

Associated Gospel Churches - Articles of Faith and Doctrine

The Lord's Supper

April 2, 2006

The Lord's Supper

XXI. The Lord's Supper

We believe that our Lord and Saviour clearly prescribed for His believing disciples the solemn rite of the Lord's Supper as a memorial of the Lord's death to be kept by His disciples until He comes again, according to His promise and the Father's revealed plan.

1 Corinthians 11:23-27; Luke 22:19-20

The Lord's Supper

- The Lord's Supper

- also known as

- Communion

- Eucharist (from Greek word *eucharistia* = 'giving of thanks')

- “And He took bread, *gave thanks* [*eucharisteo*] and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19)

The Lord's Supper

- **The Lord's Supper - meaning**

- symbolizes

- **Christ's death**

- breaking of His body (bread) and shedding of His blood (wine)

- “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.” (1 Cor. 11:26)

- **our participation in Christ's death and the benefits thereof**

- “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16)

The Lord's Supper

- **The Lord's Supper - meaning**

- symbolizes

- **spiritual nourishment**

- “Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.’”

- (John 6:53-57)

The Lord's Supper

- **The Lord's Supper - meaning**

- symbolizes

- **the unity of believers in the Body of Christ**

- because all partake of the one bread

- “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? *Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.*” (1 Cor. 10:16-17)

- “For anyone who eats and drinks *without recognizing the body of the Lord* eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (1 Cor. 11:29)

The Lord's Supper

- **instituted by Jesus Christ**
 - **a memorial of His death, based on the Jewish Passover feast**
 - **bread signifies His body, wine signifies His blood**
 - **described in Matt. 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20**
- “And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me’. In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:19-20)

The Lord's Supper

- **additional instructions through Paul**
 - **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**
 - **instructions given to Paul from the Lord (v.23)**
 - **a memorial and proclamation of Christ's death until He returns (v.26)**

“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, 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 Cor. 11:23-26)

The Lord's Supper

- **additional instructions through Paul**
 - **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**
 - **care must be taken not to partake in an unworthy manner, and so sin against the body and blood of the Lord (v.27-34)**
 - some believers getting drunk at fellowship meals associated with the Lord's Supper and humiliating those who had nothing by not sharing with them (v.17-22)
 - resulted in God's judgment – sickness or death (v.30)
 - **need for self-examination before partaking (v.28-32)**

The Lord's Supper

- **historically, a diversity of views**
 - **Roman Catholics**
 - **differ significantly from Protestants over the benefits and nature of the Lord's Supper**
 - **Protestants**
 - **differ from one another primarily over how Christ is present in the Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper

- **Roman Catholic view**
 - **the Lord's Supper as a Sacrament**
 - **imparts grace to those partaking “*ex opere operato*” (i.e. “by the work performed”), but the measure of grace conferred is proportionate to the subjective disposition of the recipient**
 - **belief in transubstantiation**
 - **i.e. the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ**
 - **occurs at the moment the priest says, ‘This is my body’ during celebration of the Mass**

The Lord's Supper

- **Roman Catholic view**
 - **belief in transubstantiation**
 - **i.e. the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ**
 - idea in embryonic form was present by 4th century AD
 - doctrine formally proposed in 818 AD, followed by several centuries of controversy
 - formally adopted at the 4th Lateran Council (1215 AD)
 - **in Middle Ages, laypeople not permitted to partake of the wine, for fear of 'spilling the blood' of Christ**

The Lord's Supper

- **Roman Catholic view**

- the sacrifice of Christ is repeated every time the Mass is celebrated

- **Christ is actually sacrificed, though the nature of the sacrifice differs from the sacrifice of the Cross**

“The Holy Mass is a true and proper Sacrifice...

