

COMMUNION

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Introduction

Ever since Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden, instead of obedience we've chosen to rebel and disobey God. That's we, humanity in general, but also you and me as individuals. We've never kept our end of the covenants. God is the promise-keeper, and we're the promise-breakers. And even though he's only proven himself faithful, we often doubt if God will keep his promises to us. And then, we not only doubt God's faithfulness to keep his promises to us, we go a step further and view ourselves as way more faithful than we actually are. Which leads us to something unique about the Christian faith when compared to all other religions.

Nearly all religions are based on some sort of works where there's some kind of obligation that must be fulfilled in order to appease the god or gods of that religion. And what makes Christianity unique isn't that we believe differently in this regard. We do believe that there's an obligation we must fulfill, that there's a standard we must meet, and there's a promise we must keep in order to have a right standing with God. In that regard, Christianity isn't unique. But what is unique about Christianity is that we believe everyone has failed to do all those things. We've all failed to fulfill our end of the covenant, so we're all promise-breakers.

All other religions say, "If you try hard enough, you'll be able to do it on your own." Christianity says, "No matter how hard you try, you'll never be able to do it on your own." And this would lead us to a place of hopelessness until we realize that what's

also unique about the Christian faith is the belief that it's not what we do that saves us, but it's what Jesus has done in our place — the work he's accomplished for us. It's Jesus' promise-keeping that makes us promise-breakers have a right standing with God.

The ultimate twist in God's story is that the covenants all find their fulfillment not in our obedience, but in *Christ's* obedience on our behalf. Yet even this shouldn't be much of a surprise, for God showed us this would be the case in his covenant with Abraham. In his covenant with Abraham God took full responsibility for both his, and our part of the covenant. God would keep his promise to us and though he knew we wouldn't keep our promise to him, God said that he'd keep our side of the covenant too. Which leads us to the Lord's Supper.

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. As you may know, the Passover meal was a celebration of God's judgment passing over the Israelites who put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. The Egyptians made no such sacrifice and experienced God's judgment for their sin. But the blood of the lamb covered the sins of the Israelites, thus God's judgment passed over them. And during the Passover meal Jesus...

Luke 22:19–22 ESV

*19 took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in my blood. 21 But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. 22 For the Son of Man goes **as it has been determined**, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"*

There are three things here we need to look at. First, in verse twenty, Jesus says that his blood will be poured out as the cup of the **new covenant**. Jesus' shed blood on the cross is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant. (For more on the new covenant, see the *Baptism* booklet.)

Second, and I think this is obvious to most of us, the Lord's Supper, or Communion, replaces the Passover Meal as the sign pointing to God's judgment passing over his people. The remembrance now shifts for God's people from the Passover story, to the story the Passover was always pointing to, which is God's judgment eternally passing over his people because the shed blood of his Son, the Lamb of God, has covered their sins.

And third, notice that Jesus says he's going to have his blood poured out, which means he's headed to the cross, "as it has been determined."

Jesus says that his sacrifice on the cross is a plan that's been determined. But when was this plan determined and who determined it? The Father, Son, and Spirit made this plan before time began. This is called the covenant of redemption, or the covenant of grace, the promised plan the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit determined would be fulfilled so we might be saved.

Now in looking more closely at the Lord's Supper, we're going to first explore how Christ is present in this sacrament. Second, we'll look at the grace offered to all who take the Supper by faith. And finally, we'll look at what it means to take this sacrament in a worthy manner.

Chapter 1

Christ's Presence

First, how is Christ present in the Lord's Supper? There are four prominent views in church history regarding Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper.

- Roman Catholics believe that the bread and wine, or juice, become the literal, or physical, body and blood of Christ.
- Lutherans hold a different view. They believe that the bread and wine, or juice, remain bread and wine, yet they become the means by which Christ's body and blood are truly and bodily present.
- Memorialists, including Baptists, Assemblies of God, other Pentecostal churches, Evangelical Free churches, among others, believe that the Lord's Supper is simply a remembrance of what Jesus did on the cross for our sins. The bread and the juice, (no wine for Baptists!) are just bread and juice. Everything that takes place during the Lord's Supper is in our minds, in our memory and remembering, thus the name of this view is memorialist.
- Finally, there's the Reformed view. And yes, I saved Gateway's view for last. The Reformed view is that the bread and wine, or juice, remain bread and wine. Yet the Supper is more than just a time of remembering. Christ is present in the bread and cup. But instead of being physically present, we believe he's spiritually present.

Before I explain why this is what we believe, let's return to the Bible. We looked at Luke's record of Jesus' words during the Last Supper. Let's look at how others record the moment.

Matthew 26:26–29 ESV

*26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; **this is my body**." 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, 28 for **this is my blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*

Mark 14:22–25 ESV

*22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; **this is my body**." 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, "**This is my blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

Mark is very similar to Matthew's account.

And the words of Paul — which are often read when the Lord's Supper is celebrated.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 ESV

23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was

*betrayed took bread, 24 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.” 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant **in my blood**. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

An essential of our faith, meaning a core belief we hold as have Christians throughout history, is that Jesus is fully God and fully man. He’s not fifty percent God and fifty percent man. He’s one hundred percent God and, having come to earth in flesh, is also one hundred percent man.

I bring this up because we must keep these two natures of Christ as they’re called, his divinity and humanity. We must keep his two natures in mind when we talk about his presence in the Lord’s Supper. For Jesus made it clear he is present in the bread and the cup, and this is where the memorialist view misses the mark. Let’s take Jesus at his word. He says he’s present in the bread and cup, but how is he present?

