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Communion: There's More to Prepare Than the Meal

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From the Series: [The Body of Christ](#)



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I. Introduction

This series is *The Body of Christ*. Last week we discussed baptism in an instructional message, looking at a lot of passages in the New Testament about what God wants us to learn and know about baptism. Today we are turning to look at the other sacrament, or ordinance, recognized by Trinity Bible Church, and that is communion. Today's message is *Communion: There is More to Prepare than the Meal*. Today we are going to look at a few different facets of communion, and we are going to be discussing Trinity Bible Church's beliefs of what the Bible teaches about communion. I think that as we go through these passages today -- we are going to look at quite a few passages -- you are probably going to be shocked about what the Bible does *not* say about communion.

The Bible is largely silent on how we are supposed to go about doing this sacrament or ordinance. It does not give us a lot of instruction or detail about how we are to go about celebrating the Lord's Table. Trinity Bible Church has some distinctive ways that we do it -- some beliefs that we have surrounding the practice of communion -- and we are going to be talking about those things today.

II. Foundational Information

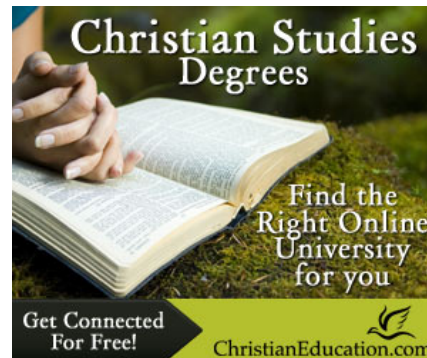
The term "communion" means "a shared or mutual participation." It is not a word that we find in the Bible. It comes from the word "community." In communion, you can see there is a shared or a mutual participation of the redeemed community; therefore, it is called communion.

This celebration is also called the Eucharist in some traditions, particularly in the Roman Catholic tradition. Eucharist comes from a Greek word meaning "to give thanks." Jesus gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples; raised the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to his disciples. It is a thanksgiving feast in the Roman Catholic Church tradition. I believe that also here at Trinity Bible Church, we consider it a thanksgiving feast, or a Eucharist, to give thanks. However, the Bible has a word that it uses for this celebration, and the term is "the Lord's Supper." Paul actually uses that phrase in [1 Corinthians 11](#) to describe what we are going to do today. The Lord's Supper is what he calls it.

Trinity Bible Church has a constitution and a doctrinal statement, and here is what it says about communion: "We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only sacraments and ordinances of the church, and they are a scriptural means of testimony for the church in this age." That is all it says in our constitution about communion, or the Lord's Supper.

Today we are going to look at what the Bible says and teaches us about communion. For many of you there probably is a lot of mystery around this celebration called communion that we practice here at Trinity once a month. Perhaps you have come out of a different denominational background and you were raised to believe in different things about communion. I was raised in a Lutheran background, and was taught certain things about communion. A lot of those things Trinity Bible Church embraces and agrees with. In a few of those things we differ. You may have come out of the Reformed, or the Presbyterian tradition, or the Roman Catholic tradition. We are going to look at a few of the distinctives and some of the passages that they teach the communion celebration from, and some places where they differ or disagree with Trinity Bible Church. Again, in a largely instructional message, we are talking about some of the distinctives of God's church. Last week we looked at baptism, and today we will look at communion.

Communion originally was designed to unify the body. However, because of so many denominational differences, today it often serves to show differences within the body. We are going to look at some of those differences. We are going to learn six things about communion today, and we are also going to have an



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opportunity to share in the celebration of the Lord's Supper together this morning.

III. The Practice of Communion

A. The Precursor to Communion

First of all, what was the precursor to communion? Where did we get it? Did Jesus just think this thing up and decide he was going to start this ceremony called communion, or was he dovetailing off of a previous tradition? Let us look first at [Matthew 26](#). We are going to look in all four of the Gospels. Later this morning we are going to be primarily camping, however, in [First Corinthians 11](#).

