

The Lord's Table @C3

Is the Lord's Table an Ordinance or Sacrament?

A "sacrament" is a ritual or ceremony where divine grace is imparted to participants. An "ordinance" is a command. There is no doubt that the Lord's Table is something Christ Himself commanded His church to do. Accordingly, the Lord's Table is unquestionably an ordinance. Historically, some Protestant churches have been hesitant to apply the word "sacrament" to the Lord's Table because of its association with Roman Catholic views of the Lord's Table in which the bread and wine are alleged to turn physically into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This view is referred to as "transubstantiation". C3 does not agree with the Roman Catholic position on transubstantiation.^{1,2} Instead, it holds a traditional Reformed and Baptist view of the Lord's Table. Because the term "sacrament" is broader than the Roman Catholic view, and refers more broadly the mystery of God working in and through the ceremony/ritual to administer grace to the believer, the Lord's Table is a sacrament. C3 affirms that God is at work in the Lord's Table by the Spirit and that Christ is present to His people and meets with them as they come to the Lord's Table, reminding them of what He accomplished for them on the Cross. Nevertheless, we will often use the less controversial term "ordinance" when describing the Lord's Table for the sake of reducing confusion to those who might not be aware of the differences.

Is the Lord's Table a memorial to the death of Christ or something more? If more, how much more?

We believe that the Lord's Table is a memorial to the death of Christ and a proclamation of the cross. The cup signifies/represents His blood shed for us and the bread signifies/represents His body broken for us. In this way, we remember the Lord at His Table as He commanded. Yet, we also believe in Christ's presence at the Lord's Table by the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the believer in faith, spiritually nourishing and growing believers in grace. In that sense, the Lord's table is a means of sustaining grace & spiritual nourishment in the life of a believer. Therefore, it is a memorial and a spiritually nourishing ordinance of the church that believers should see as an opportunity to grow in their faith.

In what way does C3 believe that Christ is spiritually present at the Lord's Table? We believe the elements are representative of Christ's body and blood. Therefore, we do not believe the elements themselves physically turn into the body and blood of Jesus. In fact, the elements at all times retain all of their characteristics of bread and wine. Nevertheless, the elements themselves are the means God uses to administer grace to believers, by serving as physical reminders of Christ's work on the Cross in our behalf, and judgment on those who approach the Lord's Table without faith. Thus, believers partake in the body and blood of Christ spiritually, by faith. The nourishment to grow in grace that happens in the Lord's Table is Christ's presence working in believers who are faithfully participating in the Lord's Table as Christ commanded.

Who should partake in the Lord's Table?

Christ-followers who are walking in fellowship with God and their fellow man are commanded to participate in the Lord's Table and should do so with a willing heart understanding that God is at work in and through the ordinance for their benefit, and that Christ is meeting with them through the Lord's Table. However, even believers should examine their heart before the Lord prior to taking communion. Sin should be confessed, forgiveness sought, and repentance undertaken. Reconciliation should be sought amongst Christians if there is any unresolved sin or divisive behavior. Men stand in danger of judgement if they approach and take from the Lord's Table for show, or with disregard to their disposition towards God, or in active disobedience. Nevertheless, we do not approach the Lord's Table out of our own purity but in spite of it. The Lord's Table is for sinners, and it is, among other things, a reminder of Christ who died for our sins. Accordingly, it is in this faith that all Christians are commanded to come and be reminded by the testimony of God, presented through the elements, that they are forgiven.

¹ C3 also disputes the Roman Catholic view regarding the Lord's Table that alleges it is a propitiatory sacrifice that is offered again for the remission of sins. Christ's work of propitiation on the cross was finished once and for all at the Cross.

² C3 also disagrees with the Lutheran position called "consubstantiation" which holds that the bread and wine shares both the physical substance of bread and wine and the physical substance of Christ's body and blood.

If anyone is not currently a believer in Christ, they should not take but consider receiving the gift of salvation that the Lord's Table signifies and proclaims. Those who participate in the Lord's Table without faith, and from an impenitent heart, eat and drink judgment on themselves (see 1 Corinthians 11:29).

What elements does C3 use in the Lord's Table?

The Scriptures describe the elements used at the Lord's Table as bread and wine (or fruit of the vine/grape). The elements represent the body & blood of Jesus. Accordingly, they should closely resemble what they represent, the body and blood of Jesus. Accordingly, bread and wine (or unfermented grape juice) are the elements that should be used if available. In the event the elements are unavailable and cannot be reasonably obtained, alternatives may be considered that closely resemble the elements. At C3, we use gluten-free bread and grape juice placed in individual cups to signify/represent the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Table. We use gluten-free bread and grape juice in individual cups to maximize participation and create less stumbling blocks for our people to come to the Lord's Table. In our church body, we have people with bread allergies, former alcoholics, children under drinking age, and people who have health concerns from taking from a shared bread/cup, etc.

How do you administer the Lord's Table at C3? We explain what communion is, encourage believers in fellowship with God to come forward to the table and receive the elements, encourage the church family to reflect and pray, and we take the elements together as a church.

Who administers the Lord's Table at C3? Pastors/Elders administer the Lord's Table at C3. We discourage the practice of administering the Lord's Table outside of the administration of pastors and elders. The purpose of this policy is not for maintaining exclusivity, but rather for the protection of God's people and the maintaining of proper order in the Church. The Lord's Table is distinguished from the common sharing of food by the faithful proclamation of the Word of God. The elements receive their significance as representative of Christ's body and blood by the faithful proclamation of the Word of God. It was Jesus Himself who proclaimed the words of institution, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" with respect to the bread and the wine. In addition, participation in the Lord's Table bears the risk of judgment for those who participate without faith or without properly examining themselves. Accordingly, the administration of the Lord's Table is not to be taken lightly and should be accompanied by appropriate teaching and awareness. Nevertheless, we will occasionally invite lay members of the church body to participate in the administration of the Lord's Table under the supervision of the pastors/elders. In addition, we may authorize various group leaders to lead groups in the Lord's Supper on occasions after appropriate discussion and preparation for the respective group leader.

How often does C3 partake in the Lord's Table? C3 partakes in the Lord's Table weekly. Just as C3 preaches from the Word of God weekly as an audible proclamation to the Gospel, so also, C3 administers the Lord's Table weekly as a physical proclamation of the Gospel.

Does C3 have a statement about the Lord's Supper in our Teaching Statement that guides what the church believes and practices? Yes. Section 13.4 states: "We believe that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the Lord in which gathered believers eat bread, signifying Christ's body give for His people, and drink the cup of the Lord, signifying the new covenant in Christ's blood. We do this in remembrance of the Lord, and thus proclaim His death until He comes. Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner partake of Christ's body and blood, not physically, but spiritually, in that, by faith, they are nourished with the benefits He obtained through His death, and thus grow in grace. (1 Corinthians 11:34-26, John 6:53-57, 63)