

## ARTICLE 12

### **We believe in the Lord's Supper and washing of the saints' feet.**

**During the Feast of the Passover, just before Jesus was to be sentenced to death and executed on the Cross, He instituted the Lord's Supper and the washing of His disciples' feet** (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; John 13:1-20). Many in the Christian church refer to water baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the washing of the saints' feet as "ordinances" or "sacraments." The terms "ordinances" and "sacraments" can be used interchangeably and are visible means of portraying Jesus' love and transforming work in our lives. Though not required for salvation, ordinances are outward signs or indications that we have received salvation. They remind us of God's gracious actions of forgiving our sins, giving us spiritual sustenance, and loving us.

**The three ordinances of water baptism, the Lord's Supper, and washing of the saints' feet signify that Christ's death is effective for our forgiveness and cleansing from sin.**

### **1. The Lord's Supper**

The rite of the Lord's Supper—eating the bread and drinking from the cup—is a sign of God's continued favor and love toward us. Through His broken body and His shed blood, which the bread and cup represent, Christ initiated the new covenant, a special relationship God entered into for the benefit and blessings of people, especially those who by faith receive Christ as their Savior.

#### **a. Several terms have been used to describe the Lord's Supper.**

Among these terms are "Feast of the Passover," "Lord's Supper," "Holy Supper," "Table of the Lord," "Breaking of Bread," "Holy Communion," and "Holy Eucharist." An examination of some of these terms can help us understand the full significance of this Holy Meal.

#### **(1) The Jews celebrated the "Feast of the Passover," a meal commemorating their deliverance from Egypt.**

The Passover meal foreshadowed and anticipated the Lord's Supper. The true Passover meal is the Lord's Supper, and Christ is the true Paschal lamb. The Paschal lamb was the lamb that the Israelites sacrificed and ate during their observance of the Passover celebration (Exodus 12). This lamb was a symbol of their deliverance from the judgment of God that came upon the Egyptians. Christ, as the Lamb of deliverance, through His death delivers believers from the bondage of sin (1 Corinthians 5:7).

#### **(2) An appropriate designation of the Holy Meal is the "Lord's Supper" because of who invites us to the Meal.**

Christ instituted the Holy Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23, 26), and as the Host, He invites believers to His table. He is present at this meal as the risen and unseen Host and blesses worshipers who honor Him and come in faith to His Holy Meal.

#### **(3) Another significant designation for the Lord's Supper is Holy Communion (*koinōnia*—fellowship).**

Believers have fellowship with the risen Lord through fellowship with His death (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). This communion or fellowship is possible only through the Holy Spirit. When the

bread and the cup are partaken of by faith, worshipers feed on the spiritual benefits of Christ's death and Resurrection.

**(4) The Lord's Supper is also referred to as the "Holy Eucharist."**

The word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word "*eucharistia*" (thanksgiving) (1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:24). When we participate in the Holy Eucharist, we are thanking God for the love of Christ and for His blessings, and we are dedicating ourselves to do what He has called us to do.

*Scripture references:*

Feast of the Passover—Exodus 12; 1 Corinthians 5:7

Lord's Supper—1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Holy Communion—1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Holy Eucharist—1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:24

**b. Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper during His last meal with His disciples before His Crucifixion.**

When Jesus gathered His disciples for their last meal together just before one of His disciples was to betray Him, He took a loaf of bread, broke it into pieces, and distributed it to them with these words: "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (Luke 22:19). Later in the meal He took the cup and passed it to His disciples, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (v.20; see also Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

*Scripture references:* Luke 22:19-20; Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

**c. The Lord's Supper is a holy ordinance that has deep significance in our relationship with Christ and in our relationships with each other.**

**(1) The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of the Lord.**

As we receive the bread and the cup, we recall that Jesus Christ died for our salvation (1 Corinthians 11:25). Thus the Lord's Supper serves to remind us frequently of our deliverance from the bondage of sin by His death. Although the word "remembrance" (*anamnesis*) refers to a past event, it is so powerful that it signifies that the death of Christ, a past event, is made effective now and brings blessings into the present. Through the Holy Spirit, believers participate in the spiritual realities of the Cross and receive strength to serve one another and the world in love.

**(2) Observance of the Lord's Supper is an expression of thankfulness to God.**

According to 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 11:24, there is an element of "thanksgiving" (*eucharistia*) in observance of the Lord's Supper. When we take the Lord's Supper (The Holy Eucharist), we offer praises and thanksgiving to God because of His mighty act of deliverance in the Cross of Christ. So in the Holy Meal we appear in the presence of God with our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving for the Sacrifice of Calvary and for the abiding and sustaining fellowship of Christ.

