

Holy Communion

The Lord's Supper and its meaning

Institution of the Lord's Supper

Matthew 26:26-28

[26] And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. [27] And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; [28] For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Mark 14:22-24

[22] And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. [23] And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. [24] And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

Luke 22:19-20

[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.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

[23] For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: [24] 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. [25] 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. [26] For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus Himself on the night He was betrayed, during the Passover meal with His disciples. This wasn't a random act but a deliberate, carefully timed establishment of a new covenant memorial that would

replace the old covenant Passover.

Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24). This simple act was laden with profound meaning. The breaking of bread symbolized His body about to be broken on the cross. The command to eat signified receiving Him and His sacrifice personally.

Then He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). The cup represented His blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins and the establishment of a new covenant between God and humanity.

The timing is crucial. Jesus instituted this ordinance at Passover, which commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egypt through the blood of a lamb. Now, Jesus—the true Lamb of God—was about to shed His blood for the final deliverance from sin and death. The Lord's Supper would be the new memorial, replacing Passover, pointing not back to Egypt but to Calvary.

Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 11:23 that he received this teaching "of the Lord"—not through human tradition but through direct revelation. This elevates the Lord's Supper to a commanded ordinance with divine authority. It's not optional or negotiable but a direct instruction from Christ to His church for all time.

The phrase "as often as ye drink it" shows this was meant to be regular and repeated, not a one-time event. The church is to continually remember Christ's sacrifice through this sacred meal.

Proclaiming the Lord's Death

1 Corinthians 11:26

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:2

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

Paul states clearly, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Lord's Supper is fundamentally a proclamation—a visible, tangible declaration of the Gospel message centered on Christ's death.

The word "shew" (Greek: *katangello*) means to proclaim, announce, or declare openly. Every time the church partakes of communion, it is preaching a sermon without words. The bread and cup proclaim that Christ died, that His body was broken, that His blood was shed. This is the core message of Christianity.

This proclamation is multi-directional. First, it proclaims to ourselves—reminding us of what Christ did, reinforcing our faith, renewing our commitment. Second, it proclaims to the gathered church—strengthening our corporate faith, uniting us in common belief. Third, it proclaims to the watching world (including the spiritual realm)—declaring that this community belongs to Christ and finds life in His death.

The proclamation has a temporal limit: "till he come." The Lord's Supper is for this age, this time between Christ's first and second coming. When He returns and we sit at the marriage supper of the Lamb, we won't need these symbols because we'll have the reality in full presence. Until then, we proclaim His death through this memorial.

Paul's ministry focused on this message. He determined to know nothing among the Corinthians except "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). The Lord's Supper embodies this singular focus. It doesn't celebrate His teachings, miracles, or example primarily—it proclaims His death.

In a world that often wants a bloodless religion, the Lord's Supper boldly declares that our salvation came through violent death. This is the offense and the power of the Gospel, proclaimed afresh each time we break bread and pour the cup.

Communion and Covenant

Luke 22:20

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

1 Corinthians 11:25

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.

Exodus 24:8

And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.

Hebrews 9:15-22

[15] And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. [16] For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. [17] For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. [18] Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. [19] For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, [20] Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. [21] Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. [22] And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Jesus explicitly connected the cup with covenant: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). To understand communion, we must understand its covenantal nature.

In the Old Testament, covenants were established through blood sacrifice. When God made the Mosaic covenant with Israel, Moses took the blood of sacrificed animals and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the

LORD hath made with you" (Exodus 24:8). Blood sealed the covenant relationship.

But the old covenant was limited. It couldn't truly remove sin or change hearts. Hebrews 9:15 declares that Christ is "the mediator of the new testament" and that His death redeemed the transgressions under the first covenant. The old covenant pointed forward; the new covenant fulfills.

When Jesus said, "This is my blood of the new testament," He was declaring that His death establishes a new and better covenant. This covenant is written not on stone tablets but on human hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33). It's sealed not with animal blood but with God's own blood in Christ.

First Corinthians 11:25 calls it "the new testament in my blood." Testament and covenant are the same word (Greek: diatheke). Every time we drink the cup, we're acknowledging our covenant relationship with God through Christ. We're saying, "I am in covenant with God through Jesus' blood."

This has profound implications. Covenant means commitment, relationship, mutual obligation. God commits to forgive our sins, write His law on our hearts, dwell with us as our God. We commit to be His people, to obey Him, to love Him with all our heart.

