future depend on what God does for us through Jesus similar to the way the Sabbath offered Israel a reminder that its life and livelihood depended entirely on God.
 - Our practice of communion ought to make us more aware of the character and goodness of our God as expressed through Jesus and thereby motivate our growing, love-motivated obedience to Him just like the Sabbath should have resulted in a deepening, love-motivated relationship between the Israelites and God.

God's expectations for the communion, a weekly observance of Jesus' death and resurrection, exist within a narrative filled with rich imagery that reminds of us the character of our God and of our Jesus-enabled relationship with Him.

