

CHAPTER 9

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Institution of the Lord's Supper

WCF 29:1

Biblical accounts

- 1) Perhaps the earliest account, 1 Cor 11:23-25

1 Cor 11:23-25, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

- 2) Synoptic gospels, Matt 26:26-28 = Mark 14:22-24 = Luke 22:19-20
- 3) Not in John's gospel, but cf. ch. 6

Relation to Jewish Passover

It is generally recognized that Jesus celebrated the Passover and instituted the Lord's Supper at the same meal. There is some disagreement as interpreters try to harmonize John with the Synoptics concerning the details and exact date of the supper. *E.g.*, see Robertson *Harmony* 279-84 and Edersheim *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 2:481-84, vs. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* 113-18 and F. F. Bruce *New Testament History* 191-92.

In any case, the relation of the two sacraments in Scripture is clear:

Matt 26:17-20, "On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?'"

“He replied, ‘Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’” So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

“When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.”

Luke 22:15-16, “And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’”

cf. 1 Cor 5:7-8, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”

Terms for the Lord’s Supper

- No special name in the Synoptics
- “Breaking bread,” Acts 2:42; 20:7
- “The feast” (ἐορτάζω *heortazo*, observe a festival), 1 Cor 5:8
- “The bread and the cup,” 1 Cor 10:16
- “Communion” (κοινωνία *koinonia*), 1 Cor 10:16-17
- “The table of the Lord,” 1 Cor 10:21
- “The Lord’s Supper” (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον *kuriakon deipnon*), 1 Cor 11:20
- Perhaps “eat” in 2 Thess 3:10 (“if he does not work he should not eat”; may refer to eating in general)
- “Love-feast” (ἀγάπη *agape*), Jude 12
- The term “Eucharist” (εὐχαριστία *eucharistia*) means “thanksgiving,” and was used to name the Lord’s Supper by the Didache and early Fathers; it is not so used in the NT

Significance and efficacy of the Lord's Supper

Four positions

(See above, ch. 4, on the efficacy of the sacraments in general)

Roman Catholic

During the middle ages the Catholic church developed the idea of transubstantiation, which is that the essence (*essentia*) of the bread and wine in the eucharist actually changes to become the body and blood of Christ, physically. However, the accidents (*accidentia*), or appearance of the elements, remain the same. Therefore, the elements are actually God, and are to be worshiped. Eating and drinking the elements actually brings Christ into the person, bringing all the grace promised.

Lutheran

Martin Luther rejected the Catholic idea of transubstantiation, but he still believed that Christ was corporally present in the elements. The essence of the bread and wine remains, but the corporeal body of Christ is present “in, with, and under” the elements, much as light is present in air. Thus, one “chews Christ with the teeth.” This takes place regardless if the communicant is a believer or an unbeliever.

The term most frequently used by non-Lutherans to describe this view is consubstantiation. However, Lutheran theologians reject this term, since it was used by several late-medieval writers to describe a somewhat different doctrine of “the body and blood of Christ as becoming substantially present together with the substance of the bread and wine, when the elements are consecrated” (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* [1985], p. 80).

[For a definitive definition of the Lutheran view (in Latin and English) see the *Formula of Concord*, Art. 7, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* 3:135-146; see also the thorough discussion in C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 3:661-673.]

Much stock is placed in (1) Christ's omnipresence, which is referred to his body as well as to his spirit, and (2) the word “is” (ἐστίν *estin*) in the words of institution.

Lutherans believe that grace will come to the person who partakes in faith, through the elements and the accompanying word.

Reformed

(WCF 29:1, 7, WLC 168, 170, WSC 96; and see thorough treatment by Calvin, Institutes 4:17; Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* [2002])

The Reformed standards oppose the Lutheran doctrine of real presence (WCF 29:7, WLC 170). It is theologically difficult to base special significance for the Lord's Supper on such a "sacramental presence" of Christ's body. Also, the word "is" often is metaphorical, meaning "represents, is similar to"; cf. "I am the door."

"Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses." (WCF 29:7)

The Reformed view denies both the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and the Lutheran doctrine of real presence (often called consubstantiation). Rather, the sacrament exhibits and conveys grace to the elect who exercise faith and obedience in receiving it. This grace is always subject to God's sovereign will. This grace operates directly on the spirit, not through the material elements. This grace is of the same type as that conveyed through the other means of grace. In a true but spiritual sense, worthy partakers do feast on Christ in the Lord's Supper (this may be the point of John 6).