...In the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrifice of the Cross the Sacrificial Gift and the Primary Sacrificing Priest are identical; only the nature and mode of the offering are different... The Sacrificial Gift is the Body and Blood of Christ... The Primary Sacrificing Priest is Jesus Christ... in every Mass Christ also performs an actual immediate sacrificial activity...” (Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, as cited by Grudem, p.992)

The Lord's Supper

- **Roman Catholic view**
 - the sacrifice of Christ is repeated every time the Mass is celebrated
 - the sacrifice confers forgiveness of sins, not just for those participating, but also potentially for the dead
 - “As a propitiatory sacrifice... the Sacrifice of the Mass effects the remission of sins and the punishment for sins... The Eucharistic Sacrifice of propitiation can, as the Council of Trent expressly asserted, be offered, not merely for the living, but also for the poor souls in Purgatory.” (Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, as cited by Grudem, p.992)

The Lord's Supper

- **Roman Catholic view – a brief response**
 - Roman Catholic view fails to recognize the symbolic nature of Christ's statements
 - **Jesus often used symbolic language in speaking of Himself**
 - “I am the true vine...” (John 15:1)
 - “I am the gate...” (John 10:9)
 - **in the same way, “This is my body... This cup is the new covenant in my blood...” is symbolic language**
 - highly unlikely that the disciples would have understood Him to mean that the bread and wine would actually turn into His flesh and blood

The Lord's Supper

- **Roman Catholic view – a brief response**

- **Roman Catholic view undermines the finality and completeness of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross**

- **Christ was sacrificed for our sins once, for all time – thus, no need for any more sacrifices**

“Nor did He enter heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.” (Heb. 9:25-28)

The Lord's Supper

- **Protestant views**
 - **Protestants uniformly**
 - **reject transubstantiation**
 - **reject the teaching of Eucharist as a sacrifice**
 - **reject the concept of the Lord's Supper as a sacrament that effects forgiveness of sins**
 - **Protestants disagree primarily on**
 - **how Christ is present in the Lord's Supper**
 - **what benefits are conferred through the Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper

- Protestant views

- traditional Lutheran view

- rejects transubstantiation, but insists that “This is my body” must be taken literally in some sense
 - the bread and wine do not ‘become’ Christ’s body and blood, but somehow ‘contain’ His body and blood
 - often referred to as ‘*consubstantiation*’
 - the physical body of Christ is actually present ‘in, with, and under’ the bread and is distributed to all that eat
 - sometimes explained as being analogous to water in a sponge – water is not the sponge, but is present in, with, and under the sponge

The Lord's Supper

- Protestant views

- traditional Calvinistic view

- rejects both transubstantiation and consubstantiation
 - understands bread and wine to be symbols of Christ's body and blood, but not *merely* symbols
 - the symbols give visible sign of the fact that Christ Himself is truly present

“By showing the symbol the thing itself is also shown. For unless a man means to call God a deceiver, he would never dare assert that an empty symbol is set forth by Him... And the godly ought by all means to keep this rule: whenever they see symbols appointed by the Lord, to think and be persuaded that the truth of the thing signified is surely present there. For why would the Lord put in your hand the symbol of His body, except to assure you of a true participation in it?” (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, as cited by Grudem, p.995)

The Lord's Supper

- Protestant views

- traditional Calvinistic view

- understands bread and wine to be symbols of Christ's body and blood, but not *merely* symbols

- Christ is truly present spiritually in a special way as we partake of the bread and wine

“Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all the benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.”
(*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 29.7)

The Lord's Supper

- **Protestant views**

- traditional 'Zwinglian' (?Anabaptist) view

- **bread and wine are symbols of Christ's body and blood, nothing more; serve only as a commemoration to remind us of what He has done**

- “There is nothing in the Eucharist but commemoration.” (attributed to Zwingli, as cited by Berkhof, p.255)

The Lord's Supper

- Protestant views

- traditional 'Zwinglian' (?Anabaptist) view

- a reaction to Roman Catholic view of the 'real presence' of Christ in the bread and wine – often denies even any special spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper

“Out of a zeal to avoid the conception that Jesus is present in some sort of magical way, certain Baptists among others have sometimes gone to such extremes as to give the impression that the one place where Jesus most assuredly is not to be found is in the Lord's supper. This is what one Baptist leader termed 'the doctrine of the real absence' of Jesus Christ.” (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, as cited by Grudem, p.995)

The Lord's Supper

- **Protestant views**

- **traditional 'Zwinglian' (?Anabaptist) view**

- **view often attributed to Ulrich Zwingli (Swiss Reformer, 1484-1531) but historians divided regarding his actual views**

- **denied physical presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements**

