

What We Believe About The Lord's Supper

Introduction

We know that many who attend CenterPoint have come from various church backgrounds and traditions. As a result, there could be some questions about what we believe and why. This is especially true when it comes to issues that tend to be debated in churches, like the Lord's Supper and Baptism. To help you get to know us better, we've taken some time to clarify what we believe the Bible teaches on these subjects. We hope this brings you not only greater understanding on these issues alone, but an increased awareness of who God is and the incredible hope that we have in Jesus.

What's the deal with the Lord's Supper?

For those who haven't grown up in the church, the Lord's Supper must seem incredibly odd! For centuries, people have been inviting others to church and offering them a little cracker and some wine or grape juice. Afterwards, they explain that this little snack is somehow related to the death of Jesus Christ. It is explained that the bread is related to Jesus' body and the juice represents his blood. Umm... what's that? His body & blood? And we're supposed to eat that? It is no wonder that the early Christians were charged with cannibalism for the way they spoke of the Lord's Supper.¹

Even if you were raised in a church, you might be wondering what the Lord's Supper is all about, especially since each tradition calls the Lord's Supper something different. Perhaps you were raised calling it "The Eucharist", "Lord's Table", or "Communion". The important thing is that we don't get hung up on what it's called, but spend our time discovering what it means. For us, the Lord's Supper is not strange, although it might look so. Rather, it's an important and meaningful time for those who have put their faith in Christ to remember His sacrifice on their behalf. It is a solemn act of worship and obedience. It is a time for those who have been saved by the body and blood of Jesus to acknowledge His great gift, remembering the redemption God has brought in Christ. It is a time for believers to proclaim His death as the means by which they have received life.

What does the Bible teach about the Lord's Supper?

The Bible has a lot to say about the Lord's Supper. While it is first instituted by Jesus Christ in the New Testament, the practice certainly has Old Testament roots. In the Old Testament and under the Old Covenant, the Israelites were instructed to remember the great redemption that God accomplished when He brought them out of Egypt. Once a year for seven days, the Israelites were to eat unleavened bread designed to remind them of the "bread of affliction" they experienced in slavery, so "that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt" (Deut 16:3). For God's people, celebrating the passover with a meal was more than nostalgia. It was remembering what God has accomplished on their behalf, rescuing them from Egypt and bringing them redemption.

In the New Testament and under the New Covenant, redemption is accomplished and applied finally and ultimately by Jesus Christ. The new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 comes through the sacrifice of Christ's blood, the sacrifice of His own life. In the same way the Israelites were commanded to eat the "bread of affliction" to remember God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, God now commands His people to look to the "living bread who has come down from heaven," his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus explains, "anyone who eats of this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

¹ According to Athenagorus (A.D. 176)

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Jesus makes the connection explicit during the Last Supper with His disciples. During the passover meal, Jesus uses the symbols normally designed to commemorate Israel's salvation from Egypt and gives them new meaning. "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). Then, most remarkably and unexpectedly, the passover meal ends without the eating of the passover lamb. It is certain this would have surprised the disciples, since the blood of the passover lamb was understood to provide satisfaction to God for their sins. At this meal, Jesus stands before His disciples as the passover Lamb Himself. Since His body and blood would be sacrificed to take away not only their sins, but the sins of all who put their faith in Jesus, He stands as the true Lamb of God (John 1:29).

Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper are profound! He is indicating that all who believe in Him will experience redemption far greater than Israel faced when they were freed from slavery. Through faith in Jesus, people can be freed from the slavery of sin, experience God's forgiveness and receive eternal life. For "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24a). It is no wonder that for centuries, Christians have followed the words and example of Jesus by celebrating the Last Supper together. It is a meal that is shared by those who have put their faith in Jesus and His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. It is a time for Christians to symbolically remember and commemorate the death of Jesus, since it is by his death "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13).