**(3) The Lord's Supper is communion.**

The word "communion" (*koinōnia*) means fellowship, partaking, and sharing.

**Fellowship with Christ**—One dimension of Christian fellowship is described by Paul as “communion of the blood of Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:16). There is a partaking of the blood of Christ—His saving benefits—in a spiritual way. Only by faith and through the Holy Spirit do we have fellowship with Christ and share in the blessings of His death. As Paul asked, “Is it [the cup] not the communion of the blood of Christ?” So the Lord’s Supper is a visible sign that believers are spiritually nourished by Christ (John 6:57-58).

**Fellowship with One Another**—Still another dimension of the communion of the Lord’s Supper is that of believers’ fellowship with one another. To use the words of Paul, “The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16). “The body of Christ” refers to the church, the fellowship of believers. Our sharing in the saving benefits of Christ’s death is expressed in our fellowship with one another.

Both our fellowship with Christ and our love for one another are deepened through the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. As the host of the Lord’s Supper, Christ is present to give us the spiritual blessings signified by the bread and cup of communion. Because we are experiencing and celebrating our communion with Christ and with others, we often refer to the Lord’s Supper as “Holy Communion.”

#### **(4) The Lord’s Supper proclaims the death of Christ until He comes again.**

**A reminder of Christ’s First and Second Coming**—As believers we live between Christ’s First Coming and His Second Coming. The celebration of the Holy Meal keeps us mindful of the first time when Christ came and He suffered for our sins. It also reminds us of the promise of His Second Coming (1 Corinthians 11:26). When we participate in the Lord’s Supper, we look back to Jesus Christ’s triumphant death and forward to His final victory when He returns.

In Jesus’ Second Coming, He will take us to heaven and will host a great banquet for us. We will then share with him in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Lord’s Supper foreshadows the inexpressible joy we will experience at that heavenly wedding feast, and it intensifies our expectation of the glorious return of Christ. Therefore, the Lord’s Supper that we partake of today is a foretaste of the final heavenly feast that is to come. At that time we will actually be with Christ in heaven, and the Lord’s Supper, in which we remember His suffering, will no longer be needed.

**Observance of Holy Communion until Christ’s return**—Paul teaches that we need to observe the Lord’s Supper “till He comes.” When Christ does come again, our salvation will be complete and no longer will the celebration of the Holy Supper be necessary. There will be a greater celebration at the final glorious banquet (Isaiah 25:6; 65:13) when our salvation is consummated and we enter into perfect fellowship with the Lord (Matthew 26:29).

#### *Scripture references:*

A remembrance—1 Corinthians 11:25

An expression of thanksgiving—1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:24

Communion—1 Corinthians 10:16; John 6:57-58

Proclamation of Christ’s death and Second Coming—1 Corinthians 11:26

#### **d. Today Christians throughout the world continue to observe the Lord’s Supper.**

Jesus intended the celebration of the Lord’s Supper to be kept alive until the time that He returns. He knew that this celebration would serve believers well after His death and Resurrection until the final establishment of the His Kingdom on earth. Today the Lord’s Supper gives believers hope and encouragement, so that they might not forget their calling to the Christian life.

**(1) The importance of the Lord's Supper lies primarily in that it points to Christ's death through which He initiated the new covenant between God and humans.**

Through His new covenant, Christ becomes the source of a person's life when that individual embraces through faith the saving power of Christ's death and Resurrection. The basis then of believers' fellowship with Christ and their fellowship with one another is the experience of the Cross. In the Lord's Supper, the Cross is represented by the bread and the cup. This representation creates an emphasis of the continuing importance of what Christ did on the Cross as the basis for our ongoing fellowship and spiritual nurture.

**(2) The Lord's Supper is a special and sacred ordinance.**

When we, with genuine faith, participate in this Holy Meal, we can expect to receive genuine nourishment from our new life in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Lord's Supper to strengthen faith, to bring about love, to promote holy living, and to confirm fellowship with Christ and with other believers.

**(3) The Lord's Supper is for all believers.**

Christ invites all who have committed their lives to Him to participate in the Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, many believers have felt that they have had to be perfect and have been afraid to partake of the Lord's Supper. Absolute perfection is not a prerequisite. If it were, there would be no one to participate. Holy Communion is for all believers, including the newly penitent (repentant) and those believers who are struggling with temptations, failures, disappointments, frustrations, or depression. The requirement for participating in this Feast is a spirit of thanksgiving and sincerity. It is only a spirit of carelessness and unbelief that makes a person unfit to join others at the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:27).

