

Communion: Questions and Answers¹

1. What is communion?

Communion is a sacrament² instituted by Christ at His Last Supper with His disciples (see 1 Corinthians 12:11; Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-23). The church is united in viewing communion as a remembrance of Jesus' redemptive work on the cross. Accordingly, communion consists of the act of eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Jesus' finished work.

In view of the biblical and historical arguments, we believe that communion is a sacrament intended to benefit the sanctification of the believer through the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

1a. Is communion only for believers?

Yes, communion is reserved for believers only. Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 that communion is a reminder of our trust in Christ and His work, as well as our participation in Christ's work: *"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."*³ Only a follower of Christ can participate in His work. Consequently, only a believer in Christ can experience communion.

1b. What does Jesus mean by "This is my Body" and "This is my Blood"?

We believe that through the Holy Spirit, a believer's participation in the act of communion, along with the elements of communion, impart God's sanctifying (though not saving) grace upon the believer, whereby the Christian receives comfort and strength as he or she lives by faith.

We believe that there is a spiritual significance in the sacrament of communion. We do not believe that the bread and wine that we eat and drink during communion literally transforms into the body and blood of Christ. Nor do we believe that communion represents a mere memorial of Christ and the Last Supper. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Paul does not state that we are merely remembering the body and blood of Christ, but that we are participating with Him.⁴

We recognize that there is a centuries-old debate concerning the significance of communion that will not be resolved until we stand before the Lord face-to-face.⁵ Yet we have articulated our belief as to the significance of communion in light of our understanding of Scripture. We believe that participation in communion is a command of the Lord and an important means of grace for God's people.

1c. Would a Wellspring member who has a different view of communion still be allowed to receive communion at Wellspring?

Yes. We recognize that historically there have been, and in the future there will continue to be, differing views on communion. This paper is not intended to be the final statement regarding biblical communion. We realize that there can be divergence amongst Wellspring Church members on this topic. And we do not feel biblically warranted to withhold communion from members because they have a differing view.

But we hope that any person with a differing view would seriously consider the biblical and historical argument of that view, especially in light of the view to which we as a church hold. And we encourage everyone to pursue further study of the Scripture on the issue of communion, as well as to ask the pastoral staff or leadership team any further questions.

2. Why do we have communion on a weekly basis? What is the scriptural authority for doing so?

We hold communion weekly because we believe communion is a means of God's sanctifying grace in the life of the believer. We see communion as a means of grace to the body of Christ, and therefore, we believe that the regular, frequent practice of communion will confer a spiritual benefit to the Christian.⁶

Further, we believe Scripture demonstrates a regular and frequent practice of communion in the following texts:

Acts 2:42-46

⁴²*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* ⁴³*And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.* ⁴⁴*And all who believed were together and had all things in common.* ⁴⁵*And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.* ⁴⁶***And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.***

The church in Acts 2 attributed teaching, "breaking of bread," and prayer as part of their "day by day" (v. 46) fellowship. Most scholars see this "breaking of bread" as a reflection of the communion commands prescribed by Jesus in the Gospels. It seems from this text then that communion was administered more frequently in the early church, perhaps even daily.

1 Corinthians 11:17

*But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because **when you come together** it is not for the better but for the worse.*

Paul prefaces his description of communion in 1 Corinthians 11:17 with a reference to when the church comes together. The implication is that communion was held each time they came together. In other words, the church participated in communion frequently, and as often as every time they met together.

1 Corinthians 11:25-26

²⁵*In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, **as often as you drink it**, in remembrance of me."* ²⁶*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

The phrase "as often as you drink it" further suggests that Paul advocated frequent participation in communion.

2a. Doesn't weekly communion lead to ritualism?

Any ritual of consistent and regular practice in corporate worship -- including communion -- can become stale and banal, i.e. lead to ritualism. But rituals are not inherently wrong, if we define ritual as an established practice. In many ways, all corporate worship is comprised of rituals. Our worship service, for instance, routinely consists of songs, announcements, and preaching. All of these, in a sense, are rituals.

While we have no problems with rituals per se, we certainly have a problem with ritualism. So how does a ritual become ritualistic? Jesus explains how this happens in Matthew 15:1-19. The Pharisees were so concerned about the religious ritual of washing their hands, they forgot the purpose of washing their hands. They forgot that the washing was a reminder of their abject sinfulness before a holy God and their need of a gracious God. They became more consumed by the act than the God who gave them the act. In verses 8-9, Jesus quotes Isaiah to describe their hearts:

⁸This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁹in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

And then He reminds us in Matthew 15:18-19 that what makes one defiled is not what one does externally, but the motivations of one's heart: ¹⁸"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." Ritualism is not rooted in the ritual itself. Communion by itself does not create hypocrisy or staleness or ritualism. It is the heart that has forgotten the God who has given His own Son for our sake that is tempted towards ritualism. And it does not take frequent participation in communion to trigger a ritualistic heart. Instead, it takes a heart that has *already* forgotten God to fall prey to ritualism. And that kind of heart makes worship itself ritualistic, not just communion.

2b. How should we prepare ourselves so that we do not become ritualistic during communion?

The protection against ritualism is the same protection against any sin -- we must continue to find grace amazing. Communion only becomes ritualistic when we have lost sight of what communion represents—the wonderful grace of God as revealed through the death and resurrection of Christ His Son. Sinclair Ferguson reminds us of the importance of being regularly revitalized by this grace: "Being amazed by God's grace is a sign of spiritual vitality. It is a litmus test of how firm and real is our grasp of the Christian gospel and how close is our

walk with Jesus Christ. The growing Christian finds that the grace of God astonishes and amazes.⁷ We must prepare ourselves for communion, and all worship, by preaching Christ and His gospel to ourselves daily. We must also wrestle deeply with our own sinfulness. Only sinners need a Savior. And sinners who remember that they are saved will treasure communion as a representation of that great salvation.

