

Summary Doctrinal Statement on Communion

At Crossroads, we believe the Lord's Supper is a sacrament in which gathered believers eat bread, signifying Christ's body given for His people, and drink the cup of the Lord, signifying the New Covenant in Christ's blood. We do this in remembrance of the Lord, and thus proclaim His death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner (1 Cor. 11:27-29) participate in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). Just as the elements are physically present, Jesus is spiritually present in (2 Cor. 13:5) every believer so partaking of the Lord's Supper is a special time of communion with our risen Savior.

What is a Sacrament?

Jesus gave two sacraments or ordinances to the church: baptism and communion. A sacrament is a special symbol given by God to His people that, when received in faith, serves as a sign and seal of His promises to us, functions as a means of grace to strengthen us, and through which we testify of our faith in Him and His promises.

What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper?

The Bible has some clear statements about the purpose of the Lord's Supper.

- "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." 1 Cor. 11:26
- "Do this in remembrance of me." Luke 22:19

We are to partake of the Lord's Supper to remember and proclaim Christ's atoning death on the cross and to look forward to His return. God often provided physical objects as reminders of his great acts (e.g. the memorial stones at the Jordan crossing – Joshua 4). The elements of communion are physical reminders of the greatest act of love ever. Eating the bread and drinking the wine help all Christians to humbly thank and worship Jesus for what he did for us and prepare for His imminent return. But the focus is not on what we are doing but what God has done for us. Whenever we take communion, as Israel took the Passover, we renew the covenant relationship (Luke 22:20) between God and ourselves and we gain spiritual nourishment that can only come from Christ (John 6:35-59).

What view of the Lord's Supper conforms best to sound Biblical interpretation?

The Lord's Supper is a memorial meal in that believers remember and proclaim Christ's death until he returns, but it is also a "participation" in Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). Christ is present in a real way. Theologian Wayne Grudem argues in his "Systematic Theology" text that when believers purposefully gather in Jesus' name, Christ is especially present. He uses Matt. 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them", to support his position. He rightfully admits this verse is spoken in the context of church discipline but contends the statement is a general truth and need not be restricted in its application. Grudem goes on stating:

We meet him at his table, to which he comes to give himself to us. As we receive the elements of bread and wine in the presence of Christ, we partake of him and all his benefits. We “feed upon him in our hearts” with thanksgiving...Yet we must not say that Christ is present apart from our personal faith, but only meets and blesses us there in accordance with our faith in him...Certainly there is a symbolic presence of Christ, but it is also a genuine spiritual presence and there is genuine spiritual blessing this ceremony.

What does koinōnia mean in 2 Corinthians 10:16-18?

Paul says in 2 Cor. 10:16 that believers participate in the body and blood of Christ. Other translations use the word communion. Literally, believers experience a sharing (koinōnia) in his body and blood. They experience a partnership in his death. What does this participation/communion/sharing/fellowship mean? Verse 18 gives us the clue because it uses a similar word, but compares it to what happens in the Jewish sacrifices: “Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants [a form of the same word] in the altar?” What does sharer/participant/partner in the altar mean? It means that they are sharing in or benefiting from what happened on the altar. They are enjoying, for example, forgiveness and restored fellowship with God. So, we should take verses 16 and 17 to mean that when believers eat the bread and drink the cup physically we do another kind of eating and drinking spiritually. We eat and drink—that is, we take into our lives—what happened on the cross. By faith—by trusting in all that God is for us in Jesus—we nourish ourselves with the benefits that Jesus obtained for us when he bled and died on the cross. When Paul says, “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?” he means: Do we not at the Lord’s table feast spiritually by faith on every spiritual blessing bought by the body and blood of Christ? When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we feast spiritually by faith on all the promises of God bought by the blood of Jesus.

Do believers receive a special grace in the Lord's Supper?

God has provided many means to sustain and strengthen the souls of his children by faith. Each means is a gracious gift from God, mediating sustaining grace to our needy hearts. So yes, the Lord's Supper is one of those—a very precious and important one. But the grace, mediated through the Lord's Supper, is not essentially different from the grace mediated by other means. Grace strengthens the soul by faith when meditating on the Scriptures (Ps. 1:3). Grace strengthens the soul by faith when saints love each other sacrificially by the power of Christ (Matt. 5:16). Grace strengthens the soul by faith when one sees the heavens declaring the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). Grace strengthens the soul by faith when a believer fulfills her ministry with God's help (1 Tim. 3:13). Grace strengthens the soul by faith when fellow-Christians pray for one another (Eph. 4:16). Grace strengthens the soul by faith when a brother or a sister exhorts or admonishes or hears my confession of sin and provides comfort (Heb. 3:12-13). And fresh grace strengthens the soul by faith when we remember Jesus in the eating of the bread and drinking of the cup, and feast on his risen life.