The Lord's Supper: The Gospel For Our Senses

Each person has 5 senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. One of my favorite things about the Lord's Supper is that God has given us a means whereby we can celebrate the gospel with all five of our senses! There can be little question that the eating of the bread and drinking of the cup provide believers with a sensory experience. It is the visual and tangible representation whereby Christians can see, touch, smell, hear, and taste of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus. In the same way the ordinance of baptism is an outward declaration of an inward change, so do those partaking in the Lord's Supper declare they have been inwardly saved by God's grace, wholly reliant upon the body and blood of Jesus for their redemption.

Does anything happen with the bread or cup?

Depending on your background, you may have heard that certain things happen to the bread or the cup. At CenterPoint, we believe the bread and the cup are mere symbols whereby the truth of the gospel is proclaimed, remembered, and celebrated. We do not believe the bread and cup possess any supernatural power in and of themselves. They are not to be understood as being transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus (transubstantiation), nor is the actual body and blood of Jesus present alongside the elements (consubstantiation). Rather, the bread and cup symbolically represent Christ's sacrifice, giving followers of Jesus a practical way to solemnly commemorate, celebrate, and give thanks to God for the free gift of His grace. To be clear, saving grace is not bestowed upon the individual when partaking of the Lord's Supper. Rather, the one who receives the Lord's Supper affirms they have already received the grace of God through Christ through faith. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). In the bread and the cup, we remember "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19)", and that "he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

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Wine or Grape Juice?

When it comes to using wine or grape juice, we do not believe one is necessarily right while the other is wrong. Since the cup functions as a symbolic representation of the blood of Jesus, we don't think it matters whether a church decides to use one or the other. At CenterPoint, however, out of sensitivity to those who might struggle with alcohol use, we have chosen to offer grape juice instead of wine. We affirm that while "all things are permissible, not all things are beneficial" (1 Cor. 10:23) and "it is better not to...drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall" (Rom. 14:21).

How often do you observe the Lord's Supper?

Jesus teaches His followers to "do this in remembrance of me", with no indication of how often we should partake of the Lord's Supper. We know from early church history that Christians took communion regularly.² But in the middle ages, changes in practice took place as the separation between clergy and laity was broadened. Laity received the bread, but not the wine due to the risk of wine spilling, and were only allowed to receive communion once a year. The Reformers argued against this practice and reclaimed regular participation for the average church goer. All this to say, the question of frequency has long been debated throughout church history and is ongoing in various church traditions.

At CenterPoint, we have often considered offering the Lord's Supper more frequently, even on a weekly basis. At this time, we have chosen to celebrate the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of each month, believing a weekly communion might tempt partakers toward a deadening familiarity with the ordinance. We don't want the Lord's Supper to become commonplace or habitual or routine. We desire for the importance of the ordinance to be communicated each time we come together and take the bread and the cup as a family.

What does this look like at CenterPoint?

Each month we take the Lord's Supper **together**. I highlight the fact that we take it together because we believe that the Lord's Supper is to be a uniting event. In the church at Corinth, for example, it was socially accepted for the host to eat with wealthy friends, while the poorer Christians went hungry. This division undermines the witness of the gospel that brings people together and makes them one body. For this reason Paul writes against disunity, urging each one to "examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28).

To foster this unity at CenterPoint, we invite everyone who has put their faith in Jesus to celebrate the Lord's Supper with us, whether they are a member of CenterPoint or not. Through a time of quiet introspection, we ask that each believer examine their own heart, knowing 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...for those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves" (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Each time we share in the Lord's Supper together, we invite all those who have put their faith in Christ to come forward and take of the bread and the cup and then return to their seats. We ask that everyone wait quietly before God until everyone present has received the elements. Once everyone has both the bread and the cup, we read from 1 Corinthians 11 and receive the Lord's Supper together as one body.

²The Didache in rural Syria (late 1st century) and Hippolytus (3rd century).

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Still Have Questions? Feel free to visit our website at www.cpchurch.com, or contact us at info@cpchurch.com. One of our pastors would be happy to talk with you further.