

What We Believe About Communion

Grace Church Position Papers

Communion, or The Lord's Supper, is only mentioned by name in the New Testament a handful of times. Yet it has origins deep in the Old Testament, and its significance can be found woven throughout the Bible. The Scriptures, though made up of many different stories, people, and events, all speak to one overarching story—God's relentless pursuit of and covenant faithfulness to his children.

Communion is a memorial meal, and it has roots in the Passover feast, which was for the Israelites, a yearly feast remembering and celebrating God's covenant faithfulness to them. Because they were so prone to forget all that he had done for them, the Lord gave the Israelites a tangible reminder of how he delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Communion is the New Testament feast remembering and celebrating God's new covenant faithfulness. Because we are as prone to forget as the Israelites were, communion is our tangible reminder that God delivered us from slavery to sin and death through Jesus Christ, the Messiah. When we eat of the bread and drink of the cup, we do so in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19).

When we participate in communion, we are proclaiming Christ's death; we are preaching the gospel and our faith in Christ as the payment for our sins. When we eat this meal in remembrance of him, we participate in an intentional recalling of Christ's body stripped, beaten, bloodied, pierced, and broken for us. It is intended to create within us a heart humble before the Lord, recognizing that Jesus is the only reason we are able to enjoy fellowship with God and a life free from sin and death. Partaking in communion is a public proclamation of our trust in the gospel, the good news of Christ's death on our behalf.

As we reflect on all of this, we see that communion is not an empty, religious, ceremonial ritual. A believer should not approach communion lightly, but with reverence, humility, and thanksgiving. The glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, is on full display in this ordinance.

Paul warns believers that if we eat or drink in an unworthy manner, we eat and drink judgment upon ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Communion is a time for reflection and self examination, a time to ask ourselves if we are living as one who professes Christ. However, approaching the table in a worthy manner does not mean we come to the table sinless, but rather we come to the table bringing our sin. To eat and drink in a worthy manner is to come knowing that we are not worthy. It means to come to the table trusting only in Christ's merit and worthiness.

Scripture is not specific as to how often believers should observe communion. Through regular weekly gatherings, our services, we seek to provide believers the opportunity to examine themselves, to reaffirm their faith in Christ and experience communion with him, and to receive spiritual nourishment through fellowship with the body. And so, at Grace, it is during these corporate gatherings that we observe communion on the first Sunday of each month.

As we celebrate the Lord's Supper at Grace, we recognize that it is an event that is both personal and communal. It is an intimate meal shared with the family of believers in unity, fellowship, and love. In Acts 2, we see a beautiful picture of this fellowship and unity in the early church. All the believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. . . . And all who believed were together and held everything in common" (vs. 42, 44). At Grace, we come together at a common table. Communion is a family meal, and as such, it is reserved for the body of Christ. We believe communion is specific to the fellowship of believers, coming together as one body, partaking of one bread—the body of Jesus broken for us—and drinking from one cup—his blood poured out for us. The table is open to all who believe. While we do not require you to be a member of Grace Church or to have been baptized before you can participate in communion, we do strongly believe and encourage all those who follow Christ to be baptized and become a member of a local church. Our table is open, and every believer is welcome to partake of the elements when they are ready.

When Jesus inaugurated the Lord's Supper, it was during preparation for the Jewish Passover (Luke 22). Because of the rules and requirements surrounding Passover, the meal most likely consisted of unleavened bread made from year-old harvested grain and fermented wine (Leviticus 23:10-14). These elements were readily available to Jesus and his disciples during this time. The easy accessibility of these substances to the masses was important in order for the table to be celebrated regularly. Today, churches use a spectrum of breads and crackers and a variety of juices or wines, highlighting the fact that the elements themselves are not the primary focus but are symbols of our Lord Jesus, the focal point of the celebration.

At Grace Church, we serve Matzah and grape juice. Matzah is unleavened bread that is striped and pierced. Throughout Scripture, leaven is used to represent sin. This unleavened bread is a reminder that Jesus was "without" sin. The stripes and piercings on the bread represent Jesus' physical suffering



for us on the cross as he was wounded for our transgressions. The grape juice that is served symbolizes Christ's blood, which was shed on our behalf. We have added vinegar to the grape juice in order to produce a bittersweet taste to serve as a physical reminder of the pain and beauty of Christ's sacrifice. This contrast should help us have a better understanding and more accurate reflection of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The bitterness reminds us of the bloody and gruesome crucifixion and act of torture Christ endured on our behalf, while the sweetness allows us to reflect on the result of Christ's gracious act that has restored our fellowship with the one true God. Although wine can serve to do the same, we have opted not to use an alcoholic beverage in order to be sensitive to those in the church body who may have previous or current struggles around alcohol consumption. This is just one way we attempt to remove any distractions from being able to worship God through this spiritually nourishing act of remembrance.

Christ's one-time sacrifice has made it possible for us to enter into eternal fellowship with God, and the Lord's Supper is a personal and communal celebration of Christ's victory over sin and death; it is participation in the benefits his life, death, and resurrection afforded to us. We celebrate the fact that, through Christ, we will stand before God as holy and blameless and that our sins will not only not be counted against us, but that we will be declared righteous and justified, just as if we never sinned! Participating in communion is an act of worship—praising the One who made a way when there was no way. We praise the One who died in our place, who bore the punishment we deserved, and gave us the righteous standing that belongs to him alone.

We take communion with much anticipation, looking forward to when he comes again to collect his bride, the Church. This meal is just a foretaste of the meal to come when we are reunited in him—perfect, complete, and lacking nothing. We joyfully expect the day we come together, once and for all, united in the body at the marriage supper of the Lamb. When we partake in communion as a local church, we do so anticipating the culmination of God's covenant love: the time when Christ himself will participate in it with us, when his kingdom is complete and restored and we live with him in eternity.

