

On the Sacrament Prayers

The Sacrament prayers over the bread and wine, now replaced by water in LDS congregations, are quite similar, but have some noteworthy differences. While the similarities between the two prayers serve to emphasize the fundamental purpose of the Sacrament, the differences serve to establish the covenant theology associated with the Sacrament.

The covenant theology latent in the Sacrament prayers is seldom, if ever, discussed. This is probably because the Sacrament is often presented as a renewal of baptismal covenants. And rightly so. However, once that equation is made, there is not any additional attempt to draw covenant theology out of the prayers. These comments are intended to address both the purpose of and the covenant embedded in the Sacrament prayers.

Similarities Emphasize Purpose

The Sacrament was instituted at Jesus' last Passover meal, held with the twelve:

17 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide [it] among yourselves: 18 For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. 19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake [it], and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. 20 Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup [is] the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:17-22)

Jesus tells them plainly the bread represents his body and the wine represents his blood, and they are to eat it to remember that he has sacrificed them for us. Thus, the primary purpose of the Sacrament is to remind the people of the Atonement.

Note which parts of the prayers are identical, and what points get repeated for emphasis:

O God, the Eternal Father,
we ask thee
in the name of thy **Son**,
Jesus Christ,
to bless and sanctify
this bread
to the souls
of all those who partake of it,
that they may eat
in remembrance of
the body of thy **Son**,

and **witness unto thee**,
O God, the Eternal Father,

O God, the Eternal Father,
we ask thee
in the name of thy **Son**,
Jesus Christ,
to bless and sanctify
this wine
to the souls
of all those who drink of it,
that they may do it
in remembrance of
the blood of thy **Son**,
which was shed for them; that
they may **witness unto thee**,
O God, the Eternal Father,

that they are willing
to take upon them
the name of thy Son, and
always **remember him** and
keep his commandments
which he has given them;
that they may always
have his **Spirit**
to be with them. Amen.

that they do

always **remember him**,

that they may
have his **Spirit**
to be with them. Amen.

The Holy Spirit is addressed once in each prayer, the Father is addressed twice in both prayers, and the Son is addressed three times in each prayer. All members of the godhead are addressed, but the role of Jesus is preeminent.

Remembering is explicitly referenced twice in both prayers, clearly echoing Jesus' intention at the Last Supper.

The "we ask thee" request for sanctification appears in both prayers, as does the acknowledgment of the formality of the act in "witness unto thee".

Differences Establish the Covenant

The most obvious difference between the two prayers is the bread/wine and body/blood symbols. The bread-body clearly have reference to the more temporal aspects of the Atonement (mortality, physical death, and resurrection), and the wine-blood referring to the more spiritual aspects (sin, spiritual death, and justification). Aside from these differences, note the portions of the text which are entire different between the two prayers:

O God, the Eternal Father,
we ask thee
in the name of thy Son,
Jesus Christ,
to bless and sanctify
this bread
to the souls
of all those who partake of it,
that they may eat
in remembrance of
the body of thy Son,

and witness unto thee,
O God, the Eternal Father,
that they **are willing**
to take upon them
the name of thy Son, and
always remember him
and **keep his commandments**
which he has given them;
that they may **always**
have his Spirit
to be with them. Amen.

O God, the Eternal Father,
we ask thee
in the name of thy Son,
Jesus Christ,
to bless and sanctify
this wine
to the souls
of all those who drink of it,
that they may do it
in remembrance of
the **blood** of thy Son,
which was shed for them; that
they may witness unto thee,
O God, the Eternal Father,
that they do

always remember him,

that they may
have his Spirit
to be with them. Amen.

The bread prayer is unique when it says:

they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son,
and...keep his commandments which he has given them

The wine prayer is unique when it says:

the blood...which was shed for them

This is the formula of the Sacrament covenant, the two parties involved signify the two parts of the contract. First, those who partake of the Sacrament are showing they are taking the name of Jesus Christ upon them and indicate they are going to hear and do his teachings. Second, Jesus has shed his blood for them. The two parties of the covenant are identified, and the requirements are stipulated. Jesus has shed his blood for us, and if want it to be of any efficacy to us, we must do what he tells us to do.

It is particularly fitting the recipient's portion of the covenant is combined with the bread prayer as the partaker is still in mortal flesh (the struggle with the flesh being emphasized by the fact that in order to "always have his Spirit" we must "keep his commandments"). The more spiritual wine prayer is reserved for the Lord's half of the covenant. Similarly, the two prayers follow a works and grace theme. The bread prayer emphasize the works we must do, while the wine prayer emphasizes the grace and mercy of Jesus' atoning blood.

Conclusion

The symbolism of the Sacrament is intended to remind us, in fitting terms of the essential activities of eating and drinking, that Jesus sacrificed his body and blood for us so we may live.

Additionally, those who partake of the Sacrament enter into a covenant with the Lord. If they keep His teachings, then they will have His blood to atone for their sins.

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