

The Ridge Christian Fellowship
Our Belief and Practice of Communion

What is the purpose of Communion?

The Ridge recognizes four essential purposes of Communion, which are remembrance, proclamation, participation and anticipation.

Remembrance

Jesus commanded his disciples to take Communion for the purpose of remembering his body and his blood.¹ There are several things we are to remember as we partake of Communion.

We remember that we have been forgiven of our sins by his blood.

We remember that God's wrath has passed over those who have come under the blood of Jesus. Jesus spoke these words when he was eating the Passover meal with his disciples. The Passover meal was a meal for remembering their salvation from the wrath of God when He brought them out of Egypt. Jesus holds up the bread and cup of the Passover meal and says this is now done in remembrance of him. Now we eat the Communion elements to remember that Jesus's body and blood have caused God's wrath to pass over us.

We also remember that we are members of the New Covenant. We are not under the Covenant God made with Israel when he brought them out of Egypt.² Jesus's blood is the sacrifice for the new covenant. The cup reminds us that we have been brought into the new covenant by the blood of Jesus.³

Proclamation

The Apostle Paul commanded his disciples to partake of Communion for the purpose of proclamation. Paul states, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."⁴ Partaking of Communion is a proclamation of the Lord's death.

Participation

We affirm that the Communion elements are about participation. We participate in the spiritual presence of Christ, we participate in grace and we participate in the unity of all believers.

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

² Jeremiah 31:31-34

³ Luke 22:20

⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:26

First, we affirm the Communion elements are a true participation in the spiritual presence of Jesus. We do not believe the elements become or contain the physical body of Jesus. We do not believe that Jesus's body is literally given to us again as a sacrifice. Rather, we affirm that Jesus's sacrifice on the cross was once for all.⁵ The idea that the elements become or contain the physical body of Christ is to sacrifice Jesus over again. The Scriptures say, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."⁶ This passage makes it clear that Jesus's sacrifice was a one time sacrifice. The doctrines of Transubstantiation and Consubstantiation present Jesus's physical body as a repeated sacrifice. What then do we mean when we say, "we are participating in the spiritual presence of Jesus?" We are saying that Jesus's spiritual presence is truly with us when we take Communion.⁷ We can answer this question by looking at other occasions where Jesus promised his presence to be with the Church. First, Jesus promises his presence will be with us as we carry out the Great Commission.⁸ Second, he promises his presence to us when we are engaged in church discipline.⁹ In what sense is Jesus with us when we are obeying the Great Commission or carrying out church discipline? He is not with us physically; he is with us spiritually. Communion is another occasion where Jesus's presence is experienced.

Second, we also affirm that taking Communion is a participation in sanctifying grace. We do not hold that taking Communion saves a person. It does not justify them. However, we do affirm that sanctifying grace is being given when we partake of Communion. An analogy might help to explain what we mean by sanctifying grace. When we gather together for the public reading of God's word and the preaching of God's word, we would say that grace is being experienced. When we are taught God's word through the preaching of Scripture we are receiving grace. The grace we receive is a sanctifying grace. It convicts us of sin and encourages us in our walk with Christ. In a similar way we affirm that partaking of the Communion elements is a participation in grace that sanctifies us.

Third, the Communion elements are also a participation in the body of believers. Paul states, "The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" This question anticipates a positive answer. Yes, the bread is a participation in the body of Christ. What does Paul mean that we "participate in the

⁵ Hebrews 10:10-12

⁶ Hebrews 10:12

⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

⁸ Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

⁹ Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

body of Christ.”¹⁰ The next verse reveals what is meant by “the body of Christ.” Paul continues, because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.¹¹ The context shows that the phrase “body” is referring to the Church. We are the “body of Christ” and the Communion elements are a participation in the unity of all believers.

Anticipation

Communion is also intended to cultivate anticipation of Christ’s return. The Scriptures tell us that we will proclaim the death of Christ through Communion until he returns.¹² Communion not only points us back to the cross, it also points us forward to the return of Christ. Jesus spoke about the anticipation of his return when he said, “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.”¹³ Communion invites us to drink in the anticipation of a fully consummated kingdom. It calls us to fix our eyes on our future fellowship with Christ.¹⁴

How often should we partake of the Lord’s Supper?

We desire to partake of Communion on a weekly basis. We recognize that there is no specific guidance on how often Christians should partake of the Lord’s Supper. Since the Scriptures do not prescribe the frequency we are left to infer and rely on the traditions of the early church. We know that the first Christians met daily and they “broke bread” frequently. It is a reasonable assumption that they were also partaking of the Lord’s Supper on a regular basis.¹⁵ It appears that the believers in Corinth were also partaking of the Lord’s Supper on a regular basis albeit they were abusing the occasion. The Apostle Paul writes to them in order to correct their sinful behavior but he doesn’t take issue with how frequently they were gathering for the Lord’s Supper.¹⁶ Although the Scriptures do not tell us precisely how often we should partake, we are given the impression that early Christians met frequently to partake of the Lord’s Supper. We participate weekly because it calls us back to the gospel. A good question for us to ask is, “how often

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:16

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:17

¹² 1 Corinthians 11:26

¹³ Matthew 26:29

¹⁴ Revelation 19:6-9

¹⁵ Acts 2:46; 20:7

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:20

do we need to be reminded of the gospel?" Weekly remembrance of Christ's body and blood is good for our growth in Christ.

The most common objection to observing the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis is that it will become mundane or trite. We do not want the Lord's Supper to be vain. However, repetition does not necessarily mean it will become empty. There are many aspects of our service that we repeat every week. Scripture reading, prayer, songs, preaching and the Lord's Supper are all a part of a symphony of the gospel that we desire to participate in every week. The layers of meaning in the Lord's Supper cannot be excavated in a few weeks. For this reason, The Ridge offers a variety of explanations on the Lord's Supper each time we partake.

Who can administer the elements?

Any follower of Christ who is in a gathering of believers. Anyone who does this should understand what Communion is about. If they are a member of our church, then we ask that they seek guidance from an elder to ensure that they are administering the elements in accordance with the teaching of the church.

Why does the Ridge offer wine and juice in the Lord's Supper?

The Ridge offers wine as an option in our weekly communion. Wine has been a part of worship for millennia.¹⁷ When God called his people to worship him at Jerusalem they were invited to celebrate with wine.¹⁸ When Jesus raised the cup at the Lord's Supper he was raising a glass of wine.¹⁹ Jesus's use of wine is not accidental. He didn't use wine simply because there was no other option. Wine was the normal drink for the Jewish people during the Passover celebration. Jesus uses wine intentionally. It reminds us of the joy and bitterness of the cup that Jesus was drinking. Jesus is the passover lamb who sheds his blood for the forgiveness of sins. The sweetness of the wine points us to the joy we have in Christ. The bitterness of the wine reminds us of the wrath that Jesus drank on our behalf. The Lord's Supper is about remembering the death of Christ and the bitter-bite that wine has reminds us of the suffering that Christ endured.

The Ridge recognizes that not every Christian desires to partake of wine in Communion for reasons of conscience. They are right to follow their conscience in this regard because the Scriptures do not expressly require the use of wine at Lord's Supper. When it comes to the question of wine vs. grape juice we do not

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 14:23

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 14:26

¹⁹ Matthew 26:27-28

seek to be divisive or pressure anyone to violate their conscience regardless of their choice in this matter.

Communion is an opportunity for the body of Christ to come together and rally around the things which unite us. Whether we use wine or grape juice we desire to be united under the blood of Christ.