First of all, in [Matthew 26](#), starting in verse 26, we are going to find that the precursor to communion is the Passover meal (the Jewish celebration of the Passover instituted in [Exodus 12](#)). This is the Last Supper, the Passover meal, the night before Jesus is crucified. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take, eat, this is my body.' And after taking the cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you from now on I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'" This passage also finds a parallel at the end of the Gospel of Mark, chapter 14, verses 22 through 25. Matthew and Mark are almost word-for-word identical when it comes to the portrayal and the story of Jesus and the Last Supper -- celebrating the Passover.

Now in Matthew, Mark and Luke (the Synoptic Gospels), clearly it is the Passover, the Jewish Seder meal, that Jesus is celebrating with his disciples. The Gospel of John is a little less clear. It could be the Passover in the Gospel of John, or it might have been the day before Passover that the Gospel of John is talking about. I believe, however, it is the Passover Meal that Jesus is celebrating here with his disciples. He is commemorating God's faithfulness to redeem the Israelites from the Egyptians. It was commemorated in Exodus, chapter 12. He is taking the old Jewish tradition and giving it new significance. That is the precursor to what we are going to do today.

The Lord's Supper, the communion meal, the Eucharist, finds its roots, if you will, way back in Exodus, chapter 12, with the institution of the Passover. Do you remember the Passover story? It is the final plague against the Egyptians. God is seeking to release the Israelites, under the leadership of Moses, from Egyptian slavery. He decides he is going to go in and smite the first born of every family -- oh, but he is going to give you a way of escape. If you take a lamb, kill the lamb, sprinkle the blood on the lintels and the mantels and the door posts of your home, then the Angel of the Lord, or the Lord himself, will pass over your house and not smite the first born. Remember, however, that the Lord is going to smite the first born from the families of those who do not have the blood on the outside. It is the last plague because it succeeded. Pharaoh said, "Go! Get out of here! Be gone with you all! Get out of here, you Israelites slaves!" The Israelites are redeemed (purchased, released) from Egyptian slavery. What an awesome picture for Jesus to build upon. That is the foundation, a Jewish tradition, which Jesus builds upon. He attributes new significance to the tradition. Just as the Israelites were redeemed by blood -- the blood of the Lamb -- from Egyptian slavery, so also, you are going to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb -- from slavery to sin and death. He takes an old tradition, adds to it new significance, and says, from now on, do *this* in remembrance of *me* -- not the Passover, but *me*.

The Lord's Supper also reminds us of John the Baptist's saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" ([John 1:29](#)). Perhaps there is imagery even there, with his being the Passover lamb. In [1 Corinthians 5:7](#), Jesus is called the *pascha*. It means "the Passover lamb" in Greek. It is a technical term for the lamb that was slaughtered every year in celebration of the Passover. The *pascha*, the Passover lamb, is who Jesus is. He takes the old tradition and gives it new significance. The Passover is the precursor to what we do here. It even speaks somewhat to the reason why we do it, doesn't it? With this ceremony, we are celebrating the redemption we have through Jesus Christ.

I also wanted to mention another passage that talks about the precursor to the Lord's Supper, or the precursor to communion. It is found in John, chapter 6. Jesus spoke these words before he instituted the Lord's Supper -- before his Last Supper or the Passover meal that we just looked at. In [John 6:51](#), Jesus says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven." He is drawing a comparison here between himself and the manna that sustained the Israelites during their thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness. He says that manna had to come down every day. It did not sustain you permanently; it only sustained you for a day. You have to eat it again, and those that ate of that bread all eventually died. He is saying that he is a different kind of bread that comes down from Heaven. He is the real thing, the permanent thing. If you eat of *this* bread, you will never die. Listen to what he said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Listen to the response of the Jews: "Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus began to argue with one another, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'I tell you a solemn truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood resides in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who consumes me will live because of me.

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This is the bread that came down from heaven. It is not like the bread that your ancestors ate, but then later died." This is far superior bread, he said. "The one who eats this bread will live forever."

