

A Theology of the Lord's Supper – Part 2

Systematic Theology 101

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Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine by Wayne Grudem

Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

It is commanded by our Lord. (Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26) It was celebrated by our Lord and His disciples on the eve of His death for us. (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20) We see the New Testament believers practicing it. (Acts 2:41-47; Acts 20:7-12) Because of what it means and does for us.

Should we call it an ordinance or a sacrament?

Yes, depending on what we mean by it! An *ordinance* is a prescribed practice ordained or ordered by God; it is often viewed as a symbol which points beyond itself to spiritual realities. A *sacrament* is a sacred practice ordered by God; it is often viewed as a means of grace that may or may not be necessary for salvation. Whatever term we use, we should see the Lord's Supper as saying something to us and through us and giving something to us as well, like the sign miracle of the loaves. (Mark 6:33-44)

Is there a background to this ceremony in the Old Testament?

Yes, the Passover especially, but also the other OT feasts that point to Christ. (Exodus 12:1-14; Exodus 12:23-32; Exodus 34:25; Numbers 9:1-14; 2 Chronicles 30:17-22; John 18:39; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:28; Matthew 26:18) The Lord's Supper also points forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb at the return of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:26; Revelation 19:7-10)

What is the message in the Lord's supper (symbolized and affirmed)?

It symbolizes the death of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:26) It symbolizes our participation in the benefits of Christ's death. (Matthew 26:26; Romans 6:1-11) It symbolizes and gives us spiritual nourishment. (John 6:53-57) It symbolizes the unity of believers. (1 Corinthians 10:17) It affirms Christ's love for us individually. (Romans 5:8) It affirms that all the blessings of salvation are reserved for us individually. (2 Peter 1:1-4) It allows us to affirm our faith in Christ. (John 6:47) It encourages us to lay down our lives in service to one another. (John 13:1-5)

How does personal faith affect the benefits received?

Some believe the Lord's Supper is beneficial regardless of who administers it and who receives it. It is best to see that only those who receive the Lord's Supper by faith receive any benefit. (1 Corinthians 10:1-14) On the other hand, those who do not receive the Lord's Supper by faith (in a proper manner) are in danger of God's judgment. (1 Corinthians 11:27-34)

How is Christ present in the Lord's Supper?

Transubstantiation (Roman Catholic View): The bread is inwardly changed into the literal body of Christ and the wine is inwardly changed into the literal blood of Christ, while appearing the same on the outside. *Consubstantiation View (Lutheran View)*: The bread and wine are not changed outwardly or inwardly, but the everywhere present body and blood of Christ is 'in, with, and under' the bread and wine like water in a sponge. *Memorial (Baptist View)*: The bread and wine are not changed outwardly or inwardly while the human body of Christ remains at the right

hand of the Father in heaven, but the bread and wine function as signs that point beyond themselves to Christ's broken body and His shed blood as we remember what Christ did for us on the cross and benefit from it. *Spiritual Presence (Reformed View)*: The bread and wine are not changed outwardly or inwardly while the human body of Christ remains at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and, although the bread and wine are signs to remind us of the broken body and shed blood of Christ on the cross, these signs are also the means of grace for us to spiritually feed on the spiritual presence of Christ, by the Spirit through faith in the gospel. – 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; John 6:47-58; Luke 24:28-35

Should we be free to celebrate the Roman Catholic mass?

If we are ignorant of what the Roman Catholic Church teaches about the mass, there may be less concern for concern. But if we understand that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the mass is an actual sacrifice of Christ which is necessary for our salvation, then we should not participate because this is contrary to the gospel. (1 Corinthians 8:4-13; 1 Corinthians 10:23-30)

Is a loaf of bread and wine required or is individual crackers and grape juice allowed?

The Scripture gives us freedom in this area. We have to admit that the initial practice was with one loaf and one cup. We have to admit that the unity celebrated in the Lord's Supper is pictured best with one loaf and one cup (or at least a shared loaf and shared cup). Scripture does use a phrase ('the fruit of the vine') that many argue could include grape juice as well as wine. (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18) But we must maintain some kind of bread and some kind of fruit of the vine.

Who can administer the Lord's Supper? preside over? pastors or elders only? men only?

The Scripture gives us freedom in this area. We do not believe that the elders are commanded to speak the 'words of institution' over the bread and wine so that they are consecrated. Wisdom should determine how it is practiced in every church.

Who should participate in the Lord's Supper?

Believers in Jesus. Preferably baptized believers. Those in good standing in the local church. Those who celebrate it in a worthy manner (not those who are worthy – none of us are!).

Should we allow any believer in Jesus to celebrate the Lord's Supper with us?

Some argue that only those baptized as believers should participate. (Closed Communion) Some argue that only members of our own local church should participate. (Landmarkism) We believe that all who believe in Jesus are a part of His body and we should recognize that by allowing them to participate in the Lord's Supper with us. (Open Communion)

How often should the Lord's Supper be celebrated?

The Scripture gives us freedom in this area. The various purposes of the Lord's Supper should guide us in our own particular circumstances. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to 'feed on Christ' and receive grace. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to proclaim the gospel to ourselves and a watching world. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remind us of the gospel in light of the danger of losing the gospel. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to encourage reconciliation and right relationships among believers.