Also, consider listening to the Word preached through the lens of your need for Him, and His desire to bring you near to Himself. Reflect on how good God has been to you throughout the week, even through the most difficult storms. Look for avenues of joy that remind you of His grace.

As a church, we will do all that we can to make communion vibrant. We will resist going through the motions of having communion. We promise to our members that we will take the preaching of God's Word and the response of communion in view of that preaching with great care and solemnity. And we will pray that God would always find our preaching and our communion delightful to Him and a reflection of his own glory.

3. Is there a biblical model for the administration of communion and the passing out of the elements?

No. While Scripture provides in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians 11 a description of the blessing of communion, and the elements to be used (bread and wine), it does not provide a model as to how the elements are to be administered.

At Wellspring, we ask those who wish to participate to come forward to receive communion instead of having the elements passed around. We have chosen to ask people to come forward as a symbol of their humility before the work of Christ. We acknowledge that Christ has done the divine work of salvation which belongs solely to God. But we also realize that in response to His work, we come to Him as sinners in need of His blood to wash away our sins. Coming forward to receive the bread and wine is an illustration of this response.

This is not to say that this method is in any way *the* biblical model of distributing the elements. In fact, we do not even assume that we will always choose this mode of distribution. Various factors, such as constraints on space may eventually limit this mode.

4. Why do we use wine during communion? What is the scriptural authority for doing so?

As we understand communion instituted by Christ, as described in Matthew 26:29, we believe that the use of wine in communion is the most biblically faithful representation of the sacrament. Scripture teaches us that wine, like all created things, when not abused or worshipped, is a wonderful expression of God's abundant grace and pleasure. Scripture even uses wine as an image of the celebration of an eternal fellowship with Him.

Historically for over 1800 years, only wine was used for communion. It wasn't until relatively recently, during the temperance movement in the 1800s in America, that wine was replaced with alternatives.⁸ American fundamentalism espoused the notion that drinking any form of alcohol was immoral and unbiblical. The decision to use anything other than wine for communion was never biblically founded, but instead, culturally-based.

While in certain instances alcohol may be abused, and in such cases become sinful (Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21), Scripture never deems wine itself as sinful. Wine was used as part of the offerings unto God in Mosaic law (Numbers 15:5-10). The Nazirites were called to give up wine for a time as an expression of one's devotion unto the Lord. But once those vows were fulfilled, the Nazirites were given full permission to drink wine again (Numbers 6:20). If wine was in any way morally ambiguous, God certainly would have prohibited the Nazirites from taking wine for life.

Psalm 104:14-15 says:

¹⁴You cause the grass to grow for the livestock
and plants for man to cultivate,
that he may bring forth food from the earth
¹⁵and wine to gladden the heart of man,
oil to make his face shine
and bread to strengthen man's heart.

In the midst of recounting all of God's blessings, wine is included as a means of God's blessings along with food and livestock. Isaiah 25:6-7, and the parallel text in Revelation 21:4, in speaking of our eternity with God, vividly describes wine as a part of that celebration:

⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
⁷He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.

God speaks of wine as an expression of His grace and care in Isaiah 55:1:

Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

Further, one cannot ignore Jesus' use of wine in his own ministry (the wedding of Cana in John 2; the parable of wine and wineskins in Matthew 9 and Mark 2).

Matthew 26:29 tells us that Jesus used wine at the Last Supper: "I tell you I will not drink again of this *fruit of the vine* until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."⁹ Even the staunchest opponents of the use of fermented grapes in communion agree that Jesus used the fermented juice of grapes.¹⁰ Their arguments against using wine tend to be the following:¹¹

Argument: Just because Jesus used fermented grape juice does not mean we need to use fermented grape juice any more than we need to use unleavened bread.

Answer: Leavened bread remains bread. Unfermented wine is no longer wine, but simply grape juice.

Argument: The most important part of communion is not duplication, but motivation.

Answer: First, if this were the case, then we need not have any form of duplication at all. If it matters not what signs we use to practice communion, then why not have chips and soda as a replacement for bread and wine? Second, most who argue this position come from Baptist backgrounds. The argument falls short when it comes to baptism where duplication of forms for the Baptist become an essential (immersion verses sprinkling). There is an inconsistency with this perspective.

4a. Is drinking wine a health risk for pregnant women? What if a pregnant woman (or her husband) is uncomfortable with her taking wine during communion -- what can or should she do?

It is well known through experience and numerous studies that alcohol, when consumed in moderate to heavy amounts by pregnant women, may result in poor outcomes in the health of their children. These outcomes include prematurity, low birth weight, anatomic/behavioral abnormalities and others.¹¹

However, many studies have also shown that low levels of alcohol intake (no consensus definition, but oftentimes defined as one to two glasses of wine or equivalent per week) have not been shown to be associated with these adverse outcomes.¹² If communion is the only source of alcohol intake for a pregnant woman, then she would be well below what would be considered a significant amount of intake. So it has been the practice of a number of physicians to allow their patients to drink wine as part of communion in light of the amount and frequency involved: a teaspoon or less, once per week.

But many physicians, in line with guidance from professional health organizations,¹³ do not recommend any alcohol intake during pregnancy because of ambiguity on the threshold of safe intake, especially at the individual level. For this reason, we recommend that if you have concerns, you discuss this issue with your physician. For those who want to avoid any alcohol intake, we provide grape juice as an alternative each week.