The word *trago* in Greek means "to chomp or to munch or to eat audibly." It is used four times in this passage. You gnaw on the body of Jesus. You chew audibly the body of Jesus – and, clearly, he is speaking in symbolic language here. Although he says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven," he does not mean he was a loaf of Wonder Bread that floated down from heaven. He is not speaking literally when he says that you have to eat his flesh and drink his blood; he is speaking figuratively of an intimate relationship with him. That is how tight he wants our relationship with him to be. You also need to know that by entering into that type of a relationship with him, he will openly satisfy you. You will never need to eat any other bread, because he will sustain you. He will satisfy you. He will give you eternal life, as he says in [John 4](#) to the woman at the well (and again in [John 7](#)). He says he is going to provide water for you -- living water. If you drink this water, you will never have to drink ever again. It says, literally, "never drink unto the ages," because you will not need to. His water satisfies you ultimately and provides for your eternal life. He is talking about an intimate relationship here. He, himself, is the ultimate satisfaction in life, ultimately providing eternal life for you.

I would disagree with the Roman Catholic church, who takes this passage extremely literally. They apply it directly to the Passover or to the Lord's Supper, to communion, to the Eucharist meal. They say that the Eucharist meal, the Mass, is a step in the path to salvation, and that it is essential to take this step. They say that you have to eat the body and the blood of Jesus as a step to your redemption. They say that [John 6](#) says that it is really the body and the blood that you are eating in a Mass ceremony. We will talk more about that later.

The precursor to communion is the Passover meal. At the Last Supper, Jesus is taking an old tradition and attributing new significance to it.

B. The Purpose of Communion

Second, let us look at the purpose of communion from [Luke 22](#), Matthew, and Mark. When they describe the Last Supper, they use almost identical words. Luke uses some different words, and he includes a phrase that Matthew and Mark do not include, even though they probably knew that Jesus had said it. It is an important phrase for us to consider when we think of the purpose of communion.

1. Communion as a Memorial

Why do we practice communion? [Luke 22](#), starting at verse 17: "Then he took a cup, and after giving 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.' Then he took bread, and after giving 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 in the same way he took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'" He probably broke the bread early in the meal, and it was after they had finished the meal, toward the end of their evening, that he takes the cup. The two are separated by time here. Only Luke and Paul give the memorial view of the Lord's Supper, the memorial view of communion. Only Luke and Paul say that Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Matthew and Mark probably knew that he had said it, but for some reason chose not to include it in their historical retelling of the events of the Last Supper.

It is because of the statement, "Do this in remembrance of me," that Trinity Bible Church has embraced the memorial view of communion. We do not believe in what is called "sacramentalism" -- that communion is a necessary step toward salvation. We do not believe that the Eucharist has to be partaken in order for you to receive grace on your journey toward redemption. We believe that you are saved completely apart from the communion service, or from the Eucharist, or from the Mass. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Trinity Bible Church embraces the memorial view, that when we partake of these elements, we are doing it in remembrance of Him. We are reflecting upon our redemption. We are reflecting upon his body and I purchased for us our salvation. That is the memorial view of communion. That is the first purpose, practice of communion. It is as a redeemed community that we reflect upon our redemption through Jesus Christ. What a beautiful picture! The bread and the wine, the bread and the juice, act as tokens -- that represent the body of Jesus Christ that was broken for us, the blood of Jesus Christ shed for us, for the forgiveness of sins. What a beautiful picture that is.

2. Communion as Fellowship

There is a second purpose in our celebration of communion (the Lord's Supper). In [1 Corinthians 10:16-17](#), Paul highlights the unity of the body during the communion celebration. Paul writes this: "Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all share the one bread." Paul highlights the unity of the redeemed community. The practice of communion does not work as well for us two thousand years later as it did for those in New Testament times. Then, they were sharing a meal together around tables, so that they were looking at other redeemed individuals in the eyes. It highlighted the fellowship of unity that we have -- a common bond in Jesus Christ. In our case, we all face the same direction. You do not get to look other redeemed individuals in the eyes, rejoicing in their salvation in addition to your own. Often,

when we celebrate communion here, we are thinking about the first purpose of communion only. In remembrance of him, we are thinking about how grateful we are for our redemption. There is nothing inappropriate about that; however, another purpose that we find in [1 Corinthians 10](#) is that we, as a redeemed unity, rejoice in the common bond we have in Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of communion. It is in memory of Him. It is a memorial view. However, it also highlights the unity that we share in Jesus Christ.

