

RIVERVIEW CHURCH

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THE LORD'S SUPPER.

BY NOEL HEIKKINEN

The Lord's Supper (also commonly referred to as "Communion" and "Breaking of Bread") is a practice instituted by Jesus on the night he was betrayed.¹ At the close of a Passover meal he was celebrating with his disciples, Jesus said,

"I HAVE EARNESTLY DESIRED TO EAT THIS PASSOVER WITH YOU BEFORE I SUFFER. FOR I TELL YOU I WILL NOT EAT IT UNTIL IT IS FULFILLED IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD." AND HE TOOK A CUP, AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS HE SAID, "TAKE THIS, AND DIVIDE IT AMONG YOURSELVES. FOR I TELL YOU THAT FROM NOW ON I WILL NOT DRINK OF THE FRUIT OF THE VINE UNTIL THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMES." AND HE TOOK BREAD, AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE BROKE IT AND GAVE IT TO THEM, SAYING, "THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH IS GIVEN FOR YOU. DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME." AND LIKEWISE THE CUP AFTER THEY HAD EATEN, SAYING, "THIS CUP THAT IS Poured OUT FOR YOU IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD."

LUKE 22:15-20 ESV

The early church picked up this practice and immediately instituted it into a regular part of their life together.² At Riverview, we seek to obey Jesus by practicing the Lord's Supper regularly as well.

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

Why do we take communion?

First, we do it to obey Jesus, which we think is a pretty important reason all by itself. Additionally, the Bible gives us at least four other great reasons:

1. It helps us remember Jesus' work on the cross³
2. When we do it, we proclaim our salvation in symbolic form⁴
3. It is a celebration of the unity we have because of our mutual salvation⁵
4. It is a declaration that Jesus will come back one day to set up his Kingdom and we will get to celebrate with him⁶

What do the bread and wine symbolize?

Bread is used in the Lord's Supper to symbolize the human body of Jesus Christ in his incarnate state, which was offered as a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world⁷. It is the common practice at Riverview to use cut up bread pieces as well as gluten-free crackers for those with dietary restrictions. Wine, likewise, symbolizes the blood of Jesus that was shed during his crucifixion, fulfilling the Mosaic Covenant⁸ and inaugurating the New Covenant.⁹

Why do we use grape juice instead of wine?

To serve and love those who struggle with alcohol in our church family, we use grape juice instead of wine during our weekend services. This is fine Scripturally because Jesus uses the phrase "fruit of the vine," not "wine." Many of our Life Groups use wine during



their observances of the Lord's Supper because they have freedom to do so.

Does the bread and wine turn literally into the body and blood of Jesus?

This is a view that is held by many in the Roman Catholic church because Jesus said, "this is my body" when referring to the bread¹⁰ and "this is my blood" when referring to the wine.¹¹ Of course, Jesus also said, "I am the gate"¹² and "I am the vine."¹³ In each of these instances, he is using symbolism to make a point. When we take communion, we are symbolically remembering the work of Jesus on the cross.

When do we take the Lord's Supper?

At Riverview, it is our practice to take the Lord's Supper every other month during our weekend services. We don't do it every week because we don't want it to become a trite ritual during the service, empty of meaning. Additionally, many Life Groups at Riverview incorporate communion during a meal they take together in their homes. This was a common practice with many of the early churches in the New Testament.¹⁴

Who can take communion?

Communion is reserved for any follower of Jesus who is not currently under church discipline. Anyone who would like to take the Lord's Supper is asked to examine him or herself so that they don't take it in an unworthy manner.

What does it mean to take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner?

One of the great things about the Lord's Supper is that it proclaims to the world the unity we have because of our common salvation. It doesn't matter if you are a college student or a single mom, a millionaire or unemployed — we are all one in Jesus. In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul chews out the people for making their communion meal all about the "haves" and making the "have-nots" feel excluded.¹⁵ This division directly contradicted the purpose of the Lord's Supper. He told them to examine themselves to make sure they were not taking communion in an "unworthy manner." Following Paul's example, we encourage all those who want to take the Lord's Supper to make sure they are not living in division and relational strife with other believers. If they are, they should take care of it before partaking in the bread and the cup.

END NOTES

1 - Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20

2 - Acts 2:46, 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10-11

3 - Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

4 - 1 Corinthians 11:26

5 - 1 Corinthians 10-11

6 - Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; Revelation 19:6-10

7 - Colossians 1:20

8 - Exodus 24:6-8; Matthew 5:17; Romans 8:4

9 - John 1:17; 2 Corinthians 3:5-6; Hebrews 10:14-18

10 - Matthew 26:26

11 - Matthew 26:28

12 - John 10:7

13 - John 15:1-5

14 - Acts 2:46, 20:7

15 - 1 Corinthians 11:18

