

EPC Book of Order – Lord’s Supper

3-3 The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper was instituted by Jesus on the night of His betrayal. It is to be celebrated until the end of the world as a perpetual remembrance of what He did for mankind on the cross. The Lord’s Supper is a seal of all those benefits of Calvary for believers, and signifies their spiritual growth and nourishment. It is a bond and pledge of the communion of believers with Jesus Christ and with each other as parts of the Church.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. Different names for the Lord’s Supper

Historically Christians have used different names to describe the Lord’s Supper. However, these names all signify the same sacrament. In addition to being called the Lord’s Supper, it is called the Breaking of the Bread, Holy Communion, and the Eucharist (Thanksgiving).

4. 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.²⁹¹ 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

5. 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.

6. The place of the Lords Supper

The Lord's Supper is a part of the worship of God's people. For that reason it should be celebrated ordinarily as a part of a regular service of worship. The observance of the sacrament should always be in conjunction with the reading and preaching of the Word, with the prayers of the people accompanied with hymns of praise.

7. Special times of celebration:

a. With those who are ill.

The Session may authorize the Lord's Supper to be celebrated with those who are ill. At least one member of the Session should be present on such occasions. The Minister shall be careful to give some brief explanation of the meaning of the sacrament.

b. Times and places other than worship on the Lord's Day

The Session may authorize the celebration of the sacrament at a time and place other than the ordinary place of worship on the Lord's Day, provided that the Session is represented. In addition,

c. Courts of the Church

The Presbytery and General Assembly may authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper at a meeting of the court or at some service or worship under the authority of the court.

8. Preparation for the Lord's Supper

The Session should give at least one week's notice prior to the celebration of the sacrament. It is always appropriate for the Session to provide instruction in the nature and meaning of the sacrament and to solemnly warn those who are not spiritually prepared. The people are to prepare themselves by the examination of their inner spiritual life, of their present relationship to Christ, to confess and repent of known sins, to forgive those who have offended them, to pray earnestly for the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit, and to draw near with a true heart in the full assurance of faith.

9. 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.

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.

10. The elements

Adequate preparation should be made of the elements to be served. It is appropriate for a large piece of bread to be made ready for breaking by the Minister and a cup with pouring vessel for the pouring of the wine/juice during the commemoration. The bread and wine/juice may be placed on a table and covered with a fine white cloth, or they may be brought forward and placed on the table when the time of celebration comes.

11. Administration of the Lord's Supper:

- a. The words of institution shall be read, either from the Gospels or from 1 Corinthians 11.
- b. The bread and wine/juice shall be blessed and be set apart from ordinary use to this holy use and mystery.
- b. The bread shall be broken before the people as a visible demonstration of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross.

12. Distributing the elements

It is proper for the people to gather at the table, but ordinarily the Ruling Elders (or others appointed by the Session) shall distribute the elements to the worshipers. A court of the Church may appoint godly people to distribute the elements when there are no Ruling Elders available.

13. The conclusion of the Lord's Supper

Following a time for private prayer and self-examination the service may conclude with a hymn of praise and thanksgiving and the people dismissed with a benediction. Following the celebration of the Lord's Supper, as an act of gratitude to God and renewed love for others, it is always appropriate to receive a special offering for the poor or for some other worthy cause. Such offerings should be ordered only by the Session.

For additional background, see *The Pastoral Letter on Children and the Lord's Supper* available at www.epc.org/about/beliefts

Westminster Confession of Faith

Chapter 29

The Lord's Supper

1. The night Jesus was betrayed he instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's supper, to be observed in his church until the end of the world as a perpetual remembrance of his sacrifice in death and as the seal of all the benefits of that sacrifice for true believers. It also signifies the spiritual nourishment and growth of believers in Jesus and their additional commitment to perform all the duties they owe him. Finally it is a bond and pledge of believers' communion with Jesus and with each other as members of his mystical body.¹

1. 1 Cor 11.23-26, 10.16-17, 21, 12.13, Mt 26.26-27, Lk 22.19-20.

