



What is communion?

CrossPointe has a “two-handed” theology, which holds essential doctrines in a closed fist and non-essential doctrines in an open hand. By this, we mean that some doctrinal stances are essential according to biblically orthodox Christianity (i.e., the Trinity; Jesus’ deity, virgin birth, sinless life, death for sin, and resurrection; the authority of the Bible; salvation by grace through faith in Jesus alone; etc.). Others are non-essential, because they stem from secondary issues which CrossPointe holds in an “open hand.” A person’s salvation does not depend on a particular stance concerning these issues.

Communion is an “open-handed” doctrine at CrossPointe.

The night Jesus was betrayed, he and his disciples observed the Passover in a Jerusalem man’s large, upstairs guest-room. As they ate and drank, Jesus said, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16). And so, Jesus’ last meal before the Cross was one of earnest intentionality as he prepared his disciples before his crucifixion.

Luke explains that this took place on the first day of Passover, the day when the Jewish priests sacrificed a lamb for Israel’s sins (Luke 22:7). The Passover harkens back to Israel’s escape from slavery in Egypt when God ordered each Israelite household to slaughter a firstborn and spotless lamb and smear its blood on the doorposts.

The Egyptians and those Israelites who refused would lose their firstborn sons and animals in the tenth plague, which God sent upon Egypt. As Egypt’s firstborn sons and animals were killed, God’s wrath stopped at his people’s doors, because the lamb’s blood shielded them.

Jesus had this sacrifice in mind when he proceeded to share the Passover meal with his disciples.

Three of the four gospels record detailed accounts of this final gathering before Jesus’ body was broken and his blood spilled. Matthew, who was among the disciples at that meal, wrote,

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:26-29).

Communion represents Jesus’ broken body and shed blood offered at the Cross for sinners in rebellion against God.

What is the bread’s significance?

Jesus “took,” “blessed,” “gave thanks,” “broke,” and “gave” the bread, all while remembering the prophet Isaiah’s words concerning Jesus’ body: “But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). God was pleased to crush Jesus, and Jesus was pleased to do his Father’s will (Isaiah 53:10). Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done,” according to Luke 22:42.

Before offering his body as an eternally perfect sacrifice, he anticipated his death with bread and wine and commanded his disciples to “Take, eat” and identify with him in his bodily death in their place for their sins.

What is the cup’s significance?

Having eaten the bread, Jesus thanked God for the cup of wine and passed it to his disciples. He said it represented “the blood of my covenant.”

Israel’s relationship with God was defined by a “covenant,” in which God promised to take Israel as his people and be their God, and Israel promised to keep the covenant as his faithful people (Genesis 17:7-9). Covenants were binding agreements between two parties, and they were sealed with blood.

Consequently, Jesus spilled his blood to seal the new life-giving covenant between mankind and God. His blood, then, was “poured out for the forgiveness of sins,” because continually sacrificing goats, bulls, and birds cannot purify people from sin or bring them to a right standing with God, according to Hebrews 10:3–4. The old covenant was incomplete and left sinful men and women in the path of God’s punishment.

Seeing the problem of unforgiven sin, the author of Hebrews wrote, “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14). Jesus’ blood is perfect to bring us into a new covenant with God, because we are cleansed from sin and free to serve God.

Why do Christians participate in communion?

Those who receive the good news of Jesus’ sacrifice for their sin have historically submitted to Jesus’ command that they participate in communion. Because of communion’s symbolism, those who eat the bread and drink the wine or juice acknowledge and identify with Jesus and his work at the Cross for their sins in their place.

Christians **remember** their Savior’s work when they participate in communion. Rather than seeing the Cross as a basic truth for Christians to leave behind as they “mature,” communion shows the Cross’s centrality for the Christian’s walk. Christ’s body and blood become the centerpieces of the Lord’s supper as those saved by Christ’s body and blood return once again to the foundational truth that God has saved sinners from his wrath by sacrificing his Son in their place.

Believers saved by Jesus’ broken body and spilled blood remember the Cross and hate the sin which made the Cross necessary. Jesus himself said, “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:24).

