

THE LORD'S SUPPER

An Exhaustive Doctrinal Bible Study

From Passover to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Old Testament • New Testament • Reformed Theology • Protestant Positions

Prepared for Personal Bible Study

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INTRODUCTION

The Lord's Supper stands at the center of Christian worship. It is embedded in the biblical pattern of eating and covenant from the garden onward (Genesis 2–3), prefigured by the Passover (Exodus 12), ratified in a covenant meal at Sinai (Exodus 24), promised in the Prophets (Isaiah 25; Jeremiah 31), instituted by Christ on the night he was betrayed (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22), interpreted by Christ in John 6, practiced by the apostolic church (Acts 2; 20), regulated by Paul (1 Corinthians 10–11), grounded in the once-for-all sacrifice explained in Hebrews, and consummated in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19). It is at once a memorial, a communion, a proclamation, a covenant sign and seal, and a foretaste of the age to come. The church has agreed that it is all of these things and has disagreed, often bitterly, about how they fit together.

This study works through every major Lord's Supper text in canonical order, examines the Hebrew and Greek vocabulary, and draws out the doctrinal implications at each point. The exegesis proceeds within the framework of **Reformed systematic theology**: covenant theology, the analogy of faith, Christ-centered typology, and the sacraments understood as signs and seals of the covenant of grace. Section 16 sets out the Reformed doctrine of the Supper in full.

Because the Supper divides Protestants more than almost any other doctrine, Section 17 then presents the other major Protestant readings — **Lutheran, Zwinglian and Memorialist, Anglican, Wesleyan, and Anabaptist / Believers' Church** — in their own terms, with their strongest texts and their principal criticisms of one another. Section 18 addresses the disputed practical questions (frequency, elements, participants, administration). The goal is not to settle every controversy but to equip the student to understand each Protestant position as its own advocates would state it, and to see precisely which texts carry the weight in each argument.

How to Use This Study

- **Canonical order:** Sections 2–14 follow the biblical canon from Genesis to Revelation. Sections 15–19 move to church history, systematic theology, comparative positions, and synthesis.
- **The pattern at each passage:** Text → language → doctrinal significance → how the passage is read across traditions. Where Protestants agree, the study says so; where they divide, the disagreement is stated fairly.
- **Scripture quotations:** Quotations follow the English Standard Version (ESV) and are occasionally abbreviated with ellipses. Consult your own Bible for the full context of each passage.
- **Original languages:** Hebrew and Greek terms are transliterated in the text; the script appears in the vocabulary tables of Section 1.
- **Confessional citations:** Quotations from the Westminster Standards, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and other historic documents are taken from their standard English texts. Larger works are cited by title and section rather than page.
- **Scope:** Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox teaching is mentioned only where necessary to explain what the Protestant Reformers were responding to. The focus is on the range of Protestant interpretation.

SECTION 1: GREEK AND HEBREW VOCABULARY

The Names of the Supper

The New Testament has no single fixed name for the meal. Each name highlights a different dimension of what Christ instituted, and the names Christians choose often signal their theology.

- **“The Lord’s Supper” (kyriakon deipnon, 1 Corinthians 11:20):** The adjective kyriakos (“belonging to the Lord”) occurs only twice in the New Testament — here and in “the Lord’s Day” (kyriakē hēmera, Revelation 1:10). Deipnon is the main, evening meal. Paul’s point is sharp: what the Corinthians are doing is not (ouk estin) the Lord’s Supper.
- **“The Lord’s Table” (trapeza kyriou, 1 Corinthians 10:21):** Echoes Malachi 1:7, 12, where “the table of the LORD” is the altar. Table language is covenant language: to sit at someone’s table is to be in fellowship with him. Paul sets it against “the table of demons.”
- **“Communion” (koinōnia, 1 Corinthians 10:16):** Participation, sharing, partnership. Paul asks whether the cup and the bread are a koinōnia in the blood and body of Christ.
- **“Eucharist” (eucharistia; eucharistēsas, Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24):** “Giving thanks.” The accounts use both eulogēsas (“blessing,” Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22) and eucharistēsas (“giving thanks,” Luke 22:19; Matthew 26:27), reflecting the Hebrew barakh. The two verbs are used interchangeably.
- **“The breaking of the bread” (hē klasis tou artou, Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42):** Whether the phrase always denotes the Supper, or sometimes an ordinary shared meal, is debated (Section 11).
- **“Love feast” (agapai, Jude 12):** A communal meal associated with the Supper in some early churches.
- **“Sacrament” (Latin sacramentum) and “ordinance”:** Sacramentum, a Latin term for an oath or pledge, was used to render the Greek mystērion. Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican churches retain “sacrament.” Baptists and many free churches prefer “ordinance,” stressing that Christ ordained it as an act of obedience.