**(4) There are a variety of ways churches may serve the Lord's Supper.**

**General Holy Communion practices**

*The Bread*—After the reading of Scripture, earnest exhortation, and self-examination, the bread is blessed in the name of the Lord Jesus and served to the people. The bread that is offered in Holy Communion often is in the form of a common loaf or in small communion wafers.

*The Wine*—The cup is blessed in the same manner as the bread and served to the people. A common cup (chalice) or individual cups may be used.

*Receiving Holy Communion*—In some churches, worshipers proceed to the altar to receive Holy Communion, while in others they remain at their seats where each person reverently eats and drinks.

**Meaning of Holy Communion practices**

One cup and a common loaf reflect our understanding of the Lord's Supper as fellowship or communion, but also, our understanding of the church as the body of Christ.

The practice of everyone partaking from individual cups at the same time also stresses the same truth—a sharing with other members of the body of Christ, the church, because of our bond with Christ. When we partake of the cup with other believers, we are reverently celebrating with each other the blessings that we have received through Christ's shed blood on the Cross.

In some churches the common loaf is broken before the congregation, signifying the body of Christ that was broken in death on the Cross.

**Holy Communion practices in the Church of God**

Typically during observance of the Lord's Supper in local congregations of the Church of God, Scripture is first read and then followed by prayer. After this time of worship, the people are served communion wafers or small pieces of bread and nonalcoholic grape juice in small glasses. In many congregations, the elements (the bread and wine) are passed to the congregation and the people partake at the same time. In other congregations, individuals may file to the altar with their families, where everyone is served together. In the Church of God, children who have accepted Christ as their Savior are permitted to receive the Lord's Supper.

### **Days of observation**

Churches often take Holy Communion monthly or quarterly and some each time they gather for worship. In addition to other days of the year, the Lord's Supper is commonly observed during the week of Easter (Holy or Passion Week)—especially on Maundy Thursday (Thursday before Easter—the day commemorating the first Lord's Supper), Good Friday, and/or Easter Sunday. Most churches take Holy Communion during the Christmas (Advent) season.

#### *Scripture references:*

An announcement of Christ's death—Matthew 26:26; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26

A sacred ordinance—Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For all believers—John 6:35; 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

## **2. Feet Washing**

In first century Palestine, servants might wash the dusty or muddy feet of a guest, but Jesus Christ's washing of His disciples' feet had much deeper significance. In washing His disciples' feet, Jesus was teaching His disciples and us about the spiritual needs of people.

### **a. As with the Lord's Supper, there exists a close link between Christ's washing of the disciples' feet and His death.**

#### **(1) By washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus vividly portrayed His death on the Cross.**

As the Passover celebration approached, Jesus was aware that His public ministry was almost over. It was at the Passover meal, the Last Supper, that Jesus conveyed to His disciples in a dramatic manner the meaning of His upcoming death by washing their feet (John 13:1-17). He arose from the Supper and "laid aside" His garments. The washing completed, He took them again. The verbs "laid aside" and "took" are the very terms that the Good Shepherd had previously used to describe His death and Resurrection (John 10:11, 15, 17-18). The use of these terms to describe what Jesus did connects the significance of His washing of the disciples' feet to His death and Resurrection.

#### **(2) To enjoy a relationship with Jesus Christ, we must allow Him to cleanse our lives.**

At first, Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet because he did not understand that Jesus' action had spiritual significance. Peter did not associate the washing of his own feet with Jesus' upcoming death and the forgiveness of sins. No one can have fellowship with Jesus Christ without being cleansed by His atoning death.

*Scripture references:* John 10:11, 15, 17-18; 13:1-17

**b. Feet washing is a holy ordinance that has deep significance in our relationship with Christ and in our relationships with each other.**

Feet washing demonstrates two vital truths:

**(1) Feet washing points to the cleansing power of the sacrificial death of our Lord.**

During the Passover, Jesus performed this act, which foreshadowed the Cross. Jesus' act of feet washing visibly illustrates to those who accept the cleansing made possible by His submission to death that they are received into fellowship with Him.