4b. Is it appropriate for someone under age 21 to take wine during communion? What are the legal and moral issues?

Yes. Most states (including the state of California) allow for alcohol consumption when used in the context of religious practices.¹⁴

Since wine consumption in and of itself is not a sin (1 Timothy 5:23), the moral question is placed on the fact that a *minor* is drinking alcohol. Because the state allows for this

consumption, a minor drinking alcohol with communion is not illegal and meets our obligation to submit to authorities as commanded by God's Word (Romans 13:1f.).

4c. Is it appropriate to use wine during communion when there might be some who have had past addictions to alcohol?

We recognize that some people have genuine, ongoing struggles with alcoholism. We want to extend love to those in that position, and offer the grape juice alternative for those who struggle with alcoholism.

4d. What about those who, out of conscience, wish to refrain from alcohol even in communion?

We would never advocate a person to act against his or her conscience as Paul writes in Romans 14:23: "For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." So we offer the grape juice alternative for those who wish to refrain from alcohol out of conscience. However, we would encourage that person to study the Scriptures and seek to find the freedom to take communion as the Lord represented at the Last Supper.

5. When should my child begin to take communion?

We do not believe there is any age limit for communion. We believe that communion is for the believer of Christ only, and one should exercise great care in taking communion (1 Corinthians 11:29). While we will not fence the table to children, we do trust that any child who comes to receive communion has come to place their full trust in the Christ. Parents are specially charged with primarily caring for the souls of their children. Thus, they are also the primary decision-makers, along with the child, as to when a child should receive communion.¹⁵ While we believe it wise for a child to wait for an exhibition of evidences of grace in his or her life before taking communion, we also believe that this is best left to the parents' discretion in consultation with the child.

5a. Does my child need to be baptized to receive communion?

No. There is nothing in Scripture that requires baptism in order to receive communion. While Scripture makes faith in Christ necessary to receive communion, it does not say anything about baptism. However, since baptism is a command of the Lord (Matthew 28:19) for all believers, it seems wise for a child to be baptized before receiving communion. We do not believe a child *must* be baptized to receive communion, since a child can come to know Christ and face a weekly communion before having had an opportunity to be baptized in the church. But once again, we believe this decision is best left to the parents and the child.

5b. Any further suggestions on discipling my child regarding communion?

We encourage parents to teach their children about the wonder and solemnity of communion. Communion is a visible expression of God's grace to His people, as a sign of His wonder and love. It is an impartation of His grace to us for our spiritual benefit. Communion should be used as a teaching tool during family worship. Prepare children by referring to the communion texts (1 Corinthians 12:11; Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-23) and teaching them about the suffering and death of Christ for our sins. Also, talk to children about

the wine that they will be drinking. Remind them of what the wine represents (see question 3). You might want to have a conversation about the fact that wine is only to be drunk at communion and when they are of age, and why this is so.

6. How can/should we examine ourselves and prepare for communion?

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself." You can imagine how this admonition may cause much consternation amongst believers who never truly feel worthy to approach the table to eat and drink.

But Paul is not stating that those who eat and drink must be sinless. This of course would undermine the reality that Christ died for us while we were still sinners who continue sinning (Romans 5:8). Instead, God is looking for believers who 'examine himself.' We must understand the ramifications of what it took to save sinners. The deeper we seek to understand our own sinfulness, the more we will come to cherish the work of the cross, and the more we will also treasure communion.¹⁶ The unworthy manner of drinking refers to the person with an unrepentant heart who sees no need for the work of Christ in his life.¹⁷

7. Is communion for the corporate body or can it be celebrated amongst individuals (at homes amongst friends, in hospitals with the sick, etc.)?

The New Testament seems to teach that communion is to be practiced amongst God's people rather than a mere gather of a few people (1 Corinthians 10:17: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."). Paul's statements on communion in 1 Corinthians 11 are addressed to the local church, a body of believers. So as a general practice, communion is best left to the local church amongst the Body (for example, we would not celebrate communion solely with a bride and groom at a wedding).

But considering that Christ instituted communion amongst twelve men, and asked the church to duplicate the event, there would seem to be some leeway for communion to be held in certain cases amongst smaller groups (for example, at a hospital bedside with some members of the church gathered together in corporate worship).

Notes

¹ This paper is not intended to be a comprehensive exposition on communion. For more information regarding this topic, see Thomas Schreiner and Matthew Crawford, *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes* [NAC Studies in Bible & Theology], (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010); Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002); Richard Phillips, *What Is the Lord's Supper*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002); Michael S. Horton, "At Least Weekly: The Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper and of Its Frequent Celebration," in *MJT* 11 (2000), 147-169; Wayne Grudem, "The Lord's Supper" in *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 988-999.

² A sacrament is a sign and seal of covenant grace which benefits the life of the believer through the work of Christ; that is, a sign initiated by Christ to signify or symbolize a deeper reality. (See Westminster Confession of Faith, 27 for further explanation.) An ordinance is a command. We believe communion is a sacrament with an ordinance. There is some historical disagreement as to whether communion is a sacrament and ordinance, or only an ordinance. In light of Jesus' words, "This is my Body," and "This is my blood," we affirm that communion has more significance than a mere authoritative command. It is for this reason, we agree with Question 162 of the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith: "Q. 162. What is a sacrament? Answer: A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those that are without."