Key Greek Terms in the Institution Narratives and Epistles

Term	Meaning	Significance
τοῦτό ἐστιν touto estin	“This is”	The copula on which the sacramental debate turns. Jesus almost certainly spoke Aramaic, which typically omits “is.” See Section 9.
σῶμα sōma	“Body”	The whole person given for others. The institution narratives use sōma; John 6 uses sarx (“flesh”).
αἷμα haima	“Blood”	Life poured out in sacrificial death (Leviticus 17:11); covenant blood (Exodus 24:8).
διαθήκη diathēkē	“Covenant” (also “will, testament”)	Septuagint rendering of Hebrew berit. Hebrews 9:15–18 plays on both senses.
ἐκχυννόμενον ekchynnomenon	“Being poured out”	Sacrificial language of blood poured out; echoes Isaiah 53:12 (“poured out his soul to death”).
ὕπερ hyper	“On behalf of, for”	Substitutionary and representative: “for you,” “for many.”

Term	Meaning	Significance
ἀνάμνησις anamnēsis	“Remembrance, memorial”	Occurs only in Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24–25; Hebrews 10:3. Hebrew background: zikkaron.
κοινωνία koinōnia	“Participation, fellowship”	1 Corinthians 10:16 — the heart of the debate over presence.
καταγγέλλετε katangellete	“You proclaim”	1 Corinthians 11:26. The Supper is a public declaration of the Lord’s death.
ἀναξίως anaxiōs	“In an unworthy manner”	An adverb (1 Corinthians 11:27): it describes how one eats, not the eater’s moral rank.
διακρίνων diakrinōn	“Discerning, distinguishing”	1 Corinthians 11:29 — what is the “body” being discerned? See Section 12.
ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ achri hou elthē	“Until he comes”	The eschatological limit of the ordinance (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Key Hebrew Terms in the Old Testament Background

Term	Meaning	Significance
פֶּסַח pesach	“Passover”	The lamb, the festival, and the act of sparing (cf. Isaiah 31:5).
זִכָּרוֹן zikkaron	“Memorial”	Not mere mental recollection but a covenant act performed before God and people (Exodus 12:14; 28:12; Numbers 10:10).
בְּרִית berit	“Covenant”	Usually “cut” (karat); ratified by sacrifice and blood, often sealed with a meal.
דַּם הַבְּרִית dam ha-berit	“Blood of the covenant”	Exodus 24:8; Zechariah 9:11. Jesus’ words echo this phrase.
מַצָּה matzah	“Unleavened bread”	Bread of haste and purity (Exodus 12:15–20); “bread of affliction” (lechem oni, Deuteronomy 16:3).
לֶחֶם הַפָּנִים lechem ha-panim	“Bread of the Presence”	Twelve loaves set weekly before the LORD (Leviticus 24:5–9).
שְׁלָמִים shelamim	“Peace / fellowship offerings”	The sacrificial meal shared among God, priest, and worshiper (Leviticus 3; 7:11–21).
תּוֹדָה todah	“Thanksgiving”	The thank offering, eaten with others as public praise for deliverance (Leviticus 7:12–15; Psalm 116:17).

A caution on the Greek eucharistia: it is sometimes said to translate todah in the Septuagint, but the standard Septuagint renderings of todah are words for praise and confession. The todah sacrifice is the closest Old Testament liturgical analogue to the Christian thanksgiving meal, but the linguistic bridge is conceptual rather than lexical.

SECTION 2: THE TABLE IN GENESIS — CREATION AND THE PATRIARCHS

Genesis 1–3 — Food, Fellowship, and the First Covenant Test

God's first act toward humanity after blessing them is to give food (Genesis 1:29; 2:16). The garden contains the tree of life (2:9) and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The first covenant test concerns eating (2:16–17), and the fall is an act of eating (3:6). After the fall, humanity is barred from the tree of life (3:22–24). The rest of the canon narrates the restoration of right eating in God's presence, which ends where it began: "the tree of life" appears again in Revelation 2:7 and 22:2, 14.

- **Eating as covenant act:** In Scripture, what one eats and with whom marks covenant loyalty. The Supper belongs to this pattern.
- **The tree of life as sign:** Reformed theologians such as Herman Witsius treated the tree of life as a sacramental sign of the covenant of works, confirming to Adam the life promised on obedience. The parallel with the Supper is that both are covenant signs attached to life.
- **Bread by the sweat of the brow:** Genesis 3:17–19 makes bread a burden until the ground reclaims humanity. Jesus, the bread from heaven (John 6:33, 51), gives bread that does not perish (John 6:27).