C. The Practice of Communion

Third, we should make a practice of communion. Here you might find a few differences from your church background. First let us look at [Acts 20:7](#). We get a glimpse, if you will, into the practice of the first century church. [Acts 20:7](#) says, "On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread" "On the first day of the week" We know from other echoes in the New Testament that the church met on the first day of the week. They did not meet on Saturday (the Sabbath). They wanted to distinguish themselves from Jewish assemblies, so they met on the first day of the week in celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Here, also, we find that on the first day of the week, when they met, they broke bread together. They celebrated the Lord's Supper together. They celebrated communion together.

We get the same hint in [1 Corinthians 11](#). In the New Testament, it seems as though the church celebrated communion every Sunday as they joined together. However, in no place does the New Testament say, "Thou shalt celebrate communion every single time you get together, or every single Sunday." The New Testament does not say that you have to celebrate communion on the first day of the week. Therefore, at Trinity Bible Church, we have adopted to celebrate communion once a month, in order to keep it special and to keep it regular. The New Testament is clear that you must practice communion repeatedly. Communion is unlike baptism, our other ordinance that we recognize as a church. You only do baptism once. Communion you do on a repeated or a regular basis.

Let us look at another passage to find out some more about how they did communion. Listen to this passage and think about some things you are hearing that are different from our practice of communion today. We are going to camp in [1 Corinthians 11](#) for a while. In [1 Corinthians 11](#), starting in verse 17, Paul writes: "Now in giving the following instruction I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For in the first place, when you come together as a church I hear there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must in fact be divisions among you, so that those of you who are approved may be evident. Now when you come together at the same place, you are not really eating the Lord's Supper." In verse 20, what does Paul call the celebration? He calls it the Lord's Supper. This is the only place in the New Testament from which get a title for this celebration. It is never called the Eucharist or communion, but it is called the Lord's Supper in the New Testament -- right there in [1 Corinthians 11:20](#).

Paul goes on to say: "For when it is time to eat, everyone proceeds with his own supper. One is hungry and another becomes drunk." He indulges to the full, Paul is saying. "Do you not have houses so that you can eat and drink? Or are you trying to show contempt for the church of God by shaming those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I praise you? I will not praise you for this." It seems that in the first century church in the Corinthian city, there were believers who were wealthy, and believers who were poor. They were not paying attention to one another as the redeemed community. They were not using the communion service as a celebration of our personal redemption, in addition to using it as a celebration of a common bond we have in Jesus Christ. Those who "had" were eating and indulging to the full, and they were overlooking those who "had not." There is disunity in the church because of that. Paul is reprimanding them and telling them to get on the same page: come together and join together, to eat together your common meal. It is a reflection of your individual redemption in Jesus Christ. You have a common bond in Jesus Christ as a redeemed community.

Did you notice that they are eating meals as the Lord's Supper? Did you pick up that their Eucharist, their communion idea, was not tiny cups and tiny morsels of bread? They are eating full meals in [1 Corinthians 11](#). We know that at Passover, when Jesus attributed new significance to the Passover meal, there was a whole meal. In [1 Corinthians 11](#), twenty-five years after that event, the church is eating a whole meal for communion. We do not do that at our church.

In fact, the practice of communion at our church looks a whole lot more like the practice of the second century church than that of the first century church. Church history tells us that soon after the turn of the second century, churches began to do token communion services. They would eat their dinners at home and then they would show up at church to have token communion services. They would drink just a little bit of wine and eat just a little bit of bread. They probably adopted that practice, the practice that we are accustomed to today, because of Paul's rebuke in [1 Corinthians 11](#). He said that there was disunity among them because of the "haves" and the "have nots." In order to eliminate that difference, the early church probably said, "Let us set aside the meal. Let us just have a ceremonial token communion celebration with just a little bit of bread and just a little bit of wine, so that we are all on the same playing field." It is like a school that demands their students to abide by a certain dress code or wear a uniform. It puts everybody on the same playing field. The Bible does not say that you have to have an entire meal. Soon after the turn of the first century, into the second century, they got rid of the entire meal and, like us, did a token celebration.

You probably also noticed that they ate the meal together in fellowship, facing one another. That is another aspect that differs from the way we practice communion. When we celebrate it, everyone faces the

same direction. We pass the plates through, rather than fellowshiping with one another over a meal as we celebrate. They also practiced it with one loaf of bread, and with one cup. It was a shared loaf that they broke and it was a shared cup that they passed around. Our practice is a bit different from theirs. We do it with micro cups. Probably not many of you have these in your home, but we have them here at church and we celebrate with very small portions of juice and very small portions of bread.