³ Gordon Fee comments on this text: "This language almost certainly refers to their sharing in the provisions and benefits of that covenant. This also means that they did not consider their table to be an altar where sacrifice was taking place, but a fellowship meal where in the presence of the Spirit they were by faith looking back to the singular sacrifice that had been made and were *thus realizing again its benefit in their lives. In this way they shared 'in the blood of Christ.'*" in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians NICOT*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 468. [Italics added]

⁴ Calvin uses this text to argue that our participation or communion (*koinonia*) with the blood of Christ through the bread and wine must have a spiritual significance to communion. He writes:

The cup of blessing While the sacred Supper of Christ has two elements — bread and wine — he begins with the second. He calls it, the cup of blessing, as having been set apart for a mystical benediction. For I do not agree with those who understand blessing to mean thanksgiving, and interpret the verb to bless, as meaning to give thanks. I acknowledge, indeed, that it is sometimes employed in this sense, but never in the construction that Paul has here made use of, for the idea of Erasmus, as to supplying a preposition is exceedingly forced. On the other hand, the meaning that I adopt is easy, and has nothing of intricacy.

To bless the cup, then, is to set it apart for this purpose, that it may be to us an emblem of the blood of Christ. This is done by the word of promise, when believers meet together according to Christ's appointment to celebrate the remembrance of his death in this Sacrament. The consecration, however, which the Papists make use of, is a kind of sorcery derived from heathens which has nothing in common with the pure rite observed by Christians. Everything, it is true, that we eat is sanctified by the word of God, as Paul himself elsewhere bears witness, (1 Timothy 4:5;) but that blessing is for a different purpose — that our use of the gifts of God may be pure, and may tend to the glory of their Author, and to our advantage. On the other hand, the design of the mystical blessing in the Supper is, that the wine may be no longer a common beverage, but set apart for the spiritual nourishment of the soul, while it is an emblem of the blood of Christ.

Paul says, that the cup which has been in this manner blessed is *κοινωνία* — the communion of the blood of the Lord. It is asked, in what sense? Let contention be avoided, and there will be nothing of obscurity. It is true, that believers are united together by Christ's blood, so as to become one body. It is also true, that a unity of this kind is with propriety termed *κοινωνία* (communion.) I make the same acknowledgment as to the bread Farther, I observe what Paul immediately adds, as it were, by way of explanation — that we all become one body, because we are together partakers of the same bread But whence, I pray you, comes that *κοινωνία* (communion) between us, but from this, that we are united to Christ in such a way, that we are flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bones? (Ephesians 5:30.)

For we must first of all be incorporated (so to speak) into Christ, that we may be united to each other. In addition to this, Paul is not disputing at present merely in reference to a mutual fellowship among men, but as to the spiritual union between Christ and believers, with the view of drawing from this, that it is an intolerable sacrilege for them to be polluted by fellowship with idols. From the connection of the passage, therefore, we may conclude, that (*κοινωνία*) the communion of the blood is that connection which we have with the blood of Christ, when he engrafts all of us together into his body, that he may live in us, and we in him. (John Calvin, Commentary on 1 Corinthians, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xvii.iii.html>)

Gordon Fee, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, adds, "Paul's concern, of course, is that the drinking of this cup is for believers 'a sharing in the blood of Christ.' As noted above, there is little evidence that food of sacred meals was understood to be an eating of the deity. Since therefore, the cup is specifically interpreted by the Lord (cf. Mark 14:24), and continued to be so understood in the early church (1 Cor. 11:25), as 'my blood of the new covenant,' this language almost certainly refers to their sharing in the provisions and benefits of that covenant...In this way they shared 'in the blood of Christ.'" (Fee, 468) The *koinonia* that the church shares in the body of Christ 'binds them together as a unique eschatological community.' (Fee, 469) The spiritual significance of partaking in this meal must be far more than memorialism.

⁵ There is a broad divergence in the understanding of what Jesus meant when He said, "This is my Body," and "This is my blood." Below are four brief explanations of the major views (there are others, but they are generally offshoots of these four):

Transubstantiation (Roman Catholicism)

Under the transubstantiation view, held by Roman Catholics, the bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ. Catholics argue: "The Real Presence is evinced, positively, by showing the necessity of the literal sense of these words ["This is my Body," "This is my blood"], and negatively, by refuting the figurative interpretations." (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05573a.htm>). The Council of Trent explains Catholic teaching on the Eucharist this way: "Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation." ("Decree Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist," 1. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 13th session (11 October, 1551). Gregg Allison gives this definition, "The true, real, and substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharistic celebrations occurs by means of transubstantiation. From two Latin words—*trans* (change) and *substantia* (substance; that which makes something what it is)—transubstantiation is the change of the substance of the consecrated bread into the body of Christ, and the change of the substance of the consecrated wine into the body of Christ." (Quoted in Schreiner, 160).

For the Catholic, justification “is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” (“Decree on Justification,” 7 (The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, sixth session [13 January 1547]) Justification is also “conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy.” (Catechism, 166, as quoted in Allison’s article in Schreiner) Thus, the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (communion) is a means not of sanctifying grace (i.e. Calvin and Luther’s view), but of justifying grace is an ongoing in the life of the believer. Grace then is imparted *ex opera operato* (‘by the work performed’), as the sacraments impart God’s justifying grace. As Allison points out: “What is expected in regard to human cooperation in salvation is that one *facere quod in se est*—does what is in one to do, which includes participation in the Church and its sacraments. By so doing, one achieves merits before God and attains eternal life. Accordingly, sharing in the Eucharist is an essential aspect of salvation...Catholic theology insists that the Church (and its sacraments) is a means of grace and thus necessary for salvation.” (Allison in Schreiner, 179-180)

Consubstantiation (Lutheran)

Martin Luther, while rejecting transubstantiation, had difficulty reconciling Jesus’ proclamation, “This is my Body,” “This is my blood.” He wrote: “It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by the Word of Christ to eat and to drink. And as we have said of Baptism that it is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God.” Thus, for Luther, while the bread and wine do not change physically, the real presence of Christ is present in the physical elements. However, Luther did not argue that by taking communion, one was infused with a grace that granted righteousness for this would have contradicted his understanding of justification by faith alone, as he detailed in his commentary to the Galatians.