In his humanity, Jesus is only in one place at one time. When he walked here on earth, Jesus was in one place at one time. Just like you and me, in his humanity, Jesus’ physical body can only be in one place at one time. And where is Jesus’ physical body right now? At the right hand of his Father in heaven.

On the other hand, in his divinity, meaning in his God-ness, Jesus is present everywhere. Omnipresence, or being present everywhere is an attribute, or characteristic of God.

Now here’s why all of this is important when it comes to the Lord’s Supper. In the Reformed view of the Lord’s Supper,

which is Gateway's view, Jesus is not present in the bread and cup physically or literally. Why? Because his physical or literal body cannot be in multiple places at one time. To believe so is to confuse his humanity with his divinity. Yet Jesus is really present in the bread and cup. This isn't just in our minds. Jesus is really present, but is so spiritually, or in his divinity.

Chapter 2

A Feast of Grace

What good is it for Jesus to be present in this meal spiritually? That leads us to our next point about the Lord's Supper: That this is a feast of grace. This meal is an opportunity for God's people to feast on and experience God's grace.

You may've noticed that we only looked at three of the four gospels. I skipped John's gospel because he doesn't record Jesus' words during the Last Supper. But John did record words of Jesus that are applicable for us now.

Jesus has just fed a large crowd of five thousand men, not counting women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish. It's a miracle! Then he takes off to the other side of the sea of Galilee without telling the crowd of people where he was headed. But the crowd figured out where Jesus had gone and eventually they caught up to him. And...

John 6:25–69 ESV

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do, to

be doing the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 **For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**" 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35 Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life;** whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." 41 **So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."** 42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by

God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 **I am the bread of life.** 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 **This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.** 51 **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.**" 52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." 59 Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. 60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 **It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.** The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But

there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) 65 And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” 66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Friends, there’s a mystery here that we’re not going to be able to completely solve. But here’s what I want you to know. Everything the world, and by the word “world” I want you to think of everything that’s working against you to live fully and faithfully and one thousand percent for Christ alone — all of the stuff that’s tempting you to believe that you can be satisfied by filling up on it — whether it be a relationship, or money, or power, or popularity, or politics, or religion — whatever it may be, it’s lying to you. It will not satisfy you. It will not fulfill you. It can’t, for it’s not capable of doing so because there’s only One who can satisfy you.

The One who said that he’s the Bread from heaven is he who will forever satisfy those who feast on him. And his words turned a large crowd away because they were satisfied with bellies full of bread and fish and empty souls. They couldn’t get past being told to feast on Jesus. To be satisfied with, in, and by him, so they left.

But when we take this meal, our souls are fed, not our bellies. Not just our minds by remembering, but our souls feast on Christ. For in this meal we take our eyes off of the things of this world, even good things, and turn our hearts to Christ. To the

Bread of Heaven, to the Lamb of God whose blood was shed for our sins. The One who has, and is, the Word of eternal life. And in turning to him we feast on grace.

- When God's Word is preached — we feast on grace.
- When we sing songs of praise — we feast on grace.
- When we witness baptisms — we feast on grace.
- When we take the Lord's Supper — we feast on grace.

This meal can fill our soul just like eating this loaf of bread fills our belly.

Chapter 3

How to Come Prepared

So how do we come prepared to feast on grace? Back to Paul's words to the Christians in Corinth. We'll begin and end with words often left out when churches celebrate the Lord's Supper, but these are important words nonetheless.

1 Corinthians 11:17–34 ESV

*17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. 23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 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." 25 In the same way also **he took***

the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— 34 if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.

How are we to prepare for this meal of grace?

- Instead of coming divided, we’re to come united with one another.
- Instead of coming focused on ourselves, we’re to come considering the needs of each other.
- Instead of coming unrepentant of sin that’s ensnared us, we’re to come repentant, confessing our sins to each other and to God.

We come to this table to feast **together**, for the Lord’s Table is not a table set for one, but is more of an, “Excuse me, sir. How long will the wait be for a table for a few hundred people to

feast together?” To which Jesus, our host says, “The table is ready. Let’s feast.” Let’s feast, indeed.

Chapter 4

Communion

This entire booklet so far has been what's called the institution, or the time of preparation. We've reflected on how Jesus is present in this meal. We've seen how this meal is an opportunity to feast on grace. And how we're to approach the table, in unity, by considering each other's needs, and having come repentant of our sins.

Before taking the meal, spend time in silent reflection. This time may be ...

- an opportunity for you to praise Jesus for who he is, fully God and fully man.
- a time of celebrating God's grace in your life, and how this meal is an opportunity to experience even more of God's grace.
- a time of repentance, confessing to God division you've allowed in your life, or a sinful focus on yourself instead of on others, or some other sin the Spirit brings to your mind that you need to turn away from.

Chapter 5

Concluding Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank you for this feast of grace. A family meal which reminds us of your great love for us. For you, Jesus, came to live, to die, and to rise from the grave so that we might experience eternal life through faith in you. A life of faith and feasting, of having our souls filled and satisfied because of your grace towards us.

Gracious God, for any whose souls are empty, whose lives are full of dissatisfaction and malnourishment, who've feasted on the things this world offers and have found themselves hungrier than ever before, open their eyes to Christ and the grace being offered to them in this meal: A full and satisfied life in being loved by you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Resources

- *What is the Lord's Supper?* by RC Sproul
- *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* by Ronald Wallace
- *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Tradition* by John Riggs
- *The Lord's Supper* by Robert Letham
- *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper* edited by Paul Engle and John Armstrong
- *A Clear and Simple Treatise on the Lord's Supper* by Theodore Beza
- *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace* by Richard Barcellos
- *Given for You* by Keith Mathison



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