The practice is not explicitly laid out or demanded of us in the New Testament. Because of that, the church began to adopt different practices that are carried on today in most churches. Most churches celebrate communion in a manner different from the first century church. The goal is to try to do it for the same reasons or purposes for which they did in the first century.

D. The Participants in Communion

Fourth, who is allowed to participate in communion? Who is allowed to say a prayer over (bless) the elements? Different denominational traditions have different opinions on these matters. Continuing in [1 Corinthians 11](#), from verse 27: "For this reason, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself first, and in this way let him eat the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks without careful regard for the body eats and drinks judgment against himself."

This is an awesome verse right here. I want you to think about this verse. "The one who eats and drinks without careful regard for the body." What is the "body" in this context? It is the body of Christ, right? But what is that? Is that the elements of communion, or is that the brothers and sisters who surround you? You see how this could be confusing? Clearly, you must have proper regard for the body of Christ; but in this context, what is the body of Christ? Is it the elements for which we must have proper regard, or is it one another? We are the body of Christ, the Bible says. In the context, probably, the indication is that it is one another for whom we are to have proper regard. Do you remember the contextual problem? Those who "have" are not having proper regard for those who "have not." When we examine ourselves, it is in the context that our horizontal relationship is to be right with God. Actually prepare yourselves. Get right with God, but also examine yourself with regard to your fellow brother. Do not eat communion bread or drink communion wine while having disregard or disrespect for your brother and sister -- for the body of Christ around you. If you do so, you bring judgment against yourself.

[First Corinthians 11:30](#) tells us what some of the judgment looks like. "That is why many of you are weak and sick, and quite a few are dead. But if we examined ourselves, we would not be judged." The implication is that if we examine ourselves and purify our hearts, God will have no reason to judge us and to discipline us in the form of weakness, sickness and death. He goes on to explain: "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned with the world." Discipline is one of the signature marks of a believer in Jesus Christ. He whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, [Hebrews 12](#) tells us. In the context here, the Corinthian church was being disciplined in the form of weakness, sickness and, yes, even death. The Lord was disciplining those whom he loved. "So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." This important verse is probably the key to the change in the early church, from the meal to the token communion: "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that when you assemble it does not lead to judgment. I will give directions about other matters when I come."

Do you get the idea that we are to examine ourselves? We are to look deeply into our own lives, our own behavior, our own attitudes, our own beliefs, before we come to the table. Clearly, the table is for believers. In fact, every church that practices communion (or the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist) reserves it for believers only. That is what Trinity Bible Church believes, as well: believers share together our common redemption in Jesus Christ by partaking of the Lord's Supper. Some churches go beyond that and say that it is only for members: you have to be a member of a church in order to partake in the communion celebration. We do not believe that at Trinity Bible Church. There is no place in the Bible that says that you have to be a member of a particular assembly in order to join in the communion celebration. It just says you have to be a believer who has examined himself.

Some churches add that you must have been baptized in order to partake in the communion meal. That began early in the church, even in the second century. They were saying that baptism is a prerequisite to celebrating communion together. We do not teach that at Trinity Bible Church. We hope that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you will undergo baptism – that you will follow the Lord in obedience and be baptized. Baptism, however, is not a prerequisite for taking the communion celebration together.

What about age? How old does a person have to be in order to celebrate communion? The Bible does not tell us that, either. We do not know the age of the youngest person who celebrated communion. I do know that in the Mormon Church (and I am not going to pretend that the Mormon Church is another Christian denomination -- the Mormon Church is not a Christian denomination), they do celebrate communion, and they celebrate communion for their children. The adults take the bread and put it in their children's mouths when their children are just old enough to gnaw on the bread. That is part of their custom, part of their traditions. Even infants are given communion. We do not do that at Trinity Bible Church. Your prerequisite is that you must be old enough to believe. You have to be a believer in Jesus Christ. You have to be able to examine yourself, and, probably, you have to be old enough to understand.

