

# The Lord's Supper

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An in-depth look into why we do things the way we do when observing the Lord's Supper. Also examining some of the issues we are discussing in regards to serving the Lord's Supper more than once on a Sunday.

## Part I – The five W's of how we observe the Lord's Supper

1. Why do we observe the Lord's Supper?
  - a. **1 Corinthians 11:17-34** – Paul commands it as a church activity
  - b. **Acts 20:7** – It was the reason they came together
2. How do we observe the Lord's Supper?
  - a. **Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-22**
  - b. Unleavened bread, which represents the body of Christ
  - c. "Fruit of the vine" (typically grape juice), representing the blood of Christ
  - d. Consuming the bread *before* the fruit of the vine
  - e. Prayers before each element
3. When do we observe the Lord's Supper?
  - a. Acts 20:7 – every Sunday
4. Where do we observe the Lord's Supper?
  - a. 1 Corinthians 11:18 – "when you come together," which is the assembly of saints
  - b. As a group, not delivered to individuals in bed, etc.
5. Who can partake of the Lord's Supper?
  - a. To do this without sinning requires "discerning the Lord's body," 1 Cor. 11:29
  - b. This would imply that a level of maturity and faith is necessary
6. What to think and pray about when we observe the Lord's Supper
  - a. Jesus Christ

## Part II – Examining the "second serving"

7. Do we have scriptural authority to serve the Lord's Supper more than once in the same congregation on the same Sunday?
  - a. Disagreement typically hinges on what is the meaning of "waiting for one another" (1 Corinthians 11:33)
8. Logistical challenges in serving it twice
  - a. In a small congregation, sometimes there is no one present to serve it the second time, even when there are those who want to partake
9. What are some ways forward?
  - a. Altering service times is often a way to mitigate the decision

## Part I – The five W’s of how we observe the Lord’s Supper

### 1. Why do we observe the Lord’s Supper?

In other words, how do we know that this is actually something we must do in an exact, prescribed way as an assembled church, and not just a story of something Jesus did?

For example, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:1-16). It was an example for Christians to follow (how is another discussion), but is it something we must do as a church? We don’t see any example of that.

But in **1 Corinthians 11:17-34** we see where Paul commands the Lord’s Supper as a church activity. Verses 17 and 20: “But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ... When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.”

Obviously, Paul is telling the Corinthians what they are doing *wrong*, but he is also clearly implying that they should have known better. It’s assumed that we should come together to eat the Lord’s Supper.

Also, in **Acts 20:7**, it was the reason the disciples came together. “And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...” (KJV).

### 2. How do we observe the Lord’s Supper?

In addition to 1 Corinthians 11, we read of the accounts of Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper in:

- **Matthew 26:26-29**
- **Mark 14:22-25**
- **Luke 22:14-22**

The accounts in Matthew and Mark are nearly identical. Luke’s has some differences which we will discuss later. In total, we see that Jesus gave bread and “fruit of the vine” (grape juice or wine) and prayed for each separately, and that clearly the disciples drank the cup after eating the bread. Let’s look at some details.

### What is unleavened bread, and why do we use that as the bread?

Unleavened bread is bread made without yeast or any other leavening agent that makes dough rise. We use this because that is what Jesus must have served.

The tricky part is that it’s not actually commanded or even described in all of the scriptures listed above. But we know that’s what was used because this was the time of the Passover, specifically during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (**Mark 14:12**).

## Why do we serve the bread before the fruit of the vine and separately from it?

All accounts make this clear:

- **1 Corinthians 11:25**, “he took the cup, after supper”
- **Luke 22:20**, “the cup after they had eaten”
- **Matthew 26:26-27** and **Mark 14:22-23** mention the two in this order but without explicitly saying “after”

Luke’s account is the only confusing one. Luke mentions a cup twice, both before and after the bread. Some say there were two cups, but I don’t get that sense. I see it as Jesus blessed the cup, then distributed it, then did the same with the bread, but they didn’t drink the cup until after eating (as it spells out with the words “the cup, after supper”).

## Why do we pray separate prayers before each—one for the bread and one for the cup?

Again, all four accounts seem to make this clear.

- **Matthew 26:26**, “Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat...’”
- **Matthew 26:27**, “And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it...’”
- And the other accounts are just as deliberate

## Some thoughts on order

If you really analyze this, Luke’s events are in this order (Jesus doing them all):

1. Took cup
2. Gave thanks (by implication it is for the cup)
3. Gave the cup (specifically here, he orders the disciples to divide the cup)
4. Says, “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes”
5. Took bread
6. Gave thanks (by implication it is for the bread)
7. Broke the bread
8. Gave the bread
9. Says of the bread, “this is my body”
10. Says of the cup, “this... is the new covenant in my blood”

Matthew and Mark both have it in the same order as each other, but different from Luke; specifically :

5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 1, 2, 3, 10, 4

And 1 Corinthians is more or less the order of Matthew and Mark but with the wording of Luke.

The point is, should we pray for the cup before the bread but drink after it, as Luke seems to have? Or is it OK to pray immediately before each? I would argue that we should stick to order when it is so deliberately spelled out, but where it is not, we have to use discretion and I would say even have *some* liberty in the order.

