

The Spectrum of Christian Faith

What does the Lord's supper mean?

Sacraments

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace, representing Christ and all His benefits. They confirm our relationship to Him and represent a visible difference between those who belong to the Church and the rest of the world. There is a spiritual or sacramental relationship in the sacraments between the sign (water and bread and wine) and what is signified. The power revealed in the sacraments does not reside in them or in the one administering them but is in the work of the Holy Spirit and in the promise of God who gives benefits to those who worthily receive them. Thus, the sacraments are powerful and effective in the life of the recipient because of God's Word which instituted them. For this reason, the sacraments should not be neglected or omitted.

EPC Book of Order/Worship

Sacraments

- Protestant churches observe two sacraments – Baptism and the Lord's Supper/Communion/The Eucharist (thanksgiving). These were both instituted/commanded by Jesus (Matthew 3/Mark 1/Luke 3 and Matthew 28:19; Matthew 26/Mark 14/Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
- Catholic and Orthodox Churches observe seven sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist, confirmation, confession, anointing the sick (last rites), marriage and holy orders.
- Orthodox Christians also hold to the belief that anything that happens in the church can be sacramental.

The Lord's Supper

Baptists
Anabaptists
Quakers
Nondenominational
Evangelicals

Anglican/Episcopal
Lutheran
Reformed and other
Protestants

Roman
Catholic
Eastern
Orthodox

Memorial

Cosubstantiation

Transubstantiation

Memorial

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, *in remembrance* of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

The bread and wine (or juice) are a physical metaphor for Jesus’ death and sacrifice. They help us visualize a spiritual reality but are still just ordinary bread and wine. In this view, communion is an ordinance and not a sacrament.

Transubstantiation

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; *this is my body.*” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. *This is my blood* of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Matthew 26:26-28

Transubstantiation is the belief that when the priest blesses the bread and wine (never juice), they really become Jesus' body and blood, physically and spiritually. Thomas Aquinas described consuming the Eucharist as an encounter the “Godhead here in hiding.” Jesus is actually present in the Eucharist service so it is right to worship him.

Cosubstantiation

This is a range of views introduced by the reformers that the Lord's supper is a sacrament (mystery) where Jesus is uniquely present and uniquely communicating God's grace but physically present.

“...the body and blood are described as being given under (in and with) the bread and wine.”
Martin Luther on Matthew 26

“...the power and efficacy of a sacrament does not lie in the external elements but wholly emanates from the Spirit of God.”

John Calvin

In these views, Jesus has a real (spiritual) but not physical or material

EPC on the Lord's Supper

A. Nature of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is in no way a re-offering of Christ nor a sacrifice. It commemorates Christ's once for all offering of Himself, and in celebrating the sacrament the people offer praise to God for what has already been done.

B. Nature of the elements

While sometimes called by the name of what they represent, the body and blood of Christ, yet they retain the essential nature of bread and wine. While the elements are to be set apart for the use ordained by Christ, this sacramental use gives no special quality to the physical elements. In the Lord's Supper, Christ is uniquely and spiritually present and is discerned by the faith of the believer.

EPC on the Lord's Supper

D. The significance of the Lord's Supper

Those who receive the Lord's Supper spiritually feed upon Christ as the true bread, remembering and, by God's grace, renewing the covenantal benefits of Christ's death on their behalf. In that sense, the sacrament conveys what it signifies when it is received by faith. Those who unworthily receive the sacrament do not receive what is signified. Rather, they are guilty of the body and blood of Jesus and condemn themselves. For this reason, the Session should be careful to refuse the Lord's Supper to those who are ignorant of its meaning or who are known to be ungodly.

E. The frequency of the Lord's Supper

The Session is responsible for determining the frequency of celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is proper to observe it as often as each Lord's Day, but it should be observed at least quarterly. The Session should exercise care that the sacrament be not neglected.

EPC on the Lord's Supper

I. Invitation to partake

The Minister shall invite all true believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, including those from other congregations that are a part of the true Church to partake in the Lord's Supper. All should be reminded of the need to trust in Jesus Christ as Lord, to repent of sin, and to covenant once more to live as followers of Jesus. Those who are ignorant in their knowledge of Christ or who are living ungodly and unrepentant lives should be warned of the serious consequences for those who unworthily partake.

J. Baptized children may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided they have appeared before the Session and professed their faith in a manner acceptable to the Session. At its discretion, the Session may admit such persons to full membership.

How often is the Lord's Supper observed?

Weekly: Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans celebrate the Lord's supper (mass) weekly. The Eucharist is the focus of the weekly gathering. Some protestant churches also celebrate the Lord's supper weekly. This seems to be the pattern of the New Testament church (Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 11)

Monthly/Quarterly: Many protestants celebrate the Lord's supper monthly or quarterly.

Yearly: Some protestants celebrate the Lord's supper only annually on the Passover accompanied by foot washing. (e.g. Church of Christ, Seventh Day).

Who can participate in the Lord's Supper?

Closed: Practiced by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches where only members in good standing (baptized and confirmed) can receive the Eucharist.

Open: Practiced by most Protestant churches where any believer (usually baptized) may participate in the Lord's supper.

Open Table: The Methodist belief that all in attendance are invited to the table.

Meet Richard Twiss

- Native American/First Nations Christian
- First Nations Version of the New Testament:
<https://firstnationsversion.com/book/first-nations-version/>

Further Reading

- Richard Twiss:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHKtDoKoD80> and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1-yF_tHjU
- *Fours Views on the Lord's Supper* – Russell D. Moore, I. John Hesselink, David P. Scaer and Thomas A. Baima, Zondervan Counterpoints, 2007