Communionism or Receptionism (Calvin)

John Calvin did not believe that Christ’s presence existed in the bread and wine because of the irrational notion that Christ’s *physical* presence and nature could be in different locations at the same time wherever communion is served. Such a thought for Calvin contradicted the orthodox understanding of the nature of the second person of the Trinity. Although Luther argued for the ubiquity of Christ’s presence (that Christ’s ascended presence could reside everywhere), there is no apparent Scriptural basis for that proposition.

Instead, Calvin contended that even though Christ’s presence does not reside literally in the bread and wine, through the Holy Spirit, the act of communion and its elements impart God’s sanctifying grace (though not salvific grace) upon the believer, whereby the Christian receives comfort and strength as we live by faith. He argued that Christ “in some measure renews, or rather continues, the covenant which he once for all ratified with his blood (as far as it pertains to the strengthening of our faith) whenever he proffers that sacred blood for us to taste.”

Memorialism (Zwingli)

Huldrych Zwingli was a reformer who did not believe that the real presence of Christ existed in any way in the elements. He also did not believe that there was any mysterious impartation of sanctifying grace by the Spirit in the act of communion (i.e. Calvin’s view). Zwingli argued that communion was a memorial of Christ’s work. And while there were spiritual implications as a memorial, there was nothing inherent about communion that imparted any form of grace.

⁶ If we hold to Calvin’s position on communion, where there is some impartation of sanctifying grace through communion, then holding communion more frequently will have great benefit to believers. If communion were only a memorial, then there would seem to be other means of memorial that could replace communion and therefore,

frequency of communion would seem unnecessary. Michael Horton comments on this point: "One's view of the nature of the Supper plays no small part in determining frequency. If the sacrament is chiefly a matter of our remembering or our attesting to our faith and obedience, it is not surprising that it should be infrequent. There are so many other things in the service, after all, that remind us of Christ's passion for us and excite our piety."

⁷ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *By Grace Alone*, (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2010), xiv.

⁸ See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1975), 2:1269-70.

⁹ Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1970), 960; William Stevens, *Doctrines of the Christian Religion* (Nashville: Broadman, 1967), 344. Keith Mathison (*Given for You*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 306) argues, "In the context of the Passover meal, the phrase, 'fruit of the vine' was a liturgical term used as a synonym for wine." Jews have always celebrated and continue to celebrate the Passover meal with wine, not grape juice.

¹⁰ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 1125.

¹¹ O'Leary CM, Nassar N, Kurinczuk JJ, de Klerk N, Geelhoed E, Elliott EJ, Bower C, "Prenatal alcohol exposure and risk of birth defects," *Pediatrics*, (2010 Oct;126(4)), e843-50. See also, Windham GC, Fenster L, Hopkins B, Swan SH, "The association of moderate maternal and paternal alcohol consumption with birthweight and gestational age," *Epidemiology*, (1995 Nov;6(6)), 591-7.

¹² Henderson J, Gray R, Brocklehurst P, "Systematic review of effects of low-moderate prenatal alcohol exposure on pregnancy outcome," *BJOG*, (2007 Mar;114(3)), 243-52.

¹³ "Alcohol and Pregnancy: Know the Facts." Press Release.

http://www.acog.org/from_home/publications/press_releases/nr02-06-08-1.cfm The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. February 6, 2008. Web. Accessed January 31, 2010.

¹⁴ <http://www2.potsdam.edu/hanson/dj/YouthIssues/Most-States-in-US-Permit-Drinking-Under-the-Age-of-21.html>

¹⁵ In instances when a child (for example a 12-year old convert who has come to church without his unbelieving parents) is without parental care, a mentor/disciple can take the place of a parent to lead and shepherd that child towards baptism and communion.

¹⁶ Thomas Watson, in his book *The Christian Soldier* (<http://www.cmfhq.org/ForumsBlogs/Blog/tabid/96/EntryId/637/Developing-a-Warriors-Heart-Self-Examination.aspx>), has some helpful suggestions on how to grow in self-examination:

Self-examination in itself is difficult:

- It is a work of self-reflection; it lies most with the heart. It is hard to look inward. External acts of religion are easy; to lift up the eye to Heaven, to bow the knee, to read a prayer—this requires no more labor than for a Catholic to count over his beads; but to examine a man's self, to turn in upon his own soul, to take the heart as a watch all in pieces, and see what is defective; this is not easy. Reflective acts are hardest. The eye can see everything but itself. It is easy to spy the faults of others—but hard to find out our own.
- Examination of a man's self is difficult, because of self-love. As ignorance blinds, so self-love flatters. Every man is ready to think the best of himself. What Solomon says of love to our neighbor is most true of self-love; "it hides a multitude of sins," Proverbs 10:12. When a man looks upon himself in the looking-glass of self-love, his virtues appear greater than they are, and his sins less. Self-love makes one rather excuse what is amiss, than examine it.
- As self-examination is in itself difficult, so it is a work which we are hesitant to perform for these reasons:

- Consciousness of guilt. Sin clamors inwardly, and men are loathe to look into their hearts lest they should find that which should trouble them. It is little pleasure to read the hand writing on the wall of conscience.
- Foolish, presumptuous hopes keep men from it: they fancy their estate to be good, and while they weigh themselves in the balance of presumption, they pass the test. Many take their salvation on trust. How confident are some of salvation—yet never examine their title to Heaven.
- Men like to rest in the good opinions of others: how vain this is! Alas, one may be gold and pearl in the eye of others—yet God may judge him reprobate silver! Bystanders can but see the outward behavior—but they cannot tell what evil is in the heart. Fair streams may run on the top of a river—but vermin may lay at the bottom.
- Men hesitate to examine themselves, because they do not believe Scripture. The Scripture says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9. The heart is the greatest impostor. It will persuade that a slight tear is repentance; a lazy desire is faith.