### 3. When do we observe the Lord's Supper?

Every Sunday, of course!

There is no direct command, though. We do have an example—one example—of a day that the disciples observed the Lord's Supper, and that's in **Acts 20:7**, and it's "the first day of the week." It's not much to go on, but you certainly can't say you are justified in serving it on a Saturday, as Catholics and others do. They have zero support for that.

Why every Sunday, and not just some? Again, we go back to that one passage. It really is easily understandable from Acts 20:7 that this was a habitual practice. The Bible uses similar language with the Sabbath. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," **Exodus 20:8**. No one argues that the Jews were to observe the *occasional* Sabbath. "Remember the day" means to observe it every time it rolls around, whether it's Thanksgiving, Taco Tuesday, or Sunday.

### 4. Where do we observe the Lord's Supper?

In **1 Corinthians 11:18**, the Lord's Supper is observed "when you come together," which is the assembly of the saints. This is a place. It may differ from week to week, but it's wherever the disciples meet together—as a whole that week.

It would be very hard to argue that members of a congregation who partook of the Lord's Supper earlier in the day could go to someone in her home and administer the Lord's Supper to only her or a few people.

### 5. Who can partake of the Lord's Supper?

To do this without sinning requires "discerning the Lord's body," 1 Corinthians 11:29. This would imply that a level of maturity and faith is necessary. The command is given to Jesus' apostles and the church in Corinth and we see disciples observing it in Acts. All of this points to Christians alone.

But we don't stop non-Christians from singing or anything else. I think it's clearly a personal choice, but it does have consequences if done wrong.

## 6. What to think and pray about when we observe the Lord's Supper

We are remembering the body and blood of Jesus Christ. That is the stated purpose.

**Luke 22:19-20**, "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.'"

The prayer before the bread is to give thanks for the bread. That's the example. Not to thank God for this day or flowers or even the church. It's not even to pray for forgiveness. It is to thank God for the bread. By correlation, you might reflect on the meaning of the bread, that it is the body of Christ, that he suffered for us in the flesh. But it's not just a time to pray random thoughts.

The prayer for the cup should be very similar. Pray for the fruit of the vine, and by correlation, perhaps the blood of Christ and the new covenant in his blood. But not the rapture or a desire for brotherly love and unity.

Think and pray about Jesus. It's not about us! It's barely about any application to us. It's about this man that died for our sins. Not our sins—the man. Think about the man.

What about **1 Corinthians 11:25-29**? "...Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself."

Some focus on the phrase "Let a person examine himself," and say that means we should consider if we have any sin before partaking of the Lord's Supper. I think this is taking the phrase out of context. The context is reflecting on the bread and cup. Are you "discerning the body"? Are you considering the purpose of this meal, or is it just some silly tradition to you?

You might consider **1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 21** and **John 6:53-58** as well.

## Part II – Examining the “second serving”

7. Do we have scriptural authority to serve the Lord’s Supper more than once in the same congregation on the same Sunday?

Some think it is wrong to have two servings of the Lord’s Supper in the same day at the same congregation (like serving it at the 10:30 AM service when most partake, and at the 2 PM service, for any that missed the morning). Others think it is acceptable to serve it twice. Here and in most places, this is a respectful disagreement and congregations can and do still function well when people disagree on this.

The main point of disagreement is over the meaning of “wait (tarry) for one another” in **1 Corinthians 11:33**. Incidentally, there is no substantive difference in translations:

ESV “So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another”  
KJV “Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.”  
NASB “So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”

### What does it mean to wait or tarry for each other?

- Some say a second serving is waiting, by being considerate of those traveling or caring for someone at home, for example
- Others might say the second serving is simply a continuation of the first. Consider when someone says “The table has been left prepared.”
- Others say it is the opposite—eating and leaving and coming back is not waiting. Consider the rebuke in **1 Corinthians 11:21-22**, “For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.... Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.”

### What is the problem and what is the solution in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34?

The problem is that some get no food while some are eating a lot. I think it is clear that there was enough food to go around if people had been considerate.

**1 Corinthians 11:20-22**, “When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.”

The solution is to wait for each other. To wait. Not to get more food.

**1 Corinthians 11:33-34**, “So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment”

Is a second serving waiting? Or is it more food? That might depend on the congregation.

## 8. Logistical challenges in serving it twice

A separate but related concern is that there are so few men willing to serve the Lord's Supper in the afternoons in the Garden City congregation that there have been days when there was literally no one present to serve it—all of the men who are willing to serve it were absent that afternoon.

## 9. What are some ways forward?

Here are some common options.

### Option 1: status quo

Continue offering the Lord's Supper twice and hope there is someone there to serve it in the afternoon if needed.

### Option 2: only once, same services

Keep the same service times but offer the Lord's Supper only in the morning.

### Option 3: change services

Eliminate the afternoon service, extend the morning and offer the Lord's Supper only at the last block of the service. Typical setup for this is:

- 9 AM sermon
- 9:45 AM classes
- 10:45 AM songs, Lord's Supper, giving and sermon