Christians **proclaim** the good news of the Cross when they participate in communion. Paul says it this way: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death” (1 Cor. 11:26). Communion is certainly a time to refresh our hearts as we ponder the weight of Jesus’ death, but let us not forget communion’s role in proclaiming this glorious event through which we enter fellowship with God. Once again, Christians who eat the Lord’s supper in sin do not proclaim Jesus’ death, because Jesus’ body and blood were offered to God for their sins, and to proclaim his death is to proclaim the purpose behind it.

The person who truly believes this understands that communion is no ordinary meal, because its nature is one of purification and redemption from sin. Therefore, Paul wrote in First Corinthians 11:27, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.” The believer who partakes in communion should examine himself or

herself for any unconfessed sin, especially against fellow members in Christ's church, before eating or drinking.

Christians **anticipate** Jesus' return when they participate in communion. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record Jesus' saying, "I will not eat it [again] until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). Upon his return, Jesus has invited all those saved by his body and blood to eat once again with him seated around the table delighting in our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is what the Book of Revelation calls "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). The prophet Isaiah, who prophesied Jesus' brutal death, also prophesied the final communion, what he calls "a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined" (Isaiah 25:6). Only then will Christians fully comprehend the weight of the Lord's supper as we sit in the presence of our Redeemer, who centuries before gave his body and blood for our redemption.

So, Christians remember the Cross and proclaim all its present accomplishments when they participate in communion, but they also anticipate the future joy of the next supper with the Lord.

How does CrossPointe administer communion?

The Bible contains no directions on how often believers should have communion, but First Corinthians 11:26 suggests that believers and churches have the freedom to participate in communion "as often" as they prefer.

Bread and grape juice can be found near the stage every Sunday morning, and we typically invite Christians to come forth as they feel led for communion following the sermon as the church sings and prays. However, CrossPointe as a body shares communion together on the first Sunday of every month, usually toward the end of the morning service, and at appropriate observances like Christmas and Easter.

Who can administer communion?

Those who serve the bread or juice are not limited to our elders or staff members, because there's no evidence in the Bible to suggest otherwise.

Are non-believers or believing guests allowed to participate?

Communion represents Jesus' accomplished work on the Cross to save sinners. Therefore, we believe that only those who have repented of their sin and believed in Christ for salvation should participate. Sharing communion signifies the Gospel itself as we identify with Christ and his people. Why would a non-believer identify with Christ's work if he or she hasn't received it personally?

Consequently, we limit communion to professing Christians only. While it is possible that someone might participate in communion who is not truly born-again, we make it our regular practice to explain why only Christians should participate. Our hope is not to shun a non-believer but to encourage personal reflection and, ultimately, saving faith in Christ as we clearly articulate what it means to be a Christian.

Believing guests are welcome to partake in communion with their fellow brothers and sisters at CrossPointe.

What if a Christian has had a bad week? Can he participate then?

Just because the days between taking communion have been tainted by sin does not render a person incapable of receiving communion, because communion represents God's grace toward sinners in Jesus' death. The one who admits his need for Jesus' saving work and repents of his sin should feel free to eat communion, which represents those actions.

However, a Christian living in sin without repentance should not participate in communion, lest he be judged. Paul said, “anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” (1 Cor. 11:29-30).

Are children allowed to participate?

Believers should participate in communion. Non-believers should not. Consequently, the child can participate if he or she has truly been regenerated by Jesus’ work at the Cross and can explain the Gospel competently. However, the non-believing child of believing parents should not participate. We approach a child’s baptism in the same way, leaving it to the parents and elders to determine a child’s readiness for communion.

Biblical References

- Matthew 26:17-30
- Mark 14:12-26
- Luke 22:7-23
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
- John 6:22-63

Further Reading

- *Vintage Church: Timely Truths and Timely Methods* by Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears (Crossway Publishers), especially chapter 5.
- *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem (Zondervan), especially chapter 50.
- Resources on the Lord’s Supper from John Piper (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/113_The_Lords_Supper/).