

Communion Teaching Guide

Understanding the significance of the Lord's Supper



Introduction

This booklet is intended to serve as an instructional guide and reference for those who may have questions relating to our celebration of the Lord's Supper and its significance. The following are some of the most common questions dealing with the meaning of the event and at what age children should receive the elements.

As you read and study the following material, please refer to the Scriptural citations in the back of the booklet, and also discuss it with others as necessary.

Please keep in mind that the sacrament of Communion is instituted by Jesus Christ in Luke 22 as a “gathering” in which Jesus offers Himself to all of the disciples at once—not one, two, or a few at a time. This is why we celebrate together as a congregation.

Questions

1. *What is a Sacrament?*

A sacrament is a holy regulation established by Christ in his church as a sign, seal, and outward display to those within the covenant of grace of the benefits they have from Christ's mediation. It serves to strengthen and increase their faith and all other graces in them; it obliges them to obey God and to witness to and cherish their love and fellowship with each other; and it distinguishes them from those outside the covenant.¹

2. *What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper?*

The Lord's Supper is an act of worship taking the form of a ceremonial meal, in which Christ's servants share bread and wine (or grape juice) to commemorate His death and celebrate the new covenant relationship that they enjoy with God.² Those who receive the Lord's Supper in faith "have their union and communion with Christ confirmed, and they publicly witness to and repeat anew their thankfulness and commitment to God and their mutual love and fellowship with each other".³ It is a time to remember His sacrifice, draw near to Him through the Holy Spirit, and look ahead to the future Messianic Banquet (Revelation 19:9).

3. *Who ought to come to the table of the Lord, and how do we prepare for it?*

The EPC's Book of Worship says: "The Minister shall invite to partake all true believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, including those from other congregations that are a part of the true Church. 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.”⁴ The Westminster Larger Catechism says that we preparation to receive this sacrament involves careful examination “of the condition of our life in Christ; of our sins and failings; of whether we truly and to what degree know God, believe in him, and have repented, and of whether we love God and our fellow believers. We should have a charitable attitude toward everyone, including forgiveness of those who have wronged us. We must also assess how much we desire Christ and whether we are living in newness of obedience. Finally we must renew the practice of these graces in us by serious meditation and fervent prayer”.⁵ If this is where you are personally, then you are welcome to the Table.

4. *What do the elements of bread and wine signify?*

Please refer to the following verses in the Bible: Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. In each of these passages, Jesus Himself refers to the bread as “My body”, and the cup as the “new covenant in My blood”. His institution of this supper at the Passover feast indicates clearly that Jesus means for His disciples to see Him as their Passover Lamb—the final and perfect atoning sacrifice for their sin. His death on the Cross and resurrection from the dead ratifies (confirms) this new covenant.

5. *How does the New Covenant of the Lord’s Supper relate to the Old Covenant of the Passover?*

In Exodus 12, God commanded Moses to call the leaders of the Israelites to slay a lamb, sprinkle blood on the lintel and doorposts of their homes, and remain in their homes overnight as the Lord passed over to slay all the firstborn of Egypt because of the continuing disobedience of Pharaoh. This was the first Passover. Scripture teaches that Jesus is the perfect Lamb of God to whom these ancient sacrifices pointed (John 1:29; Hebrews 10:11-14). His death set his people free from

their slavery to sin. It is important to note that all the covenants in Scripture are sealed with a sacrifice (Exodus 24:8; Hebrews 9:18, 13:20-21).