Last week I said that there is one situation in which we would tell someone to wait for baptism. That is in the case of a child who has trusted Christ as his or her Savior and Lord, but is still receiving parental instruction concerning the meaning of baptism. The same goes for communion. Let us instruct our children concerning the meaning of communion, in order to remove some of the mystery from it. Do not make them partake in a celebration that they do not understand. Let us explain communion to our born-again (saved) youngsters before we allow them to enter into the celebration of communion.

Who may administer the rite of communion? At Trinity Bible Church, we typically have the elders administer the rite of communion. The elders come forward to distribute the elements, and to pray (often) over the elements at Trinity Bible Church. However, that is not based on a biblical passage. The Bible, again, is silent on who administers the rite of communion. In some traditions, a properly ordained priest has to bless the elements in order for them to be legitimate. If anyone other than a properly ordained priest blesses the elements, the recipient has not legitimately received communion. In other words, it does not count. At Trinity Bible Church, we do not believe that is the case. The person who sanctions the communion does not really do anything to the elements. In fact, you could receive the elements from a non-believer, hypothetically speaking, and it would still be valid for you to receive the communion. The Roman Catholic church holds a view called "sacerdotalism," specifying that a properly ordained priest has to say a prayer over and bless the elements in order for them to properly function in your life. At Trinity Bible Church we do not believe in sacerdotalism.

E. The Parts of Communion

Fifth, we will examine the parts of communion. What is involved in communion elements? There are four predominant views when it comes to the parts of communion. I want to run through them quickly, and then I want us to celebrate communion together. We will come to the table together. There are four views, if you will, of the elements themselves. There is a view called "transubstantiation" (substance transformed), which states that the substance is transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The traditional Roman Catholic view is that the bread and the wine are supernaturally transformed, by the blessing of a properly ordained priest, into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ, and then the elements are distributed. In fact, Martin Luther was upset with the Catholics, because in his day, although the Catholic church distributed the bread to the laity (to the folk), they would not distribute the wine. The wine was considered too important for common people to receive. They all might spill the blood of Jesus, and that would be a really bad thing to do. For this reason, the priests in Martin Luther's day would drink the wine on behalf of you commoners. You could receive bread, however, because you are not going to do a lot of harm to the bread.

The second view is called "consubstantiation." This is a traditional Lutheran view of communion. Consubstantiation says that Jesus' body and his blood are contained in the bread. The bread does not fully transform into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, but the bread and the wine contain the body and the blood of Jesus Christ. That is sort of a middle ground view.

The third view is called the "spiritual" view. This is associated mainly with reformed traditions, with Presbyterian churches. This view says that in a very special way, the spiritual presence of Jesus is with us during communion. In a special way, Jesus is spiritually present with the bread and the wine during the communion ceremony.

The fourth view is the view of Trinity Bible Church. It is called the "representative" view. It says that these elements are merely tokens, symbolically representing the body and the blood of Jesus Christ -- that there is no supernatural transformation in the form of these. The body and the blood of Jesus Christ are not going to come here with these elements. Jesus was killed, he rose again, and he is seated at the right hand of the Father right now. That is where his body and blood are. They are not here physically with us. We also do not believe that Jesus is more spiritually present in the elements during communion than he is with you and me at any other time during the week. We are filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and we are always in the presence of God. Jesus is not spiritually in our presence more during communion than he is at any other time of the week. We believe in a representative view.

There are some common questions regarding communion. Can we substitute the bread and the wine for other things? The answer is "yes" or "no," depending on what you are substituting for the elements, and why. In last week's sermon on baptism, I said that the traditional mode of baptism in the New Testament is water baptism, and it is usually by immersion. To the best of our knowledge, historically, archeologically, and biblically, it seems to have been immersion baptism. Therefore, at Trinity we follow immersion baptism, and we strongly encourage it. There are, however, extenuating circumstances: if there is a reason for which you cannot be immersed in water, or if you are in the part of the world that does not have enough water, or if you are bedridden or quadriplegic, or if you have a phobia of water and are terrified of being immersed in water. We have no problem in using other modes to baptize an individual. However, your "default" should be immersion. Do not stray from immersion just for novelty. The same thing goes for communion. You use bread and wine unless you have a good reason not to use them.