2. In this sacrament Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor is any actual sacrifice made for the remission of sins of the living or the dead.² Rather, this sacrament commemorates Christ's offering up of himself, by himself, on the cross once for all, and it spiritually offers up to God every possible praise for that sacrifice.³ Consequently the so-called sacrifice of the Roman Catholic mass does detestable injustice to Christ's one sacrifice, which is the only propitiation for all the sins of the elect.⁴

2. Heb 9.22, 25-26, 28.

3. 1 Cor 11.24-26, Mt 26.26-27, Lk 22.19-20.

4. Heb 7.23-24, 27, 10.11-12, 14, 18.

3. In the administration of the Lord's supper Jesus has directed his ministers to declare to the congregation his words instituting this sacrament, to pray, and to bless the bread and wine, which are thus set apart from their ordinary use and put to holy use. His ministers are to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and (communicating themselves, too) to give both to the communicants—but not to anyone else not present at that time in the congregation.⁵

5. Mt 26.26-28, Mk 14.22-24, Lk 22.19-20, 1 Cor 11.23-27; see citations under Sections 1 and 2, Acts 20.7, 1 Cor 11.20.

4. Practices contrary to the nature of this sacrament and to the institution of it by Christ are private masses or receiving the sacrament alone from a priest or anyone else;⁶ denying the cup to the congregation;⁷ and worshiping the bread and wine themselves by lifting them up or carrying them around for adoration or reserving them for any counterfeit religious use.⁸

6. 1 Cor 10.6, 1 Tm 1.3-4.

7. Mk 4.23, 1 Cor 11.25-29.

8. Mt 15.9; there is not the least appearance of a warrant for any of these things, either in precept or example, in any part of the word of God; see all the places in which the ordinance is mentioned.

5. The bread and wine in this sacrament, properly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, so relate to him crucified that truly and yet only sacramentally they are sometimes called by the name of what they represent, that is, the body and blood of Christ.⁹ Even so, they still remain in substance and nature only bread and wine, as they were before their sacramental use.¹⁰

9. Mt 26.26-28.

10. 1 Cor 11.26-28, Mt 26.29.

6. The teaching that the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of Christ's body and blood (usually called transubstantiation) by the consecration of a priest or any other means is objectionable not only to Scripture but even to common sense and reason. Such

The Lord's Supper

teaching overturns the nature of the sacrament and has been and is the cause of much superstition and indeed flagrant idolatry.¹¹

11. Acts 3.21, 1 Cor 11.24-26, Lk 24.6, 39; these statements are inferences from the doctrine of the sacraments and do not require specific Scripture proofs.

7. Worthy receivers, physically partaking of the visible substances of this sacrament, do then also by faith actually and in fact, but not physically or bodily, spiritually receive and feed on Christ crucified and on all the benefits of his death. The body and blood of Christ are not then bodily or physically in, with, or under the bread and wine; but they are actually spiritually present to the faith of believers in the administration of this sacrament, just as the bread and wine are physically present.¹²

12. 1 Cor 11.28, 5.7-8, 10.16,3-4, Jn 6.53,58; see note under Section 6 above.

8. Although ignorant or wicked men may partake of the physical substances in this sacrament, they do not receive what is signified by them. However, by their unworthy coming to the Lord's table they are guilty of his body and blood and bring judgment upon themselves. Therefore, just as the ignorant and ungodly are not fit to enjoy communion with Christ, neither are they worthy to come to the Lord's table, and, as long as they remain ignorant and ungodly, they cannot and must not be allowed to partake of the holy mystery of communion without committing a great sin against Christ.¹³

13. 1 Cor 11.27-29, 2 Cor 6.14-16, 1 Cor 10.21, 5.6-7,13, 2 Thes 3.6,14-15, Mt 7.6.