The Lord's Supper is thus a covenant renewal ceremony. Each time we partake, we're renewing our commitment to God and He's reaffirming His promises to us. We're declaring, "I am in this covenant. His blood is my assurance. His promises are mine.

Worthy Participation

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

[27] Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. [28] But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. [29] For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

1 Corinthians 11:31-32

[31] For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. [32] But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Paul gives a sobering warning about how we approach communion: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27). This isn't about being perfect but about our attitude and approach.

To eat and drink "unworthily" doesn't mean we must be worthy in ourselves—no one is. Rather, it means approaching the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner: carelessly, flippantly, without reverence, or while harboring unrepentant sin. The Corinthian church had turned communion into a regular meal where some got drunk while others went hungry. They weren't discerning "the Lord's body."

Paul says such participation brings judgment: "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). The word "damnation" (Greek: *krima*) means judgment or condemnation. Some in Corinth had become weak, sick, or even died because of their irreverent approach to communion (verse 30).

This isn't meant to frighten sincere believers away from the table. Rather, it's a call to self-examination: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28). Before partaking, we should examine our hearts, confess any known sin, reconcile any broken relationships, and approach with reverence.

Paul offers hope: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). Self-examination and repentance prevent God's corrective judgment. And even when God does discipline us for irreverent participation, it's redemptive discipline to keep us from final condemnation.

Worthy participation means coming humbly, recognizing the significance of what we're doing, examining our hearts, confessing our sins, and receiving the elements

with faith and gratitude. It's serious, but it's also a gracious provision for continual cleansing and renewal.

Communion and Unity

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

[16] The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

[17] For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

1 Corinthians 11:20-22

[20] When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. [21] For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. [22] 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.

Acts 2:42

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Paul presents communion as fundamentally communal: "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17). The very word "communion" (Greek: koinonia) means fellowship, sharing, participation together.

When believers gather around the Lord's Table, they're not just individually remembering Christ; they're corporately proclaiming their unity in Him. We all partake of one bread, signifying we all belong to one body. We all drink from one cup, signifying we all share in one covenant. This makes the Lord's Supper a powerful expression of Christian unity.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians because their divisions and selfishness contradicted the very meaning of communion. Some arrived early and ate their fill while others went hungry. Some got drunk while others were humiliated. Paul says, "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper" (1

Corinthians 11:20). Their behavior denied the unity that communion represents.

The early church understood this. Acts 2:42 lists four practices of the first Christians: the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. "Breaking of bread" likely refers to communion, placed alongside teaching and prayer as a core practice. They did this regularly, together, as an expression of their newfound unity in Christ.

Communion should break down barriers. Around the Lord's Table, social distinctions fade. Rich and poor, educated and uneducated, different ethnicities and backgrounds—all are equal before the cross, all equally dependent on Christ's blood, all equally members of His body.

This has practical implications. Churches that regularly practice communion should also regularly examine whether they're living in the unity that communion represents. Are there divisions? Prejudices? Unforgiveness? These contradict the message of the one bread and one body.

When we partake together, we're declaring that our unity in Christ is deeper than any earthly difference or disagreement. We're one family, one body, sharing one Lord and one salvation.

Remembrance and Anticipation

Luke 22:19

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.

1 Corinthians 11:26

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

Revelation 19:9

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Matthew 26:29

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

Jesus commanded, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Communion is fundamentally an act of remembrance—looking back to what Christ accomplished on the cross. Like the Israelites' Passover meal that reminded them of God's deliverance from Egypt, communion reminds us of our deliverance from sin and death.

But the Lord's Supper isn't only backward-looking; it's also forward-looking. Paul says we proclaim the Lord's death "till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This temporal marker reminds us that Christ is coming again. Every communion service is a declaration of hope in His return.

Jesus Himself pointed to this future dimension: "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29). He anticipated a future feast in His kingdom. Revelation 19:9 speaks of "the marriage supper of the Lamb"—the ultimate communion when Christ and His bride (the church) are finally and fully united.

This gives communion a three-dimensional timeline: 1. PAST: We remember Christ's death—His body broken, His blood shed for our sins. 2. PRESENT: We proclaim that death now, applying its benefits to our lives, renewing our covenant commitment. 3. FUTURE: We anticipate His return and the eternal feast in His presence.