In self-examination great advantage will accrue to us: the benefit is great whichever way things turn. If upon examination we find that we have not saving grace—then the mistake is discovered, and the danger can be prevented. If we find that we have saving grace—we may take the comfort of it. How glad was he who had "found the pearl of great price?" He who upon search finds that he has but the least degree of grace, is like one who has found his box of evidences; he is heir to all the promises, and in a state of salvation!

So that we would be successful in our self-examination, let us desire God to help us to find out our hearts, Job 34:32. "That which I see not teach you me."—Lord, take off the veil; show me my heart; let me not perish through mistake, or go to hell with hope of Heaven. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23-24.

¹⁷ Thomas Schreiner (p. 93) argues that those who partake in an unworthy manner are not ultimately believers: "They neither proclaim the gospel nor is their identity shaped by it. They are unbelievers. They reject Jesus and put Him on the cross. They are guilty of His body and blood. This reading is confirmed by the references to drinking judgment on oneself in 11:29, experiencing God's judgment in 11:30, and being condemned with the world in 11:32.

Fencing the Table For Both Believers and Unbelievers

1. Exegetical Arguments from Scripture, Especially 1 Corinthians 11

On the relative pronoun ὅς (“whoever”) in 1 Cor 11:27

The relative pronoun ὅς combined with the Greek particle ἅν always refers to indefiniteness in the New Testament. This is why out of 65 uses of the phrase in the New Testament, virtually every instance of the phrase emphasizes indefiniteness as **translated by the phrase “whoever” or “whatever” or “anyone”**. Also, most commentators do not address the relative pronoun, though Anthony Thiselton does noting that the pronoun is “indefinite.”

It seems right then to translate the word as “whoever” (which virtually every translation of the Bible does) and use its natural meaning as “indefinite.” Therefore, though Paul is addressing the Corinthian church’s abuse of the communion feasts in 11:17-22, this **does not limit Paul’s audience merely to those Corinthians abusing the feast. The use of “whoever” is Paul’s opportunity to take the case study of abuse in the Corinthian church and apply it broadly to all people from all different contexts, including both believers and unbelievers.** This is the general usage of this pronoun throughout the New Testament.

Also, the argument can be made that the Corinthian church, including those who are abusing communion in 11:17-22, **is a mixed group of believers and unbelievers.** Paul’s **defense of his apostleship in 9:3** (“This is my defense to those who would examine me.”) **seems to indicate that there** are those who are teaching a different and false gospel (cf. 1 Cor 1:18f.) and the means to undermine this gospel is to undercut his apostleship. In 1 Cor 15, Paul had heard that some were denying the resurrection of the dead (15:12) which meant that **ultimately, they would be denying Christ’s resurrection (15:16)**. If this were the case, then surely there were some who did not have saving faith.

Thus, the reality is that in any believing community, there is still the mixture of believer and unbeliever that only the Lord knows. It seems safe to say then that even if the **“whoever” is not universally applied, but only applied to the immediate context of Christian believers**, that this still does not rule out the fencing of the table to both believer and unbeliever.

“Unworthy manner” (ἀναξίως) and “guilty” (ἔνοχος) (v. 27)

The word ἀξίως is used in four other instances in the NT:

Eph 4:1

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

Phil 1:27

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

Col 1:10

... so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

1 Thess 2:12

...we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

The **ἀναξίως** *ana* in the Greek word means “no/not,” which sets up Paul’s usage of the word in verse 27. In each instance of the word in the NT, **ἀξίως** points back to the gospel of Christ and our walking in light of it. So when Paul uses the word **ἀναξίως**, he is speaking to those who are *not* walking in the gospel of Christ and to those who do *not* hold to its validity and power. This can apply to believers, since they are not living as “to which you have been called.” But when one is walking **ἀναξίως**, then surely this can apply to an unbeliever who is certainly not living in view of the gospel of Christ.

Such a person is **ἔνοχος** (guilty/liable) ‘concerning the body and blood of the Lord.’ The word **ἔνοχος** is such a strong word, a legal term that can be used to state that a crime or sin has been committed.¹ In fact, Hebrews 2:14-15 uses it to describe the “subjects” (**ἔνοχοι**), those enslaved to the power of the devil and death. The usage of such a **strong word and phrase requires “whoever” to deeply consider** walking in a manner worthy of Christ and His gospel. To fail to do so could make one as liable as any enemy of God.

Commentator David Garland puts it this way:

They become “responsible for his body and his blood...--that is, they are chargeable for the Lord’s death. Those whose behavior at the Lord’s Supper does not conform to what that death entails effectively shift sides. They leave the Lord’s side and align themselves with the rulers of this present age who crucified the Lord (1 Cor 2:8; cf. Heb 6:5).

