

LORD'S SUPPER

"the bread and cup"

Key question

What is the Scripture's teaching on the Lord's Supper?

Key text

I Corinthians 11:23-26

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way he took the cup also after supper saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

Key Definition

Ordinance

An ordinance is an outward rite prescribed by Christ to be performed by His Church as an act of worship and edification.

The Lord's supper

The Lord's supper (the taking of the bread and cup by believers) is a perpetual symbol of our union with one another in Christ.

Introduction

1. The sharing of bread and cup as an expression of union with Christ has been a universal practice of the Christian church throughout its history.
2. There have been differing views of the significance and meaning of the elements and act. These differences have sometimes separated Christians from fellowship with each other mocking the very message of the ordinance itself.

A. From Sacrament to Ordinance

1. The word sacrament comes from two Latin words: *sacra*, which means "holy," and the suffix *mentum*, which means "to set aside." In Christian thought "sacrament" refers to an action of

God that is received, affirmed, treasured, and kept (Eph.3:3-6). “Sacrament” expresses the mystery of the union between God and man – effected by God, kept by man.

2. The Old Roman Catholic Church viewed the sacrament as *opere operatum* (it works by the work) without individual faith. Protestants challenged that “one sided” view by emphasizing the importance of individual faith.
3. The Enlightenment, which replaced the mystery of sacramental action with an emphasis on the rational and understandable, influenced the free-church tradition (churches that broke away from the state and stood independent of state control) to introduce the word *ordinance* with its emphasis on human responsibility.
4. The Christian church today is divided in its understanding of the proper meaning of the Bread and Cup. While this should not be an obstacle to fellowship for those who love Christ and embrace the Gospel, it can represent significant differences in how the grace of God is given to His people.
5. Points of disagreement can be illustrated by looking at four different views.

	Transubstantiation	Consubstantiation	Reformed	Memorial
Groups (Denominations)	Roman Catholic	Lutheran	Presbyterian, other Reformed Churches	Baptist, Mennonite
“Founder” of position	Thomas Aquinas	Martin Luther	John Calvin	Ulrich Zwingli
Presence of Christ	Through consecration the bread changes into Christ's body and wine changes into Christ's blood. Christ is truly and substantially present in the elements themselves.	The elements do not change into the presence of Christ, but he is actually present in, with, and under the elements.	Christ is not literally present in the elements. He is present spiritually in the partaking of the elements.	Christ is not present in the elements either literally or spiritually.
Significance of Lord's Supper	Spiritual food for the soul; it strengthens participants and frees from venial sins. Christ is sacrificed at each Mass to atone for the sins of the partaker.	Recipient has the forgiveness of his sins and the confirmation of his faith. Participation must include faith or the sacrament conveys no benefit.	A commemoration of Christ's death that bestows grace to seal partakers in the love of Christ. The supper gives spiritual nourishment and brings one closer to the presence of Christ.	A commemoration of the death of Christ. The partaker is reminded of the benefits of redemption and salvation brought about in Christ's death.
Major Documents	Decrees of Council of Trent	Augsburg Confession Smaller Catechism	Westminster Confession 2nd Helvetic Confession	Schleitheim Confession Dordrecht Confession
Proper Administrator	Priest	Ordained Minister	Pastor Church Leaders	Pastor Church Leaders
Participants	Bread to church members. Cup is withheld from the laity	Believers only	Believers only	Believers only
“This is my Body”	Literal Interpretation	Literal Interpretation	Nonliteral Interpretation	Nonliteral Interpretation

B. The worship meeting of the early church.

1. We do not have a record of a first century church meeting agenda but we do have Old Testament Jewish Temple service order, some understanding of the Synagogue service

from the period after the NT was written and we do have principles from the Apostles teaching.