Genesis 14:18–20 — Melchizedek's Bread and Wine

Genesis 14:18 (ESV) — *"And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)"*

Hebrews 7 develops Melchizedek as a type of Christ's priesthood, but neither Genesis 14 nor Hebrews 7 says anything about the bread and wine. The early church (for example Cyprian, Letter 63) read them as a type of the Eucharist, and the Roman Catholic tradition builds on this to argue for a sacrificial priesthood. Most Protestant interpreters decline the connection because the New Testament itself does not draw it. Calvin (Commentary on Genesis 14:18) argued that the bread and wine were provisions for Abraham's weary men and refused to make them a proof-text for the Mass. The passage is best read as covenant hospitality after victory.

Genesis 15, 17 — The Cut Covenant and the Sacramental Sign Pattern

Genesis 15:9–21 shows covenant ratification: animals are divided, and God himself passes between the pieces, taking the covenant curse upon himself. Genesis 17 adds the sign of circumcision, and the pattern of speech is what matters for the Supper.

Genesis 17:10–11 (ESV) — *"This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you."*

Romans 4:11 (ESV) — *"He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."*

- **Sign-language:** God says "This is my covenant" of the sign of the covenant. The thing signified and the sign are named together. Reformed exegetes see the same idiom in "This is my body... this is my blood of the covenant."

- **“Sign and seal”:** Romans 4:11 supplies the classic Reformed definition of a sacrament: an outward sign that seals what God has promised to faith (Westminster Confession 27.1).
- **Before Sinai:** Sacramental signs precede the Mosaic law: the rainbow (Genesis 9:12–17) and circumcision (17:11). For Reformed theology this shows that sacraments belong to the covenant of grace itself and are not merely Mosaic ceremonies.

Genesis 18, 26, 31 — Covenant Meals

- **Genesis 18:1–8:** Abraham feeds the LORD and two angels. The meal precedes the renewed promise of Isaac. God eats in fellowship with his covenant friend.
- **Genesis 26:28–31:** Isaac and Abimelech make a covenant; Isaac “made them a feast, and they ate and drank” (v. 30), and they swore an oath the next morning.
- **Genesis 31:44–54:** Jacob and Laban make a covenant, Jacob offers a sacrifice on the mountain, and “called his kinsmen to eat bread” (v. 54).

In the ancient Near East, covenants were ratified by sacrifice and sealed with a meal. To eat someone’s bread was to be bound to him in loyalty, which is why Psalm 41:9 (“who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me”) is the sharpest picture of betrayal, and why John 13:18 applies it to Judas.

SECTION 3: THE PASSOVER — EXODUS 12–13 AND ITS RENEWALS

Exodus 12:1–13 — The Lamb, the Blood, and the Meal

Exodus 12:13 (ESV) — *“The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will fall upon you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.”*

The Passover establishes the structure that the Supper will fulfill. An unblemished male lamb is chosen on the tenth day and slaughtered at twilight on the fourteenth (12:3–6). Its blood is applied to the doorposts and lintel (12:7). Its flesh is roasted and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, in haste, by the whole household (12:8–11). Nothing is left until morning (12:10).

- **Substitution:** Judgment falls either on the firstborn of the household or on the lamb. The lamb dies in the place of the firstborn.
- **Blood applied by faith:** The blood protects those under it who obey. Hebrews 11:28: “By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.”
- **Atonement and nourishment together:** Israel is not only spared by the blood but fed by the lamb. Redemption and participation belong together in the same ordinance. This double structure — saved by a death, fed by the victim — is the deep grammar of the Supper.
- **“It is the LORD’s Passover”:** Exodus 12:11 says of the meal itself: “It is the LORD’s Passover.” The sacrificial meal is called by the name of the saving act it signifies, an idiom the Reformed tradition finds again in “This is my body.”