Those who partake in this unworthy manner do a grave injustice to Christ and His work on the cross, the very message Paul has gone to emphasize throughout this first letter to the Corinthians (cf. chapters 1-4). If a person should come to the table in such a manner, they do so without a genuine thought of what the very elements represent, the saving work of Christ. So when such a person, believer or unbeliever, take part in the sacrament, they have no true vested interest in what Jesus accomplished. In this sense, they take the bread and wine as nothing more than either a meritorious work

¹ BAGD, 267.

(God will grant me favor if I partake), a syncretistic mindset (I'll cover all of my bases), a superstition (Maybe these elements have power), out of peer pressure (I can't be the only one refraining), or out of tradition (My parents are believers). Such a perspective undermines the very atoning work of Christ itself, which proclaims that absolutely nothing can save a person or grant one favor before God except the sheer grace of God. This is a gift (Eph 2:8-9). Therefore, the communion itself does not do anything apart from the grace given from Christ's work as received in faith. So to take part in communion without such faith in God's grace would functionally nullify Christ's cross work and make taking communion nothing more than a ritualistic act, making the person liable for judgment and guilty before God.

“discerning” (διακρίνω)(v. 29); “judgment” (κρίμα²) (v. 29, 34); “judged” (διεκρίνομεν) (v. 31); “judged” (κρίνω)(v. 32); “condemned” (κατακρίνω)(v. 32)

All of these words have the same root word in the Greek that is meant to project the same message: there are severe consequences for those who eat and drink in a manner unworthy of the gospel of Christ. The repetition is meant to emphasize judgment (cf. Moule, Garland, 550).

The δοκιμαζέτω (“examine”) of verse 28 is a word used to describe a test of authenticity (e.g. The word describes a stamp used to document those items, such as a pottery jar, that have been passed through the refining fires and shown to maintain its structural integrity). It is with this type of intent, because of the severe consequences of unworthy partaking, that a person is to search his heart to see if he truly trusts Christ's redemptive work.

Paul goes on to describe in verse 29 what a person must “discern” (διακρίνω). This person must discern “the body.” Both Garland (p. 553) and Thiselton (p. 893-894) argue that discerning the body has to do with one's full dependence on the atoning work of Christ. Thiselton describes that the person must

² Kittel defines *krima* as a word that has significant, eternal ramifications for those who do *not* genuinely trust in Christ:

Originally κρείμα, Hellenistically κρίμα, this word means the “decision” of the judge, a. as an action, Jn. 9:39 ; Ac. 24:25 ; R. 11:33 ; 1 C. 11:29 , 34 ; Hb. 6:2 ; 1 Pt. 4:17; 2 Pt. 2:3; Rev. 20:4 , b. as the result of the action, the sentence, as in most of the other NT passages apart from 1 C. 6:7 ; Rev. 18:20 . Usually the decision is unfavourable, and it thus bears the sense of condemnation. It may be used of human as well as divine judgment. Distinctive expressions are κρίμα λαμβάνειν, Mk. 12:40 and par. (Mt. 23:14); Lk. 20:47 ; Jm. 3:1 ; R. 13:2 ; κρίμα βαστάζειν, Gl. 5:10 ; κρίμα ἔχειν, 1 Tm. 5:12 ; ἐμπίπτειν εἰς κρίμα, 1 Tm. 3:6 ; ἐν τῷ κρίματι εἶναι, Lk. 23:40 ; in all these κ ρ ί μ α is penal judgment → a. In 1 C. 6:7 : κρίματα ἔχετε μεθ’ ἑαυτῶν, κρίμα, bears the sense of a legal action or process ; though there are no other known instances of this usage, it arises naturally from b. Rev. 18:20 rests on LXX usage : ἔκρινεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ κρίμα ὑμῶν ἐξ αὐτῆ, “he has fulfilled your legal claim on her by his judgment.” The LXX normally uses κρίμα for ὑψων . It can thus have the sense of judicial decision. But it can also mean the right which someone has, namely, the oppressed.

...be mindful of the uniqueness of Christ, who is *separated* from others in the sense of giving himself for others in sheer grace. The Lord's Supper, by underlining participation in, and identification with, the cruciform Christ, thereby generates the social transformation, which is Paul's *second* [his italics] concern. Nevertheless, he never leaves behind the *proclamation of the cross* [his italics] (1:18-25) as the ground of the identity transformation, and it is of the very **essence of the Lord's Supper (and of baptism)** to keep this anchorage in grace and in the cross in sharp focus. (Thiselton, 893)

Thiselton's point is critical. There is no doubt that Paul has a social concern. The immediate context points that out. God cares about our love for our neighbor (cf. Matt 5). He wants us to make amends with those we have conflict. But to assume that this self-examination is solely about this social concern makes far too light Paul's **usage of the concept of judgment** in this passage. As Thiselton puts it, it is a *second* concern. We must not miss therefore the main concern of Paul in a lack of discernment in the **Lord's Supper: A failure to see our relationship to God through Christ's atoning work as we take part in the Supper is the primary cause of judgment to be imparted.** While this is surely a warning for believers, certainly unbelievers bear the genuine and real concern of this warning, who by definition do not have a personal and genuine **perspective of the Supper in view of Christ's atoning work.**

By holding this view of Christ's work, the believer has the motivation and calling to go meet social concerns with others. What the believers were missing was not the impulse to go, but rather the ultimate motivation and transformation of their hearts to go and care for others. If they should truly examine themselves, they would be motivated to go to others and make amends and be hospitable and refrain from drunkenness and have mercy to those in need. But they needed the power of the gospel, of Christ and His atoning work (1 Cor 1:18f.). Social concerns (love for neighbor) will/must follow true **heart transformation, which is the reason Paul emphasizes as Thiselton states, "the cruciform Christ" throughout this letter.**