- a. While some “high church” groups have viewed the Old Testament Temple worship as a mandated model for Christian worship, most evangelical groups have seen the change from Old Covenant to New Covenant reflected in the day and form of worship.
 - b. The fact that there is no prescribed order for worship in the New Testament may be significant. It suggests that there is freedom in the form of worship.
2. D.A. Carson suggests the following definition of worship. His definition reflects several of the basic principles of NT worship. *Worship by the Book by D.A. Carson p.26*
 - “*Worship* is the **proper response** of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so.
 - This side of the Fall, *human worship* of God properly **responds to the redemptive provisions** that God has graciously made.
 - While all true worship is God-centered, *Christian worship* is no less **Christ-centered**.
 - Empowered by the Spirit and in line with the stipulations of the new covenant, it manifests itself in **all our living**, finding its impulse in the gospel, which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers.
 - Such worship therefore manifests itself both in **adoration and in action**, both in the **individual** believer and in *corporate worship*, which is worship offered up in the context of the body of believers, who strive to align all the forms of their devout ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples that bring to fulfillment the glories of antecedent revelation and anticipate the consummation.”
 3. The meetings of the early church seemed to be devoted to the edification of the Body of Christ (believers) with a combination of teaching, and the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7-12).
- C. **The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ, practiced in the church, and taught by the apostles.**
1. Its institution by Christ.
 - a. Matt.26:26-28; Mk.14:22-24; Lk.22:19-20.
 - b. The first Lord's Supper was apparently a part of the Jewish Passover meal just before His crucifixion. John 18:28; 19:14 may refer to an alternative view of the Passover (Sadducees), which was after the crucifixion.
 2. Its practice in Acts 2:42,46, 20:7 is described as “breaking of bread.”
 3. Its prescription in the epistles
 - a. **I Cor.10:16** “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?”
 - b. **I Cor.11** “¹⁷ But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it. ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you. ²⁰ Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, ²¹ for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing?”

What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. ²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same way {He took} the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink {it,} in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. ²⁷ Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰ For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world. ³³ So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. ³⁴ If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment. And the remaining matters I shall arrange when I come."

4. Its practice in the early church.
 - a. The "love feast" was a common practice - II Pet.2:13, Jude 12; I Cor.11:20; Acts 2:42,46; 6:1.
 - b. According to the Didache, 7-15; and Justin Martyr, Apology, c.lxvii, & c. lxxv. the event consisted of:
 1. A feast, various prayers of thanksgiving and confession, reading and instruction from Scripture,
 2. The Supper itself,
 3. A collection for orphans, widows, sick, and needy, and finally a holy kiss.
 - c. There is no indication in Scripture as to how often this ordinance was practiced.

D. **Its significance.**

1. Points of agreement among most Christians.
 - a. It is a remembrance of Christ - I Cor.11:24.
 - b. It is a proclamation of His death - I Cor.11:26.
 - c. It is an assurance of Christ's second coming - I Cor.11:26; Matt.26:29.
 - d. It is a time of fellowship with Christ and His people - I Cor.10:21.
 - e. It is restricted to believers - I Cor.10:21.
 - f. It is restricted to believers who apply their faith in relationships with other believers - I Cor.10:15-17; 11:27-34.
 - g. Unrepentant believers under discipline were excluded from the Supper (I Cor.5:11-13; II Thess.3:6, 11-15).
2. A response to the Roman Catholic view.
 - a. Note two similar views
 1. **Consubstantiation** (Lutheran view). Body and blood of Christ are spiritually present and combined with the elements ("in, with, and under") when the clergy person speaks the Word over the elements.

2. **Transubstantiation** (Roman Catholic view). Elements are changed into body and blood of Christ when a properly ordained priest says, "this is my body."
 - a. The Catholic Church teaches that grace is imparted to those present "by the work performed" but is received in proportion to the subjective disposition of the recipient of the grace.
 - b. The mass is viewed as a re-acton and application of the atoning sacrifice of Christ and without eating and drinking the "body and blood" of Christ there can be no participation in the salvation that it promises.

Jn 6:51 "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

Jn 6:53 "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."

Jn 6:54 "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life."

Jn 6:55 "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink."

Jn 6:56 "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

I Cor 10:16 "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"

- c. This view goes back to the 2nd century (Ignatius). The Council of Trent (1551) officially defined the doctrine.
 - d. More recently, some Roman Catholic theologians have argued for "transignification." This view has been rejected by Pope Paul VI.
- b. Problems with Transubstantiation:
1. How could Christ's body and blood be in two places at once at the original last supper? The Roman Catholic response is that this is a mystery.
 2. How can the bread be both bread and the body of Christ at the same time?
 3. Is it not more reasonable to understand Jesus' teaching as metaphorical as when He refers to Himself as "the door" Jn.10 or "the vine" Jn.15?
 4. In John 6:63 we read, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." This comes in response to Jesus' teaching about eating his body and drinking his blood (vs.53-59). This does not seem to fit the Roman Catholic view.
 5. Jesus and Paul are quite clear that the bread and cup are a "remembrance" not a "sacrifice."