This perspective transforms how we approach the Lord's Table. It's not just a somber memorial of past events, though it includes that. It's also a joyful anticipation of future glory. We remember death but celebrate resurrection. We acknowledge suffering but anticipate triumph.

Each time we partake, we're living in this beautiful tension between "already" and "not yet." Already, we're forgiven, redeemed, part of His body. Not yet have we seen Him face to face or entered into the fullness of the kingdom. Communion holds both realities together, keeping us grounded in what Christ has done while keeping us hopeful for what He will do.

Until He comes, we remember. And in remembering, we hope.

The Real Presence of Christ

Matthew 26:26

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

John 6:53-56

[53] Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. [54] Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. [55] For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

[56] He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

1 Corinthians 10:16

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

Jesus' words, "This is my body... this is my blood," have been understood differently across Christian traditions. Some interpret "is" as literally meaning the bread becomes Christ's actual body and the wine His actual blood (transubstantiation). Others see "is" as "represents" or "signifies" (memorial view). Still others hold a middle position of Christ's spiritual presence in the elements.

John 6:53-56 records Jesus saying, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." While this passage doesn't directly describe the Lord's Supper (which hadn't been instituted yet), it uses similar language and emphasizes the necessity of participating in Christ. He promises that those who eat His flesh and drink His blood dwell in Him and He in them.

First Corinthians 10:16 asks, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" The word "communion" (koinonia) means participation, sharing, fellowship. We genuinely participate in Christ's body and blood through this meal.

While Christians debate the exact nature of Christ's presence in the elements, virtually all agree that He is genuinely present in the celebration of communion. Whether that presence is physical, spiritual, or symbolic, the Lord's Supper is a

means of grace through which Christ meets with His people.

The practical reality is that approaching the Lord's Table with faith opens us to encounter Christ. This isn't magic—the elements don't have inherent power. But when we receive them in faith, discerning the Lord's body, we open ourselves to His grace, His presence, His nourishment.

Paul's warning about eating and drinking judgment on oneself (1 Corinthians 11:29) suggests something significant is happening beyond mere symbolism. You can't eat judgment by just eating ordinary bread and wine. There's a spiritual reality present that demands reverence.

Whatever our theological understanding, we should approach communion expecting to meet with Christ, to receive from Him, to be nourished by Him. The bread and cup are not empty symbols but means of grace through which our living Lord feeds our souls.

Communion in Church Practice

Acts 2:42

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 20:7

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

[17] Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. [18] For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. [19] For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. [20] When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. [21] For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. [22] 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. [23] For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: [24] 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. [25] 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. [26] For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. [27] Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. [28] But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. [29] For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. [30] For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. [31] For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. [32] But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. [33] Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. [34] And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

The early church practiced communion regularly and corporately. Acts 2:42 shows that "breaking of bread" was one of four core practices from the beginning. Acts 20:7 indicates believers gathered "upon the first day of the week... to break bread," suggesting a weekly pattern connected with Sunday worship (the day of Christ's resurrection).

First Corinthians 11:17-34 reveals that communion was practiced when the church "came together" (verses 17, 18, 20, 33-34). It was a corporate gathering, not a private ritual. The abuses Paul corrected were happening "when ye come together in the church" (verse 18).

This corporate nature is essential. Communion is not primarily an individual devotional practice but a church ordinance. It expresses and creates unity among believers. It's part of the gathered worship of God's people.

Different Christian traditions practice communion with varying frequency: some weekly, some monthly, some quarterly. The New Testament doesn't prescribe an

exact frequency, saying only "as oft as" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). However, the early church pattern seems to be frequent—likely weekly.

Some churches practice "open communion," welcoming all believers. Others practice "closed communion," restricting it to baptized members. First Corinthians 11:28 says "let a man examine himself," suggesting personal responsibility rather than church gatekeeping, though church discipline (1 Corinthians 5) might exclude unrepentant sinners.

The manner of distribution varies—some churches have members come forward, others pass elements through the pews, others use individual cups, others a common cup. These are matters of practical arrangement rather than theological necessity.

What matters is that churches practice communion regularly, reverently, corporately, and in a manner that honors its meaning. It should be explained so participants understand what they're doing. Time should be given for self-examination. The Gospel should be proclaimed. And believers should be encouraged to participate worthily, which means humbly, repently, and faithfully.

The Lord's Supper is Christ's gift to His church, and the church should treasure and faithfully practice this sacred ordinance until He returns.

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