

What We Believe – 10. Ordinances (Part 2)

We believe in: *“The ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as being instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism by immersion as an identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, the only proper subjects for it being those who profess repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord’s Supper as a commemoration of His death, but not being a sacrifice for sin and not involving any change in substance of the bread and the wine.”*

A) Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ has given to the church two specific activities, commonly referred to as “Ordinances” or the “Sacraments”; these are: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These are means of grace, good gifts of a generous God to spiritually feed and bless His people. In this second study we shall consider the subject of the Lord’s Supper.

B) The Lord’s Supper

1. What is the Lord’s Supper?

The significance and importance of this ordinance can be understood with consideration of the various names given to it.

Firstly, this is The Lord’s Supper because it is a meal instituted by Jesus, with Him as host, at which Jesus invites His people to share a meal and remember Him. Christ’s last supper with His disciples on the eve of the crucifixion appears in all four gospels (though John’s account does not contain references to the institution of the new meal, *“this is my body... this is my blood”* etc.). **1 Corinthians 11:17-34** also provides further elaboration on the significance of the meal in the context of a church in which its practice was being abused.

Secondly, this is communion, fellowship, a mutual sharing. Paul calls it *“a participation”* in **1 Corinthians 10:16** (the same Greek word as used

for “fellowship”). The Lord’s Supper is communion with each other and with Jesus Himself.

Thirdly, this is eucharist, coming from the Greek word for “thanksgiving” (“...*and when he had given thanks...*” [1 Corinthians 11:24](#)). In communion we give thanks for God’s gracious work of salvation through Jesus.

We also use the generic terms, ordinance (meaning an authoritative decree) and sacrament (meaning a pledge).

However, one word we must not use is Mass. The Roman Catholic Mass, though similar in appearance to the Lord’s Supper, is fundamentally different. The RC doctrine of *transubstantiation* insists that the bread and wine actually become the real body and blood of Jesus Christ, so that He might be offered up as a sacrifice every time the event occurs (see the canons of the Council of Trent). By contrast, Hebrews 10:12-14 clearly points to Christ’s *single* sacrifice, conducted once for all His people.

2. Where does the Lord’s Supper come from?

As with baptism, this ordinance finds its place within the much broader scope of biblical theology. The theme of “food and drink” is of great significance from the opening pages of the Bible onwards. Only once the earth is filled with good food does God bring His image-bearers into being, and generously invites them to His banquet ([Genesis 1:29](#), see [Psalm 23:5](#)). The very first prohibition upon humanity concerns what they may eat ([Genesis 2:16-17](#)), and the fall into sin occurs when Adam and Eve eat what is prohibited ([Genesis 3:6](#)).

Cain and Abel are taught to worship God with offerings of food, though Abel’s contribution is accepted over his brother’s, suggesting an initial awareness of the need for the sacrifice of life ([Genesis 4:1-5](#)). This theme recurs in [Genesis 8:20-21](#) as Noah offers an animal sacrifice to the LORD and is explicitly permitted to eat meat. Later, Abraham is

blessed by Melchizedek who brings out bread and wine (**Genesis 14:18**).

The theme continues through the Exodus (i.e. the Passover) and wilderness wanderings (manna and quail) and into the detailed requirements for food (Kosher) in the Law of Moses. The covenant blessings and curses often involve food (e.g. the famine in the life of Elijah, **1 Kings 17:1**), and Daniel's faithfulness is seen in his refusal to eat the king's food in the Babylonian court (**Daniel 1:8**).

In the New Testament, Jesus is criticised for His choice of eating companions (**Luke 15:2**). He declares Himself "*the bread of life*" with reference to the manna in the wilderness (**John 6:48**) and institutes the first communion in light of the new Passover achieved through His death and resurrection. Concern over eating between Jew and Gentile features prominently in Acts (e.g. **Acts 10**), and the question of food sacrificed to idols appears in the epistles (e.g. **1 Corinthians 8**). Finally, towards the end of Revelation there is an invitation to the "*marriage supper of the Lamb*." (**Revelation 19:9**).

The Lord's Supper therefore symbolises the following:

- God's generosity as gracious host, sharing His good gifts and inviting us into fellowship with Him and each other;
- A reminder of God's mighty acts of salvation through Christ, as a sacrifice to take away sin;
- An identity marker of the covenant people of God, distinguishing them from the surrounding world.

3. Who is the Lord's Supper for?

The symbolism identified above indicates that only believers in Jesus Christ may come to the Lord's Table. There are severe warnings for those who would take "*the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner*" (**1 Corinthians 11:27**).

The Lord's Supper should also be limited to those who have been baptised. The two ordinances belong together, and the order is important. Baptism is the sign and seal of entry into God's covenant people; the Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of ongoing family life in God's covenant people. It makes no sense to take the meal that speaks of Christ, without having first made the profession of faith in Christ. Some churches restrict the Lord's Supper further to only members of a local church (either of the church observing the eucharist or visiting from another local church).

In some cases it may be necessary to bar individuals from attending the Lord's Supper. **Matthew 18:15-20** and **1 Corinthians 5** certainly imply that those in open sin should not be permitted to take communion.

4. How is the Lord's Supper to be carried out?

Two general principles are worth stressing. Firstly, the Lord's Supper must be carried out together. This is a covenant family meal, not an individual snack. Whilst there is vital need of sober self-examination (**1 Corinthians 11:28**), this meal is intended to be fellowship between God's people, as well as with the Lord. "Online communion" is an oxymoron – communion requires real communion!

Secondly, the Lord's Supper should be carried out frequently. There is no prescription in Scripture on frequency, though evidence points to the early church coming to the Lord's Table weekly (e.g. see **1 Corinthians 11:17-20**). Some church traditions (e.g. Brethren) have consequently adopted a position of weekly communion, whilst others celebrate the Lord's Supper monthly.

C) Conclusion

The Lord's Supper is a wonderful means of grace, in which Christ nourishes His people spiritually. It is easy to undervalue, but Jesus only gives good gifts to His church. We need the regular practice of the Supper for our benefit and Christ's glory.