



Rev. Michael Mueller



Questions of Faith

How should we practice Holy Communion?

If by “remembrance” of Jesus, one would understand that through the Sacrament Christ is present for us for the forgiveness of our sins and for the strengthening of our faith, then such understanding would be in keeping with what historically Christians understand the Scriptures to mean. If, however, “remembrance” of Jesus were understood as a simple “memorial” or mental “recall” of Jesus and His work, such understanding would not be in keeping with Scriptural teaching.

All three accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23) explicitly state that Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, “*Take, eat; this—this bread, which I have just blessed and broken and am now giving to you—is My body.*” Jesus uses similar language in referring to “*the cup*” (of wine) as “*His blood.*” A plain and straightforward reading of these words leads to the conclusion that both bread and body, both wine and blood are present in the consecrated elements of the Lord’s Supper.

Perhaps the most explicit expression of this truth, however, is found in I Corinthians 10:16-17, where Paul writes: “*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.*” Paul clearly says here that we all “partake” of “bread” when we receive the Lord’s Supper—even as we also partake of and “participate in” the true body of Christ. And he says that we all “partake” of the wine (the cup), even as we also partake of the true blood of Christ.

Similarly, in I Corinthians 11:26, Paul says: “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.*” Paul expressly states here that when we receive the Lord’s Supper we are “eating bread” and “drinking the cup” (wine), but he goes on to say that those who eat this bread and drink this cup are also partaking of the true body and blood of Christ. It also encourages our participation “often,” so I prefer to celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week.

So “real” is this participation in Christ’s body and blood, in fact, that those who partake of the bread and wine “*in an unworthy manner*” are actually “*guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord*” (I Corinthians 11:27). The result may be sickness or even death (vs. 11:30)

Partaking of the Lord’s Supper “*in a worthy manner,*” of course, is not something that we “do” or “accomplish” on the basis of our “personal holiness” or “good works.” It means receiving God’s free and gracious gifts of life and forgiveness offered in the Lord’s Supper in true repentance produced by the work of the Spirit through God’s Law and in true faith in Christ and His promises produced by God’s Spirit through the Gospel.

So, in communion we receive in, with, and under the bread and wine the true body and blood of Christ shed on the cross—that same body and blood that bought us forgiveness of sin. This same Jesus Christ Who is now risen and ascended and sits at the right hand of God the Father. In the Sacrament, the same Jesus who died is present, although not in exactly the same way that He was corporeally present when He walked bodily on earth.

Scripture teaches that the Lord's Supper is a precious gift of God in which Christ gives us His true body and blood (in a supernatural way), together with the bread and wine, for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. Because the Bible teaches that this Sacrament may also be spiritually harmful if misused, and that participation in the Lord's Supper is an act of confession of faith, Christians traditionally have communed only those who have been instructed in the teachings of Scripture and who have publicly confessed faith in these teachings. For children, this normally means two to three years of training with the pastor.

In today's world where people are casual about membership in organizations and pastors often are not able to, nor are people as open to, inquire as to everyone's understanding of Communion, some pastors have taken to posting something like the following in the bulletin itself and announce it prior to the Service of the Lord's Supper. This lets each person make an informed self-selection and only reserves to the pastor the willingness to step in if it is known that someone is 'at risk' in communing. Pastors are also to instruct children whose parents want them to commune prior to confirmation and assure that they are able to discern the real presence.

NOTE TO VISITORS Our Lord's Body and Blood are offered in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion to all baptized Christians who discern His real presence. Raise your index finger if you prefer grape juice. [Sunday Bulletin]

It is very important to note that in I Corinthians 11:27-29, Paul distinguishes between divine judgment and divine condemnation. The Corinthians had been under God's judgment (*krima*, 11:29 & 34); God was judging (*krinomenoi*, 11:32). But the purpose for this judgment was a disciplinary one ("we are being disciplined," *paideuometha*) so that the Christians might not be condemned with the unbelieving world (11:32).

At a basic level, a Christian should be aware that when Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, God pardoned us of all sin. As Scripture puts it, "*in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them...*" (II Corinthians 5:19). Therefore, we have already been forgiven of our sins—those that we have done in the past and those that we will do in the future. This is what makes the work of Christ such good news! The means of grace are the conduits through which we come to know and believe this good news, and the means through which the forgiveness of Christ is continually made known and given to us.

Ironically, what is already ours becomes ours. Like water that already belongs to us in a storage facility, it becomes ours continually when it is piped into our house so that we can drink it. One theologian wrote, "If God had not forgiven all sins, there could be no means by which the forgiveness is offered." This is exactly correct.

The Gospel and the Sacraments, including the Lord's Supper, are the divinely ordained ways in which the merits of Christ are revealed, offered, and imparted to us. The words of institution in the Lord's Supper, then, are God's way of saying to us: "Your sins have been forgiven already, and again I am giving you anew this wonderful blessing. Be of good cheer. Your sins ARE forgiven." In this way we can go our way with a clear conscience and a renewed heart.

Finally, consider the benefits received. The first and foremost benefit is mentioned by Christ in His institution in the words of the text: "*My blood of the New Covenant which concerning*

many is being poured out for the forgiveness of sins.” It is this forgiveness of sins that is delivered to us by our Lord, through His own body and blood.

Now, you might wonder why this extra step is needed. Didn't Christ do all that was required to forgive my sins when He died on the cross? Yes, He did. Yet, the gift which Christ secured there He wants to deliver to us again and again in a **personal** and **visible** way through the Supper. We receive it in an individual, one-on-one basis. This forgiveness is “for you.” This is in contrast to our group general confession and absolution, where you receive forgiveness as a group. In the Lord's Supper, it comes to you individually—**for you**—by way of eating and drinking.

This forgiveness then provides a multitude of further blessings. This gives us power to live our daily lives, knowing our sins are forgiven and that we are God's blessed children. This supper also strengthens our faith. I Corinthians 11:26 says, “*For as often as you may eat this bread, and drink this cup, you solemnly proclaim the death of the Lord, until He shall come.*” In the Supper, our Lord holds before us the very price that was paid to secure the promises He makes to us. Christ paid with His body and blood, and in receiving them we are reminded of the promises of our Lord. This causes us to be renewed and strengthened in our faith in Christ and the fulfillment of His promises.