Peter failed to understand the relationship between the washing of the disciples' feet and the Cross. At first, he resisted Jesus' attempt to wash his feet either because of pride, like those who assume they can cleanse and sanctify themselves from sin, or because of not feeling worthy enough. He may not have considered it appropriate for the Lord to stoop down and wash his feet. What motivated Peter could have been either pride and/or shame from thinking that he should be doing the serving rather than the Lord. When it comes to spiritual matters, we might experience both pride and shame at the same time. Nevertheless, as it was for Peter and for us also, the need is to humble ourselves before the Lord and allow Him to cleanse us from sin. To stress this truth, Jesus said to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8). Here the term "wash" means more than the mere cleansing of the feet. It refers to a spiritual washing or cleansing that frees from sin by the atoning death of Christ. The washing of feet symbolizes cleansing by the sanctifying power of the Cross. Therefore, those who refuse to have faith in the power of the Cross to forgive sin can have no fellowship with Christ.

**(2) Feet washing summons believers to humble service to God and others.**

When Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, He provided the most vivid example of humility and service in the Bible. It is hard to imagine our Lord and King washing peoples' dirty feet, but this humble action fits the whole pattern of Jesus Christ's life of service on the earth. Jesus' symbolic action at the Last Supper is an example of the nobleness of serving others.

*Scripture references:*

Points to Jesus' cleansing power—John 13:8-10

Summons believers to humble service—John 13:13-17

**c. Feet washing is a holy ordinance that reminds of the cleansing power of the Cross.**

**(1) Feet washing has historical roots in the practice of hospitality during biblical times.**

In biblical times dusty or muddy roads and the wearing of open sandals made it necessary to wash the feet upon entering homes. Normally this act of hospitality was performed by a host's servants.

**(2) The washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus had deeper significance than did the common practice of washing feet as an act of hospitality.**

The disciples' and our observance of feet washing serves as reminders of the cleansing, sanctifying power of the Cross and summons all believers to humble service.

*Scripture references:*

Historical roots—Genesis 18:4; 1 Samuel 25:41

Significance of Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet—John 13:1-17

#### **d. Today a number of Christians continue to observe feet washing.**

##### **(1) All believers are eligible to participate in feet washing.**

Frequently this ordinance is spoken of as "washing of the saint's feet." "Saints" is an Old Testament term for the people of God, but in the New Testament, it is a common designation for Christians (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1).

##### **(2) Jesus intended for feet washing to be observed by the church.**

##### **Feet washing practices in the Church of God**

Within the Church of God, the ritual of feet washing is typically practiced as follows: After the reading of John 13:1-17 to the congregation and the offering of prayer, the men divide up in pairs and the women in pairs with pitchers of water and/or basins filled with water. They then dip one another's feet in the basin of water or pour water over the feet and dry them with a towel. Often this act is accompanied by the offering a silent or audible prayer by the person who is doing the washing for the person whom is being served.

##### **Days of observation**

Churches commonly observe the washing of the saints' feet on Maundy Thursday (Thursday before Easter—the day commemorating the first Lord's Supper), Good Friday, New Year's Eve, and/or other special occasions.

*Scripture references:* John 13:1-17

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## **Discussion**

### **The Lord's Supper**

- 1) Name some terms used to describe the Lord's Supper and discuss the significance of each term.
- 2) What is the importance of the Lord's Supper today?
- 3) What has participation in the Lord's Supper meant to your life?

### **Feet Washing**

- 4) Discuss two vital truths that feet washing demonstrates.
- 5) Have you ever participated in feet washing? If so, what did you learn in the experience?

## **Prayer**

Most gracious God, we thank You for Your Son and His sacrifice at Calvary. We thank You for inviting us to the Holy Table of our Lord and to the service of the washing of the feet of fellow believers.

We pray that You will teach us reverence for holy things. Help us to grasp that Holy Communion and humble service in feet washing point us to the Cross and Christ's gifts of forgiveness and life.

Enable us to come to the Table and to the service of the towel with sincere faith and fervent devotion, so that we may receive nourishment from the bread of heaven and be cleansed by Christ's atoning death.

And grant, dear Lord, that by daily devoting ourselves to You, we may remember and live as people who are not our own, but people bought with a price, the precious blood of Christ. May we draw strength from our daily communion with You, loving, forgiving, and serving others as You have done for us.

Amen.

## Resources for Additional Study

Barclay, William. *Lord's Supper*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Stoffer, Dale R., ed. *The Lord's Supper: Believers Church Perspectives*. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1997.

Thomas, John Christopher. *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Press, 1991.