Luke 22:19 "And he (Jesus) 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.*" Luke 22:19

I Corinthians 11:23-25 "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: 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.* 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.*"

C. Fermented wine and the use of alcohol by Christians

1. **The meaning of "wine" in the New Testament.** It must be generally recognized that although fermentation was a process that required time it was a process that started early and without refrigeration would continue. In ancient cultures fermentation was a way of

preserving a drink. It also served a number of medicinal purposes. The same word for wine is used in both a positive and negative context. There are a number of reasons it is very difficult to insist that the New Testament wine was unfermented grape juice.

- a. There was no way to prevent fermentation in ancient times. *“Unfermented grape juice is a very difficult thing to keep without the aid of modern antiseptic precautions, and its preservation in the warm and not overly clean conditions of ancient Palestine is impossible.”* (p.3086 of International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)
- b. The Last Supper was several months after the grape harvest meaning that the wine used must have been fermented.
- c. Wine, not grape juice, has medicinal value – I Tim.5:23; Lk.10:34
- d. Wine, not grape juice, “makes merry.” – Ps.104:14-15
- e. At the wedding of Cana (Jn.2:1-11) the “best wine” created by Jesus was saved till last. Grape juice could not be called the best wine.
- f. Jewish history is consistent in its recognition of wine as fermented drink. Note that it was often mixed with water to make it weaker or with spices to make it stronger. *“In the Talmud, which contains the oral traditions of Judaism from about 200 BC to AD 200, there are several tractates in which the mixture of water and wine is discussed. One tractate (Shabbath 77a) states that wine that does not carry three parts water is not wine. The normal mixture is said to consist of two parts water to one part wine. In a most important reference (Pesahim 108b) it is stated that the four cups every Jew was to drink during the Passover ritual were to be mixed in a ratio of three parts water to one part wine. From this we can conclude with a fair degree of certainty that the fruit of the vine used at the institution of the Lord's Supper was a mixture of three parts water to one part wine. In another Jewish reference from around 60 BC, we read, "It is harmful to drink wine alone, or again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment" (II Maccabees 15:39).”* Robert Stein Christianity Today June 20: 1975

2. Advice concerning the use of wine in the New Testament.

- a. The drunkenness is scorned throughout the Old and New Testaments. **Rom.13:13; Eph.5:18** “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” (See also I Cor.6:9-10; Prov.23:20-21; Isa.5:11,22)
- b. Drinking wine is prohibited in certain contexts:
 1. Priests while they served in the Temple. Lev.10:9-11
 2. Nazarites were not to drink. Num.6:3
 3. Kings and Princes were not to drink. Prov.31:4-5
- c. Moderation (including the use of wine) is the normal advice.
 1. An elder is not to be “addicted to wine.” **I Tim.3:3; Titus 1:7**
 2. A deacon is not to be “addicted to much wine” **I Tim.3:8**
- d. The use of wine is put in a positive light or even encouraged in some contexts.
 1. **Luke 10:34** The Good Samaritan “came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them;”
 2. **I Tim.5:23** “No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.”

3. **John 2:1-11** “Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.” Vs.10
3. **Deferring to the conscience of others.** As Christians we should give consideration to the possibility of being a “stumbling block” for others in what we do. Romans 14 makes this clear. (see apttoteach.org theology file #308)
- “¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. ¹⁴ I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ¹⁸ For he who in this {way} serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. ²⁰ Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or {to do anything} by which your brother stumbles. ²² The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because {his eating is} not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”
4. **Legalism.** While there are principles that should guide our behavior in keeping with differing social contexts, it is not wise to legislate a particular behavior in every context. Love calls for a certain amount of freedom and discretion in conduct. I Corinthians 10:23-33 clarifies this issue. He starts in vs.23 with “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

D. **Foot-washing as an ordinance.**

1. In John 13:1-20 Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and asked them to do likewise to each other vs.14.
2. There are some groups that practice foot-washing as an ordinance today believing that it was practiced by the early church. Most Christians have understood this act of Jesus as symbolic of the need among His followers to humbly serve each other. They do not see evidence that it was a common practice of the early church.

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. What are the central texts that speak of the Lord's Supper?
- b. What is a sacrament?
- c. What are the Biblical requirements for celebrating the Lord's Supper?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. How would you summarize the Lutheran, Catholic, and Baptist views of the Lord's Supper?

- b. Should “foot washing” be an ordinance of the church today?
- c. How would you defend your view of the Lord’s Supper?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. Can Protestants rightly celebrate the Lord’s Supper with Catholics?
- b. How important is the Lord’s Supper to the Christian faith?