

The Lord's Supper

Remembering and Proclaiming the Gospel

Primary texts regarding the Lord's Supper:

- **Matthew 26:26-29** *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."*
- **Mark 14:22-25** *And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*
- **Luke 22:14-20** *And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "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." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*
- **1 Corinthians 10:14-21** *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 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? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.*
- **1 Corinthians 11:17-34** *But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I*

believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also he took the cup, 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. 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. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For 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. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

Supplemental text regarding the Lord's Supper:

- **John 6:47-58** *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*

Who partakes of The Lord's Supper?

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with his disciples. Paul wrote his instructions (as was given to him by Jesus) to the church when they "come together". The Lord's Supper is meant for Christ-

followers, those who believe in the Person and finished work of Jesus Christ and confess Him as their Lord and Savior, to be taken in context of the gathering of the church.

What happens when one partakes of the Lord's Supper

Physically, you eat and drink.

Jesus blessed the bread and cup and gave it to his disciples for them to eat and drink. The Lord's Supper is not an idea or a feeling. It involves the physical act of eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine.

Mentally, you remember.

Jesus said to "do this in remembrance of me." What are we remembering? We are remembering a historical act. We remember the life of Jesus. We remember the teaching of Jesus. We remember the example of Jesus. We remember the sacrifice of Jesus. We remember the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus that atoned from our sins and redeemed us. We remember the forgiveness of Jesus. We remember the love of Jesus, shown to us while we were his enemies and in no way deserved his love.

Spiritually, you participate.

Unbelievers can eat, drink, and remember things they may have learned about Jesus and his teachings. It is this point of spiritually participating that makes this an act that only Christ-followers can enjoy. The word rendered "partake" (*koinonia*) in 1 Corinthians 10:16-18 literally means "sharing". When believers partake of the Lord's Supper, they are experiencing a partnership in Jesus' death, in which accomplished our forgiveness and restored relationship with God.

Does this mean that we literally participate in eating the body of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ? That is not what the text is saying. In the Gospel accounts of the Lord's Supper, Jesus says, "This is my body" and "This is the new covenant in my blood." One reason that this does not mean that the elements become the body and blood of Jesus is that when he instituted the Lord's Supper, he had not yet died (besides, Jesus didn't say that the cup was his 'blood', he said it was the new covenant). So his language was meant to be figurative. Additionally, when Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 10, he compares the Lord's Supper to participating with demons in regards to pagan sacrifices. Just as you wouldn't think that you literally 'eat a demon', you are not literally eating Jesus' body nor drinking his blood. The supplemental text of John 6 also supports this. Jesus was a couple years away from his death, so his teaching on Him being the Bread of Life and 'eating his flesh and drinking his blood' was figurative; a foreshadowing of what

was to come. This was confusing even to the disciples. Later in John 6:63, Jesus explains to them the spiritual meaning of participating, or sharing in his flesh and blood: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Outwardly, you proclaim

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:26 “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Partaking of the Lord’s Supper is an outward, visible act of proclaiming the Gospel. Aside from baptism, there is no other clear picture of Jesus death and resurrection (Paul including ‘until he comes’). Additionally, there are three key things we proclaim, in light of 1 Corinthians 11:23-24. First, we proclaim Jesus is Lord (v. 23). Right away we are clear on which God we’re talking about. Second, we proclaim Jesus gave thanks (v. 24). Jesus trusted in God the Father, even in the face of his own death, because he knew his resurrection was on the other side of it. Lastly, we proclaim that he broke the bread (v. 24). No one else broke the bread. No one took Jesus’ life from him. He willingly laid it down out of love for the Father and for his followers. We recognize Jesus’ authority by Him breaking the bread. The Lord’s Supper is a wonderful proclamation of the whole Gospel message.

Corporately, you love

The Lord’s Supper is a table open to anyone who is a Christ-follower, no matter their position in life. It is a table where everyone comes equally – all spiritually poor and needing Jesus. The Corinthian were reprimanded by Paul because they were partaking of the Lord’s Supper in an unloving manner. Some would drink all the wine and get drunk. Some would eat all the food and leave none for their brethren. Some were being insensitive to the poorer among them and created division. The Lord’s Supper is designed for followers of Jesus to come together in love for Jesus and one another, all expressing our need for Jesus.