- “...that His natural body is really and actually present in the Supper, or is eaten with our mouths... we constantly assert to be an error repugnant to the Word of God.” (attributed to Zwingli, as cited by Berkhof, p. 255)

- **at Marburg Colloquy (1529), agreed with Luther on 14 of 15 points of doctrine, but the two parted ways on how Christ is present in the Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper

- Protestant views

- traditional 'Zwinglian' (?Anabaptist) view

- view often attributed to Ulrich Zwingli (Swiss Reformer, 1484-1531) but historians divided regarding his actual views

- but in other statements, Zwingli does not appear to deny the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper

“The true body of Christ... is present to the contemplation of faith; but that His natural body is really and actually present in the Supper, or is eaten with our mouths... we constantly assert to be an error repugnant to the Word of God.” (attributed to Zwingli, as cited by Berkhof, p. 255)

The Lord's Supper

- **The AGC position**
 - somewhat open to interpretation
 - **Lord's Supper a memorial prescribed by Christ, to be kept until He comes again**
 - suggests a symbolic view (vs. transubstantiation or consubstantiation)
 - does not comment on whether Christ is spiritually present in the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper

- **Application**

- **Who should partake of the Lord's Supper?**

- **historically, most Protestants would probably agree that only believers (broadly defined) should participate**

- **Lord's Supper commemorates Christ's death and signifies participation in that death and its benefits (i.e. being a Christian); thus those who partake should be Christian**
 - **serious consequences for those who partake unworthily (1 Cor. 11:29-30) – thus those who have not received Christ should not receive the elements**
 - **typically (though not always) assumes participant has been baptized – the CGC position (i.e. baptized believers may partake)**

The Lord's Supper

- **Application**

- **Who should partake of the Lord's Supper?**

- **historically, most Protestants would probably agree that only believers (broadly defined) should participate**

- **challenged lately by some in Emerging Church movement, who argue that unbelievers should be allowed to partake in Communion, to welcome them into the church community**

- “Growing up I heard about the dangers of ‘drinking the cup in an unworthy manner’ – how the Lord's Supper was only for professing Christians. The proof text, of course, was always 1 Corinthians 11:29... Since most Christians assume that all humanity is doomed apart from Christ, just how much would taking the elements affect a so-called unbeliever's fate? Would they go to hell twice?” (from M. Yaconelli , ed. *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic*, as cited by D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, p.16-17.)

The Lord's Supper

- **Application**

- **Who should partake of the Lord's Supper?**

- **historically, most Protestants would probably agree that only believers (broadly defined) should participate**

- **Emerging Church movement – a brief response**

- **wrongly places 'belonging' before 'becoming' – unbelievers should certainly be made to feel welcome, but some experiences simply cannot be shared – “What fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14b)**

- **suggests it's OK for unbelievers to sin, since 'most Christians assume that all humanity is doomed apart from Christ' and that unbelievers are 'going to hell' anyways**

The Lord's Supper

- **Application**

- **How should we partake of the Lord's Supper?**

- **with reverence and awe**

- a 'solemn rite' – Christ is present in a special way (spiritually); as we partake of the bread and the wine

- **with self-examination and repentance**

- “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself... But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.” (1 Cor. 11:28-29,31)

The Lord's Supper

- **Application**

- **How should we partake of the Lord's Supper?**

- **having reconciled with our brothers and sisters**

- “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matt. 5:23-24)

- **with joy and thanksgiving**

- a celebration for what Christ has accomplished at the Cross

The Lord's Supper

- **Application**

- **How should we partake of the Lord's Supper?**

- **with eager anticipation**

- **the Lord's Supper as a "means of grace"**

- **not that it effects remission of sins, but as a means through which God renews and strengthens our faith and brings blessing to us**

- **come, anticipating fellowship with the Lord at His table**

The Lord's Supper

- **Application**

- **How should we partake of the Lord's Supper?**

- **with eager anticipation**

- **the Lord's Supper as a pledge of greater things yet to come**

- “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.” (Matt. 26:29)

- “Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready... Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’” (Rev. 19:7,9)

References

- **Berkhof, L. *The History of Christian Doctrines*. (London: Banner of Truth, 1969), p. 242-256**
- **Carson, D.A. *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005)**
- **Grudem, W. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 988-1002.**