6. *Do the elements of bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Jesus as we consume them?*

No. Presbyterians, along with most other Protestant denominations, believe that there is no compositional change in the elements when consumed. Rather, the common elements of bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ, who is present spiritually in this sacrament. The Westminster Catechism says, “The body and blood of Christ are not present in bodily or physical form, either in, with, or under the bread and wine in the Lord’s supper. They are, however, spiritually present to the faith of the recipient just as truly as the external elements are obvious to the senses. And so those who receive the Lord’s supper in the right way do actually feed on the body and blood of Christ, not in a bodily or physical way, but spiritually, while by faith they receive and apply to themselves Christ crucified, along with all the benefits of his death”.⁶

By calling the bread His body and the cup His blood, Jesus teaches us that just as physical bread and wine sustain us in our earthly life, His crucified body and shed blood are what sustain our souls for eternal life. The visible sign of Communion reminds us that we are united with Jesus Christ though faith by the work of the Holy Spirit, who draws us into participation with Christ. In this, we come to share in His suffering and death as if we ourselves had suffered and paid the punishment for sin in our own bodies. Because Christ bore the wrath of God against sin on our behalf on the Cross, our identification with Him through faith means that our sins have been paid for, and we stand blameless before the Father clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

7. *Why should we take Communion?*

We celebrate Communion for several reasons: (1) It is commanded of us in Scripture by our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) To commemorate Christ's death until He returns. (3) To celebrate our new covenant relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (4) To quietly engage in a time of self-examination before Him, confessing our sins before Him, and asking Him to renew our strength and put us back into right fellowship with Him. (5) Because we are ever grateful to God for all He has done for us in Christ. Communion is a means of receiving His grace. (6) Because we love Him. (7) Because it is an act of worship in which we acknowledge Christ Jesus as our sole source of strength and guidance in a fast, furious, and confusing world.

8. *How old must one be in order to participate in this Sacrament?*

Scripture is silent as to the age at which one may participate in Communion. In the Gospels the Passover meal was celebrated by Jesus and the disciples. In 1 Corinthians 11, the bread and cup were shared by the church at Corinth. In neither case is age specified. In the Book of Order, our church states that "Baptized children may be admitted to the Lord's table provided they have appeared before the Church Session and professed their faith in a manner acceptable to the Church Session".⁷ (Opportunities for this are provided regularly for children through our Sunday School and Confirmation classes.)

It is understood that the primary responsibility for the nurture and instruction rests with the parents. In baptism, parents pledge to bring up a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is the responsibility of the Session of the church (the Elders) to see to it that parents are adequately equipped to

provide solid nurturing. The sharing of information and resources in this booklet is one step in this direction.

9. *When should a child be introduced to Communion instruction?*

It depends on the child. Some will begin asking questions as they watch parents and/or other adults taking the elements. Others may not ask questions, but privately wonder what is going on. Be sensitive to the spiritual needs of your children during the Communion service and offer an explanation of the purposes of Communion after the service. Use your Bible—especially the references listed in question 5. Above all, be prepared to answer!

Conclusion:

The Lord's Supper offers us a time to visibly reflect on the Gospel message and share this sign and seal of God's grace with brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ has commanded all believers to eat and drink in remembrance of Him. It is our sincere hope that you find this material helpful in aiding your own understanding of the responsibilities of Communion. Please read and reread this material along with the Scriptures listed and the Confessions of our church to further your knowledge of this time of celebration, which we typically do the first Sunday of each month. If you would like even more information, feel free to contact Pastor Josh or any of the Elders, because we will be happy to provide assistance.

Communion is a time for us to remember what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for us, a time to participate in His death and resurrection through faith and by the Holy Spirit, and a time to anticipate the day when we will celebrate with Him in the great Heavenly banquet commemorating the final, perfect union of Christ and His Church.

References

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- ¹ Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 162
 - ² New Geneva Study Bible, p. 1584. Foundation for the Reformation, 1995.
 - ³ Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 168
 - ⁴ Book of Order, Book of Worship, Chapter 3.3.I.
 - ⁵ Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 171
 - ⁶ Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 170
 - ⁷ Book of Order, Book of Worship, Chapter 3.3.I.

Note:

The Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is divided into two parts:

(1) The Book of Order consists of three sections: the Book of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Book of Worship.

(2) The Book of Confessions contains the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms (Larger and Shorter).