Zwinglian

This approach to the Lord's Supper makes it to be only a memorial ordinance. There is no promise of grace other than that which comes through obedience to any other command. The objective act is more important than the subjective experience. However, Reformed theologians argue that the penalties for unworthily partaking the Supper indicate that more is involved than a simple ordinance; 1 Cor 10:14-22 indicates that spiritual things are going on during the Lord's Supper; it is not just what the participant is thinking about.

Relation of the Lord's Supper to the new covenant

This relation is clearly expressed in the words of institution:

Matt 26:28 and Mark 14:24, "my blood of the covenant"

Luke 22:20 and 1 Cor 11:25, “the new covenant in my blood”

The church now operates under the new covenant. The old (Mosaic) covenant is no longer operative; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:6, 13.

The transition to the new covenant appears to be not Pentecost (cf. John 7:39, and the Greek text of John 14:17, {C} rating in UBS), but the institution of the Lord’s Supper during Passover. Christ is our Passover lamb (John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7).

An interesting suggestion is that, just as baptism is the initial covenant ritual, so the Lord’s Supper is a repeated renewal ritual. It is clear that the sanctions of the new covenant are pictured: death for disobedience (the penalty paid by Christ), and life for faith and obedience.

Recipients of the Lord’s Supper

Limitation of recipients

Just as with the Passover, the recipients of the Lord’s Supper are limited to those who are a part of the visible church (cf. Exod 12:48-49).

While church discipline was exercised in the OT church, the NT further emphasizes the necessity of an acceptable testimony in one’s way of life, in order to partake of the Lord’s Supper:

1 Cor 5:6-7, 13; 10:21; 11:27, 29; 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15; cf. WCF 29:8, WLC 173

This requirement, especially the command to examine oneself (1 Cor 11:28) and to “discern the Lord’s body” (v. 29), has led most Reformed churches to limit recipients to the age of discretion, with the category of “communicant members.” This requirement is not evident in the OT regarding the Passover. Cf. the related argument concerning baptism (ch. 7, “Common Objections” #6).

The warnings against approaching the Lord’s table unworthily should not be pressed so that those who do not have assurance of salvation are barred. If someone has a true desire to be in Christ, yet feels unworthy, he should be encouraged to come to the Lord’s table, WLC 172.

Some churches practice “close communion,” allowing only members of their own church or denomination to partake of the Lord’s Supper. This practice is designed to prevent people from partaking unworthily, thus bringing judgment on themselves, and also to protect

the testimony and communion of the church from being compromised. On the other hand, most Protestant churches practice “open communion,” allowing all professing Christians present to participate (i.e., those belonging to an evangelical church). Only those judged too young or known to be unqualified are prevented from taking part. With reasonable safeguards this seems to be the best approach. It recognizes the spiritual unity of the visible church, and properly regards the communion as the Lord’s table, not the church’s table.

Preparation of recipients

In order to profit spiritually from the Lord’s Supper, the people should be encouraged to prepare for the sacrament, by self-examination, prayer, meditation, repentance, and revival. In this way, the Holy Spirit more abundantly blesses those who come in faith to the Lord’s Supper.

WSC 97

see esp. WLC 171 (before), 174 (during), 175 (after)

Mode of administration

WCF 29:3-4, WLC 169

The pastor and the people should partake of both elements. Obviously, there should be no adoration of the elements, etc.; nor is it necessary to receive the elements in a kneeling position. Rather, the communicants are to be “at” or “about” the table.

Unlike the annual Passover, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated frequently in the Apostolic church; today many churches celebrate it quarterly, monthly, or even weekly, cf. WLC 177.

WCF 29:4 disapproves of private services; this seems to refer to those who simply desired to avoid public services (as princes and nobles). It certainly does not rule out administering the Lord’s Supper in small groups for those who are ill or are otherwise unable to attend public services.

The elements should be “bread and wine” (WCF 29:5). The bread may be leavened or unleavened. There is no NT requirement to keep the ceremonial law against unleavened bread at Passover. The wine may be fermented, but need not be. American evangelical churches usually use unfermented grape juice, to avoid giving any offence or cause of

stumbling. These matters relating to the mode of administration do not comprise the essence of the sacrament.