

THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Three Main Views

1. **Roman Catholic View:** It takes Christ's statements "this is my body" and "this is my blood" literally. The essence or substance of the bread and wine actually change physically to become the body and blood of Christ. Every time the mass is celebrated, the sacrifice of Christ is repeated. Known as transubstantiation, it did not become accepted as an official Roman Catholic doctrine until 1215.
2. **Lutheran view:** The essence of the bread and wine remain, but the physical body of Christ is present "in, with, and under" the elements. His body is present in the bread as water is present in a sponge—the water is not the sponge, but it is present in the sponge. This is known as consubstantiation. According to this view, Jesus was in essence saying, "This bread accompanies my body."
3. **The rest of Protestantism:** The bread and cup are symbols, representing Christ's body and blood.

Biblical Accounts

There are four biblical accounts. 1 Corinthians 11:23-32 was the first written account (55 AD). The other three accounts are found in Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14: 22-24; Luke 22:19-20.

- According to 1 Corinthians 11:23 when did the events described in this passage take place?
- According to Matthew 26:18-20, what Jewish festival were Jesus and the disciples observing when Jesus instituted this ordinance?
- What was the purpose of this feast, according to Exodus 12:24-27?
- What does Exodus 13:8-10 tell us about its purpose?
- Do you see any significance in the fact that Jesus chose to institute the Lord's Supper during this specific Jewish festival? Are there any similarities between the two?
- According to Matthew 26:26, what did Jesus do during the Passover meal?

- What did Jesus do just before He broke the bread?
- Compare this to 1 Corinthians 10:16. What does it call the communion cup? What does this tell us about this ordinance?

The Greek word translated “gave thanks” in Matthew 26:26, 1 Corinthians 10:16, and 1 Corinthians 11:24 is *eucharisteo*. This is why this ordinance is sometimes called the Eucharist.

- Why did Jesus break the bread?
- According to I Corinthians 10:17, what is the significance of the fact that there was only one loaf?
- What did Jesus say as He distributed the pieces of bread to His disciples in 11:24?
- Compare this to Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; and Luke 22:19. How is the wording different?
- What did Jesus mean when He said, “This is my body?”
- According to 1 Corinthians 11:24 and Luke 22:19, what other phrase did Jesus add on to this? What does that tell us about the Lord’s Supper?
- When did they drink the cup, according to 1 Corinthians 11:25?
- According to v. 25, what is the cup a symbol of?

- How does Hebrews 10:1-4 and 10:14 describe the contrast between the sacrifices of the old and new covenants?
- Does 1 Corinthians 11:26 tell us anything about how often we should celebrate the Lord's Supper?
- How often was the Passover observed?
- What does Acts 2:42 imply about how often the early Christians in Jerusalem celebrated the Lord's Supper?

The Bible doesn't tell us how often to celebrate it. Church history says that the early church originally had what they called a love feast on Sunday evenings (see Jude 12 and 2 Peter 2:13). This consisted of a shared meal similar to a potluck. At the end of the meal they had communion. This was supposed to serve as an expression of the church's unity and love for one another. Unfortunately, it was often abused (1 Corinthians 11:20-22) and served as more of an expression of their greed and selfishness. Consequentially, the church stopped having love feasts while some of the apostles were still around. While most congregations had communion every Sunday during the morning service after that, this was never universal. At the other extreme, some churches only observed it once a year based on how often Israel observed the Passover. Today there are churches that observe it every Sunday, once a month, every other month, quarterly, twice a year, once a year, and two groups (the Friends and the Salvation Army) don't observe it at all. I believe that it should be observed regularly, but not so often that it becomes routine and we start just going through the motions.

- According to 1 Corinthians 11:26, what are we doing when we observe this ordinance?
- How long are we to continue doing this (v. 26)?
- According to v.27, what do we need to guard against?
- What are some ways in which a person can partake of it in an unworthy manner?

- According to v. 27 what are we guilty of doing when we partake of it this way?
- What does v. 28 urge us to do before we partake of the Supper? What sorts of things should we examine?
- According to v. 29, why do we need to examine ourselves first?
- This was happening in the Corinthian Church. What were some of the results (v. 30)?
- According to v. 31, how can we avoid this?
- Why does the Lord judge believers and discipline them (v. 32)?

Open Communion means that a congregation invites everyone who has accepted Christ to partake of the Lord's Supper with them, even if they aren't members of that particular church. This recognizes that the body of Christ is much larger than one congregation or denomination.

Closed Communion means that participation is limited to the church's members. Some do this to maintain "doctrinal purity" and not allow believers from other theological traditions to participate. Others do this to insure that non-Christians don't participate. In reality, there may be unsaved people on their membership roles who partake with them, while genuine Christians who aren't on the roles are excluded.

It should also be noted that the Bible doesn't say anything about who should administer the Lord's Supper. In most Protestant churches, the clergy do it. This is a tradition passed on to us by the Roman Catholic Church. In some congregations, people from the congregation take turns administering it, which is in keeping with the biblical teaching on the priesthood of all believers.