Also, regarding the word "judgment" (κρίμα) (v. 29, 34), it might be assumed that this **judgment must only be for believers since verse 32 states, "But when we are judged (κρίνω) by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned" (κατακρίνω) along with the world."** The problem with this interpretation is that the same word is used to describe "we are judged" and "condemned along with the world." To make a distinction in the English that one word is meant for believers ("we are judged") and one for unbelievers ("condemned along with the word") is a neglect of the actual Greek text.³

³ In fact, Kittel's understanding of *krino* is expansive. There are many instances where translators translate *katakriino* and *krino* interchangeably with "judgment" and "condemnation." Here is Kittel's conclusions on the usage of *krino*:

Understanding of the NT concept of judgment is confronted to-day by a rationalistic criticism which rejects the concept as mythical and unethical. In face of this we must stress the fact that in the NT judgment is not capricious or emotional, as so often in myths of judgment. It is an inwardly necessary consequence of the sin of man. All human acts are a sowing ; God's judgment is the related and self-evident reaping, Gl. 6:7 , 8 . God's judgment is the inevitable repayment of what man does, R. 1:27 . Before the judgment

Paul's point is instead to note once again the severity of the act of failure to examine oneself in view of Christ's redemptive work. The world (unbelievers) will be condemned because they refuse to believe they need a Savior (atonement). When believers partake in the Supper **without this examination in the atonement, by God's grace** (as Paul has done throughout this rebuke in this letter), we are brought back to remember what the Supper is truly about so that we will not act like unbelievers by our failure to recognize the full, gracious, cross-work of Jesus. This is to keep us from facing the judgment of the Lord, and it is the reality of the κρίνω (judgment) of the Lord that keeps us from the κατακρίνω (condemnation/judgment) of the Lord. After all, what better way to save people from death than to show them what death and its consequences are truly appear to be?

2. Pastoral Concerns for Unbelievers

John Calvin makes the argument that the unbeliever who takes communion does a grave injustice to Jesus:

I hold it, then, as a settled point, and will not allow myself to be driven from it, that Christ cannot be disjoined from his Spirit. Hence I maintain, that his body is not received as dead, or even inactive, disjoined from the grace and power of his Spirit. I shall not occupy much time in proving this statement. *Now in what way could the man who is altogether destitute of a living faith and repentance, having nothing of the Spirit of Christ, receive Christ himself?* Nay more, as he is entirely under the influence of Satan and sin, how will he be capable of receiving Christ? While, therefore, I acknowledge that there are some who receive Christ truly in the Supper, and yet at the same time unworthily, as is the case with many weak persons, *yet I do not admit, that those who bring with them a mere historical faith, without a lively feeling of repentance and faith, receive anything but the sign. For I cannot endure to maim Christ, and I shudder at the absurdity of affirming that he gives himself to be eaten by the wicked in a lifeless state, as it were.* Nor does Augustine mean anything else when he says, that the wicked

throne of God man is rewarded according to his work, 2 C. 5:10 . There is an organic connection between the human act and its consequence in the divine judgment. That this connection is established by God's act means that it is not accidental. For the God of the NT is holy and righteous in His judgment. If what He does transcends man's understanding, He is no less worthy of our adoration, R. 11:33 –36. The wrath in which He judges is holy.

For what the NT tells us is that God's judgment is on the hypocrisy and outward piety which is acting only for the sake of external reward, Mt. 6:1 –18; Mk. 7:6 etc. God's judgment lays bare the hidden essence of man. R. 2:16 ; 1 C. 4:5 , 6 ; Rev. 2:23 etc. He who does good only for fear of the judgment has not attained to fulfillment of the first commandment, that he should love God with all his heart, Mk. 12:29 f. If the NT witness seeks to rouse man from his indifference and slackness with its reference to the divine judgment, it is in order that he should consider his duty to do the good as such, i.e., out of love for his Creator. The concept of judgment cannot be taken out of the NT Gospel. It cannot even be removed from the centre to the periphery. Proclamation of the love of God always presupposes that all men are moving towards God's judgment and are hopelessly exposed to it. For this reason mysticism and the Enlightenment, which either set aside or restrict the thought of divine judgment, are directly opposed to the NT Gospel.

receive Christ merely in the sacrament, which he expresses more clearly elsewhere, when he says that the other Apostles ate the bread — the Lord; but Judas only the bread of the Lord. (**Calvin's Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11**)

If our pastoral concern for unbelievers is the state of their souls, then it would seem to be pastoral negligence to refrain from any warning when the very act of taking communion, as seen in Scripture and in historical theology, has such severe consequences. **Calvin calls the person who is “destitute of a living faith and repentance” a person who is “to maim Christ” during the act of communion.** Pastoral care would seem to call us to protect all from such a predicament.

3. Historical Precedent⁴

“Fencing the table” has been a recognized practice for most churches of various denominations. While the aspect of fencing the table to particular types of believers has often been a point of contention throughout church history (cf. the communion debate in **Jonathan Edwards’ day**), **there has been common agreement amongst churches historically to fence the table from unbelievers.** Only in strongly Zwinglian-influenced churches is there an absence of any fencing from unbelievers. Fencing is not for the sake of exclusivity, but rather, as the exegesis noted, it is to protect people from the realities of judgment.

⁴ See <http://opc.org/OS/html/V3/4d.html>, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/fencingtable.html>, and many churches, denominations, and affiliations.