

The Journey Church

Positional Statement: Communion

Why do we call it Communion?

The practice of observing the bread and the cup is found in every major Christian tradition. There are many names for this act: Communion, Lord's Supper, and the Eucharist. The name that this practice is called is not nearly as important as the reverence and focus that should exist while observing it. The word "Eucharist" simply means: Communion. The Lord's Supper is a term used to identify that this practice is connected to and originated by the Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his crucifixion. The word "Communion" means: the act or instance of sharing; an intimate fellowship. We feel this word best describes what is taking place as we observe this practice. We are sharing with each other, as a community, an intimate fellowship with Christ, in which we humble ourselves, come to the table, and feast upon his body, broken for us, and his blood, shed for the forgiveness of our sin. This is an intimate act in which we fellowship with Christ, and share and partake in his sacrificial death, and share in his sufferings.

What is the significance of the bread and cup?

What are we doing as we partake the Lord's Supper?

The bread of the Lord's Supper is mentioned as the body of Christ, broken and given for us; and the cup is referenced as the blood of Christ, poured out for the forgiveness of sin.¹ These elements are observed and taken in connection with the Passover Meal as the bread represents the body of Christ broken and sacrificed for us. The cup represents his blood shed for the forgiveness of sin and our atonement.

We believe that the elements of bread and wine are unchanged as we take them (they remain bread and juice, not become the physical body and blood of Christ); however, we believe that Christ is present with us and in us as we partake of these elements: the bread and the cup. This is not simply a symbolic or memorial meal, as it is a spiritual act which carries spiritual implications. When we partake in this observance we are inviting Christ to dwell in us as we commune and dwell in him and surrender our lives to his Lordship. In this observance we are also publicly confessing our faith and allegiance to Christ and our belief in his death and resurrection.

We do not believe that the taking of the Lord's Supper is a salvific action, in that the taking of the bread or cup saves someone; however, we believe that upon a person's recognition and surrendering of their lives to Christ, this action could be a first act of faith and public

¹ Matthew 26:26-28

profession. We believe that the stepping forward to the Lord's Table for the participation in Communion can be an individual's response to the prompting and invitation of the Spirit to God's grace and redemption in their life. In other words, it could be a person's "I identify with Christ" moment, a moment in which through their own volition, they confess faith in Christ.

Why do we take communion?

The best answer for this question is simple: Jesus told us to. He told us to partake in this sacrament so that we would remember what he done for us. Every time we gather at the Lord's table we are reminded that he invites us to fellowship with him, that his body was broken and his blood was shed so that we could have right-standing with God, and as a result be in relationship with God. We do this because we were told to by our Lord.

Who can/should take communion?

Communion is designed and intended to be a practice of faith by followers of Jesus; however, we believe this is a matter of conscience in which each person must examine their heart and mind to determine whether or not they should participate.

Should there be restrictions for when you can observe?

There are some examples in the Scriptures and early church history for abstaining from participation in the Lord's Supper. First, it is a practice intended to be observed by believers. This does not imply that there will be adverse consequences to an unbeliever who does partake the Lord's Supper, but the observance will be of no physical or spiritual benefit. Second, it is essential that upon observing the Lord's Supper that each individual examine their hearts, lives, and actions against the commands and expectations of Christ.² This should lead to a time of confession, repentance, and turning back to Christ before partaking of the Lord's Supper. This also includes forgiving others who have sin against us and reconciling relationships that have gone astray. Paul says, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have part of both the Lord's table and the table of demons."³ This implies that our hearts and consciences must be clean before God regarding our sin. Paul also says that "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."⁴

² 1 Corinthians 11:28

³ 1 Corinthians 10:21

⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:27

Who can serve communion?

Just as partakers of the Lord's Supper are urged to examine and prepare their hearts, so are those who are in position of serving/administering the communion elements. Those who serve the Lord's Supper should be committed followers of Jesus whose lives indicate evidence of the work of God/fruit of the Spirit. This role is not restricted to clergy or other major church offices, but must be taken with seriousness and reverence as this practice/sacrament is a deeply spiritual act. This role is open to men, women, and youth who demonstrate a maturity in Christ and understanding of this observance. This role is not open to unbelievers or new believers, as the importance of this act requires a mature understanding.

Why do some churches take communion infrequently and other more frequently?

The frequency of Eucharist/Lord's Supper/Communion observance is not specified by Scripture. As a church we observe this practice on a weekly basis as we gather to worship. This follows with the tradition and practice of the early church from as early as the apostles and first believers.

Is this practice just a tradition or is this a life-giving practice? What is the value?

We believe that just as worship, prayer, Scripture reading and preaching of the Word/exhortation are essential elements of the church's life, the weekly observance of communion is as well. We do not believe that this is a religious tradition that loses its meaning or value when practiced frequently, just as worship, prayer, Scripture reading, and preaching do not; rather, we believe that in all these things, including the Lord's Supper, that each individual's preparation of heart determines the practice's transformative effect.

Wine vs. Grape Juice

The issue of using wine or grape juice for the Communion time has been a widely debated issues in many circles. Traditionally in Southern Baptist Churches, which we are, grape juice has generally been the preferred choice for this practice. There is a long history associated with why particular denominations and churches prefer their choice over the other. Both sides are able to present valid arguments for why they choose either wine or juice.

Those who use wine argue that wine is what Jesus used when he had the Lord's Supper and shared with his disciples to "do this in remembrance of me." Those who choose to use wine will say that "if it was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me." This argument will point out that traditionally over the last 1800 years of the church that wine has always been used for this practice and other ceremonial meals. It was only during the Prohibition of the 19th century that a push started to be made to transition from wine to grape juice. It was

the Wesleyan Methodist minister Dr. Welch who came up with a "non-alcoholic" wine that could be used by churches for the Lord's Supper without "breaking the law." We know this today as Welch's Grape Juice. Once the prohibition ended many did not go back to the practice of using wine during the Lord's Supper, particularly Methodists and Baptists, who were strong supporters and catalyst of the Prohibition laws. Those who use real wine argue that just because wine is alcoholic doesn't mean it is wrong or should not be used. They contend, that just like food, sex, and other good things are often abused and distorted, alcohol is the same way. There is no biblical condemnation for alcohol, only drunkenness. Supporters of wine during the Lord's Supper claim that the church should lead the way in redeeming alcohol use, much in the same way that it should redeem other God-given things that have been abused, perverted, or distorted by the culture. Churches who use real wine will make it clear that underage participants of Communion should abstain from the cup or drink an alternative (juice) instead. The same can be applied to those who struggle with alcohol abuse and sobriety.

Those who argue against real wine and prefer grape juice have arguments as well. The predominant theme of those in this category revolve around simply not making it an issue to begin with by just going with juice. Though this is true, it doesn't mean that is the choice that holds the most biblical integrity. Supporters of grape juice instead of wine will often argue that wine can become a stumbling block for those with alcohol addictions or underage participants. Many on this side of the argument often hold the idea that drinking any alcohol, sacramental or social, is wrong. This fuels much of the belief as to why this should not be something practiced in the church.

Though this is our stance, we believe that each church should decide based on what they believe to give them integrity to God's will for them. We do not see this as a primary area of doctrine (such as the fall, the Trinity, salvation, etc.), but a secondary issue that should not divide churches, but one that should definitely be discussed with prayer, study, and reflection.