
OVERVIEW OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.



In hopes to better inform and prepare our people, I've composed this document in a question and answer format. Please do not hesitate to ask me any follow up questions.

1. What is Lord's Supper?
2. Who should partake?
3. How can I prepare?
4. What is represented in the meal?

1. What is Lord's Supper?

It is sacrament, or a visible sign of an invisible grace. It is a sacred meal that Jesus Christ instituted (Matt. 26:ff, Mark 14:22ff; Luke 22:19,20; 1 Cor. 11:24ff) for his church to remember him and enjoy his benefits. Names for this sacrament, taken from Scripture:

- The Lord's Supper - 1Cor. 11:20
- The table of the Lord - 1Cor. 10:21
- Communion - 1Cor. 10:16,17
- The breaking of bread – Matt. 26:26,27, Acts 2:42
- The Eucharist (thanksgiving) Matt. 26:26,27

Our historic confession helps bring a summarized clarity to what we understand the Scriptures to teach:

Westminster Larger Catechism - (Question 168: What is the Lord's Supper?)

Answer: The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, his death is showed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; have their union and communion with him confirmed; testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, and their mutual love and fellowship each with other, as members of the same mystical body.

Below I hope to unpack some more of what it is represented in meal. The use of bread and wine as elements point us to the cross of Christ and his body and blood. We do not believe it is in accordance with scriptures to assert we are re-sacrificing Christ on an "altar" and then consuming his actual physical body and blood. The questions should follow, "well, is Christ present with this sacrament or is it just a memorial?" We emphasize that the Lord's Supper is more than a mere commemoration; there is a real (though mystical) presence of the body and blood of Jesus spiritually conveyed to us by God's Spirit. The benefits of this meal are not present in the elements alone, but conditioned upon the faith of the partaker, which leads to the next question...

2. Who should partake?

In short, all who humbly acknowledge themselves to be sinners (Romans 3:23) and trust by faith in work of Jesus Christ for their salvation (Ephesians 2:8,9). In addition, it is important to point out that the natural outworking of such saving faith is a public profession and uniting with Christ's body in a local church (through baptism into church membership).

Some may object, “I am a baptized follower of Christ, but not a member of a church – what’s the big deal?” The benefits and responsibilities of church membership is a subject that can be taken up elsewhere (see this article: <http://bit.ly/NqAPQx>). Amongst many other things, being an active member in good standing of some Bible-based church helps bring clarity and credibility to a person’s profession of faith. We are trying to underscore the beauty of a family meal where people join and identify with the family and body of Christ formally.

You may also ask “what about my children should they partake”? Desiring that our children come to articulate their personal faith in Christ and their ability to discern Christ body in the meal, we ask that they refrain from partaking in the Lord’s Supper until they join as full communing members (see Pastor Troy for more information).

We are encouraged and warned in God’s Word to not partake of the meal in an “*unworthy manner*” - 1 Corin. 11: *“²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. ²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.”*

To understand what the Apostle Paul warns of here in partaking in an “*unworthy manner*” (v.27) that can bring “*judgment on ourselves*” (v.29), it helps to review the context of this chapter (11) where he instructs the believers in the church there who were abusing the Lord's Supper in a variety of ways*:

- Disunity in the Local Body - Paul says that “*when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you*” (v. 18).
- Neglect of the poor - Paul pointed out that the rich were eating all the choice food earlier in the day, leaving only scraps for the poor who had to work all day and had to come late to the feast (vv. 20-22).
- Misunderstandings about meaning - Paul clarified the true meaning of the meal as being done “*in remembrance of [Jesus]*” (v. 24), as the “*new covenant in [Jesus'] blood*” (v. 25), an act where we “*proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*” (v. 26), and where we “*recognize the body of the Lord*” (v. 29).

** This three-point summary was composed by Rev. Jonathan Culley*

As too help us avoid such errors and to partake in a way that honors God, we should prepare to come to this sacrament...see next question.

3. How can I prepare?

As one Pastor aptly puts it: “Preparing for the Lord's Supper should not be confused with perfectionism or legalism. The point is not to be sinless before partaking (which would disqualify us all!), but rather to have a heart-attitude of repentance and reconciliation as we partake. Even if our faith is weak, as long as our heart-orientation is one of humility and desperate need for God, Jesus welcomes all who are in need to partake.” After all, it was Jesus who said, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28). Let us nourish on Him, knowing that He paid for all our sins and gives us new life.

1. Understand ourselves – We have a humble estimation of ourselves before God and his holy law. Honestly confessing our failures and sin to God and living with a desire to repent (turn) from sin? This is another point where having the community of a local church formally helps us discern this in our lives.
2. Understand Christ’s Cross – After honestly and humbly confessing our sin, we should be driven to the cross to find forgiveness. Our sin nailed to Jesus to a cross, and only his sacrifice can reconcile us to God (not the presence or supplement of our good deeds). We reflect with joy and gratitude to what has been done for us as we “*remember*” (1 Corin. 11:24) and “*proclaim his death*” (v.26).
3. We seek to unity and reconciliation in the body and make sure we are not neglecting the poor in our midst.

Perhaps it helps to outline a few examples of practical questions to ask yourself in preparation:

- What are the areas of sin (things I am doing or not doing) to love God and my neighbor? Am I willing to let these go and turn to Christ for forgiveness?
- Do I truly understand why Jesus was crucified for my salvation? Do I appreciate the gospel of grace?
- Is there anybody I've offended and need to seek forgiveness from?
- Is there anyone who has offended me and I have yet to forgive?

4. What is represented in the meal?

The meal is both a visible "sign" and "seal" (confirmation of a reality) of the promised benefits enjoyed between Christ and his true followers.

What is represented in the SIGNS?

1. The Lord's death - *"This is my body broken for you...This is my blood shed for you" "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" - 1 Cor. 11:26*
2. The union of the believer with the crucified Christ - As we look upon the symbols, we are reminded of Christ's death for our sins. As we partake of these symbols we are reminded of our spiritual union with Christ. This union is expressed in the language of Paul, when he refers to the church as the body of Christ (the mystical body), each of us being members of that body. Properly partaking of communion, however, does more than remind us of our union with Christ, but in the act of remembrance and commemoration, actually strengthens and deepens that relationship. *"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks, a participation (fellowship) in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" - 1 Cor 10:16,17*
3. The benefits of being united with Christ - The effect of communing with Christ, i.e. of feeding upon him, is nourishment, spiritual growth that results in eternal life: *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" - John 6:54,56*
4. The union of believers with one another - The loaf of bread symbolizes Christ's body, not only his physical body, broken for us on the cross, but also his mystical body, the church. The act of many believers partaking of one loaf symbolizes the unity of the body of Christ, which is nourished by Christ, the Bread of Life. *"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of one loaf." - 1 Cor 10:17*

What is represented in the SEALS?

1. The great love of Christ - It shows not only that Christ is loving and self-sacrificing, to go to the cross, but that his love is directed personally to the participant. *"This is my body, broken for you..."*
2. The promises of the covenant - Lord's Supper assures the participant of receiving all the promises of the covenant, all of the benefits and blessings that are in Christ Jesus. - *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" - Rom 8:32*
3. Reaffirmation of the believer's faith. - The Lord's Supper is a reciprocal seal, not only does he pledge himself to us, but we pledge ourselves to him. 1 Cor 11:26 - *"Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he come."* Here proclaiming his death is pledging allegiance to him by acknowledging that you have been redeemed (purchased) by his death, and pledging a life of obedience to him. *"You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God with your body." - 1 Cor 6:19*