Personally, you examine

Paul is clear that we are to partake of the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner and thoroughly examine our hearts before we eat and drink. Does this mean that we need to be perfect and sin-free? No, that’s impossible. But this does mean that we examine our hearts and confess where sin has taken hold. We need to repent of ways that we have tried to be our own Savior. We need to make things right with our fellow believers by apologizing for ways we have sinned against them. We need to show grace and forgiveness to each other and receive the grace and forgiveness that God has given us. Not respecting the gravity of the Lord’s Supper does have its consequences. Some in

the Corinthian church were ill and most unrepentant has died! But this was not a death who's destination was hell (1 Corinthians 11:32). The consequences of misusing the Lord's Supper do not result in losing one's salvation, for once you are Jesus', you are His always (John 10:27-30). But like a good Father, God does indeed discipline his children for the purpose of personal and corporate sanctification.

The Lord's Supper champions the Gospel and defeats Idolatry

The Lord's Supper is about the Gospel – Jesus' life, his death, and his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Another problem of the Corinthian church that Paul had to address was their over-realization of the meaning of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:14-21) and turned the meal into an act of idolatry. Some of the Corinthians had turned the Lord's Supper into grace-giving sacramental food verses the spiritual act of remembrance that Jesus had ordained. Neither ordinance of the church (baptism and the Lord's Supper) is what provides us with grace. Grace is provided to us through our faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9). No work, including the acts of baptism or partaking of the Lord's Supper, provide us with grace. The Lord's Supper does not provide us with grace; rather, the Lord's Supper reminds of the grace that God has already given us.

The Junk Drawer: Frequency, Methods & Children

Question: How often should a church celebrate the Lord's Supper?

This is an open-handed issue that depends on each particular church. I've been a part of churches that partake of the Lord's Supper quarterly, monthly, and weekly. In my experience, taking the Lord's Supper quarterly (4x's a year) seemed much too infrequent and unfamiliar. Doing it monthly kept it a regular practice and seemed to uphold the gravity of the event. One church I was part of practiced it weekly, but it became just a ritual.

It would seem that the early church did indeed partake of the Lord's Supper each time they gathered (Acts 2:42). With this in mind, Delta offers the Lord's Supper each week. To help prevent the table from just becoming a religious ritual, we work very hard in applying the scripture that was preached that day in the taking of the Lord's Supper, so our church has the opportunity to repent and celebrate what Jesus has done for them. Our people come on their own accord to a pre-set table, pray, and take the elements. We actually discourage people from taking it if they feel it is losing any personal meaning. Once a month, we also practice "Family Communion", where we invite whole families and friends to come together and have an Elder of Delta personally lead them through the Lord's Supper.

Question: How should a church distribute the Lord's Supper?

There are various methods and elements used such as: intinction (dipping the bread in the cup), using a common cup, passing out the elements in individual cups and pieces of bread or crackers, coming up to a table or servers, using grape juice or wine, etc. This is an issue of context. Jesus referenced "the fruit of the vine", so it then becomes a cultural call between juice and wine (offering both can minister to those who feel that drinking wine is literally how Jesus ordained it and also is sensitive to those who may struggle with alcohol). Using a loaf of bread, matzo, or unleavened bread (like pita bread) becomes just a matter of preference. At the same time, substituting potato chips for the bread and Mountain Dew for the cup (like many a youth pastor has done) is not appropriate as there was intentionality on Jesus' part in using bread and the fruit of the vine.

Good questions to ask are: what is appropriate to our cultural context? What method and elements work best for the size of our congregation? What theological convictions do our Elders feel most strongly about? What would give our people, in our city, in our time the best picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Question: Should children partake of the Lord's Supper?

Children should be held accountable the same way that adults are. So, the following questions should be addressed by the believing parents:

Does my child trust in Jesus alone for forgiveness?

Does my child intend to follow Jesus as their Leader and obey Him?

Does my child understand the significance of the Lord's Supper?

Has my child given a credible profession of faith in Jesus?

Does my child show remorse of sin in their life?

Does my child consciously honor and obey his/her parents as to the Lord?

We have seen the Lord's Supper be a key element in seeing the children in our church come to faith in Jesus. We have seen the Lord's Supper be instrumental in the spiritual growth of families as a whole in our church. But ultimately, this is a question that a believing parent needs to answer in discernment regarding their young disciple.