Some people have asked whether communion can be culturalized. Can an Eskimo use water and fish for communion? Can a college student use chips and Coke for communion? Some of you are just shaking your head: oh, what an atrocity! Again, if you have a good reason to get away from the bread and the wine, then

perhaps it is permissible. However, if you have perfectly good bread and perfectly good wine or perfectly good juice (and I will explain that in a second), do not substitute chips and Cokes just for novelty. Again, you would be getting away from the biblical description of how communion works, and that is always a frightening thing. Here at Trinity Bible Church, we use bread and juice. We feel we have a good reason for using juice instead of wine: because alcohol in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the United States is a stumbling block for a lot of people. The last thing that we want is for a recovering alcoholic at Trinity Bible Church to have to pass by the elements, because it is a cultural stumbling block here in the United States. For that reason, we use something as similar as we can: we use red juice, and we stick with bread. At Trinity Bible Church, the bread sometimes is unleavened, and at other times it is leavened. Look at what Paul writes in [1 Corinthians 10:17](#). He says, "one loaf." The Greek word that he uses there usually refers to leavened bread. Here at Trinity Bible Church, we might use unleavened or leavened bread, and we always use red juice.

I want to invite the men who will be serving communion to come forward at this time, along with our music leader. Have a seat on the front row. We are going to join in a community celebration of our individual redemption. Even though we are not looking each other in the eyes, our celebration is as a community who is one in Jesus Christ -- because we share from one cup, because we share from one loaf, because we are one in Jesus Christ, and because of our common bond in him. He has redeemed each of us individually, but he has placed us all as inexcusable members of the body. We are all part of one body and there is unity there, so let us celebrate the table together. I will distribute the elements. I ask you to hold on to them, individually. We will first take the bread together, and then we will take the juice together after that is distributed.

Paul writes in [1 Corinthians 11:23](#) "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and after he had given thanks he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" Amen.

Paul goes on in [1 Corinthians 11:25](#): "In the same way, he also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, every time you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Let us drink together. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we are grateful for our redemption. We celebrate this gratefulness as a community of redeemed individuals. Bless you, Lord, for sending your Son to be the propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, redeeming us from sin and death. We remember him today. In Jesus' name, amen.

F. The Priority of Communion

Finally, there is the priority of communion. I want to show you a passage to which we do not often refer. When we do look at it, we take it too lightly. Look at [Acts 2:42](#). Doctor Luke is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, in the beginning of the book of Acts. Listen to these words describing the earliest church: "They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Does anything come to your attention in this verse? The notion of the breaking of bread is not just eating together. Most scholars agree that this verse is discussing some sort of a communion activity -- probably, again, around a full meal. They are probably around a table celebrating not just individual redemption, but the community of the redeemed.

IV. Application and Conclusion

Scholars mostly agree that in [Acts 2:42](#), the breaking of bread is described in community. It is one of the things to which we should devote ourselves. Sure, devote yourselves to the apostles' teaching. You and I can see that it is important to devote ourselves to the Word of God, to devote ourselves to fellowshiping with one another, and to devote ourselves to prayer. We are even told elsewhere to devote ourselves fervently to prayer, keeping watch in it at all times. Are we to devote ourselves to the Lord's Supper? Yes, the Holy Spirit is telling us to devote ourselves to this celebration. Doesn't it make sense to do so? This celebration is the clearest symbolic expression of our redemption in Jesus Christ: the body of Christ that was broken for us, and the blood of Christ that was shed for us, giving us the remission of sins. We are to devote ourselves to this symbolic representation of all Christ did in redeeming us. We are to devote ourselves to this act. Communion represents the best that Christianity has to offer. Celebrating communion, celebrating the Lord's Table is our finest hour as Christians.

Abstract

Communion is one of two sacraments and ordinances (baptism being the other) recognized and practiced by Trinity Bible Church. Unlike baptism, believers everywhere are expected to participate in Communion on a repeated basis. Also known as the Lord's Supper or Eucharist (meaning "to give thanks"), Communion was instituted by Jesus Himself on the night before His crucifixion. Although the celebration of the Lord's Table was designed to unite God's people, differing interpretations have instead led to divisions within the body of Christ. What does the Bible teach about Communion? Why did Jesus institute this practice? How often should churches offer Communion? Is there any reason why someone should refrain from participating in the Lord's Table? These and other questions will be addressed when we take a closer look at this important church ordinance.

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