- **Not a bone broken:** Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 prescribe that no bone of the lamb be broken. John 19:36 cites this at the cross.
- **Unleavened bread:** Purity and haste (12:15–20). Paul applies it: “Cleanse out the old leaven... For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Exodus 12:14–28 and 13:3–16 — Memorial and Catechesis

Exodus 12:14 (ESV) — *“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.”*

Exodus 12:26–27 (ESV) — *“And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’”*

- **Zikkaron (memorial):** The memorial is a liturgical act that brings the saving event into the present life of the people. Later Jewish tradition (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5) states that in every generation a person must see himself as if he had come out of Egypt. Whatever its date as codified, this captures the participatory sense of memorial that stands behind Jesus’ “Do this in remembrance of me.”
- **Explained ordinance:** The children’s question (12:26; 13:8) makes the ordinance a teaching moment. The signs are never mute: they are accompanied by the Word that explains them. This is a foundation of Reformed insistence that Word and sacrament belong together.
- **Covenant households:** The whole household — including children — is included in the Passover meal (12:3–4). This becomes a central text in the Reformed debate over children at the Table (Section 18).

Exodus 12:43–51 — Who May Eat?

No foreigner may eat the Passover. A purchased slave or a resident alien may eat if circumcised, and then “he shall be as a native of the land” (12:48). The Passover is a covenant meal, and the covenant sign is the gate to it. Reformed churches draw the parallel: baptism, which replaces circumcision as the covenant sign (Colossians 2:11–12), is the entrance to the Table. This is the basis for “fencing” the Table (Section 16, Section 18). Baptists, who reserve baptism for professing believers, also require baptism for the Supper, but for a different reason: they read the covenant’s membership as regenerate from the outset (Jeremiah 31:34).

Numbers 9 and Deuteronomy 16 — The Second Passover and the Bread of Affliction

- **Numbers 9:1–14:** Those ceremonially unclean or on a journey keep a “second Passover” a month later. Neglecting it without cause results in being “cut off” (9:13). Uncleanliness is not an excuse to omit the ordinance; it is a reason to prepare properly.
- **Deuteronomy 16:1–8:** The Passover is centralized at the sanctuary. The unleavened bread is “the bread of affliction” (lechem oni, v. 3), eaten “that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.” Remembrance is a lifelong discipline.

Renewals — Joshua 5, 2 Chronicles 30 and 35, Ezra 6

Every major renewal of Israel's covenant fidelity is marked by a Passover:

- **Joshua 5:10–12:** Passover at Gilgal after circumcision on entering the land; the manna ceases the next day and Israel eats the produce of the land.
- **2 Chronicles 30:** Hezekiah's Passover. Many had not cleansed themselves, and "they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed" (v. 18). Hezekiah prays: "May the good LORD pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God..." and "the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people" (vv. 18–20). God attends to the seeking heart within his own ordinance, while the passage also shows that disorder in approach has consequences that need healing.
- **2 Chronicles 35:** Josiah's Passover: "No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel" (v. 18).
- **Ezra 6:19–22:** The returned exiles keep Passover together with everyone who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to seek the LORD (v. 21).

Christ Our Passover in the New Testament

- **John 1:29:** "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
- **John 6:4:** "Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand" — the setting for the bread of life discourse.
- **John 19:14, 31–36:** Jesus is condemned on "the day of Preparation of the Passover" and dies with no bone broken (Exodus 12:46).
- **Luke 22:15:** "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."
- **1 Corinthians 5:7:** "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."
- **1 Peter 1:18–19:** Redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."
- **Revelation 5:6–12:** The Lamb "as though it had been slain" receives the worship of heaven.

Passover and Lord's Supper Compared

Feature	Passover	Lord's Supper
Lamb	Unblemished lamb slain (Exodus 12:5)	Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19)
Blood	Applied to doorposts (12:7)	"Blood of the covenant" (Matthew 26:28), applied to the conscience by faith (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22)
Deliverance	From Egypt and the death of the firstborn	From sin, death, and wrath (Colossians 1:13–14)
Meal	Lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs	Bread and cup; participation in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16)
Memorial	Zikkaron (12:14)	Anamnēsis (Luke 22:19)
Participants	Circumcised covenant members (12:48)	Baptized believers (Reformed and most Protestants; children debated)
Frequency	Annual	Regular (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:26)

Feature	Passover	Lord's Supper
Hope	The promised land	"Until he comes" — the new creation (Matthew 26:29; Revelation 19:9)

SECTION 4: THE SINAI COVENANT MEAL, MANNA, AND THE BREAD OF THE PRESENCE

Exodus 24:1–11 — The Covenant Ratified and the Meal Eaten

Exodus 24:8 (ESV) — *"And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"*

Exodus 24:11 (ESV) — *"And he did not lay his hand on the chiefs of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank."*

This is the most important Old Testament background to the words of institution. The sequence matters: the covenant words are read and accepted (24:3–7), sacrifice is offered, half the blood is thrown on the altar and half on the people (24:6–8), and only then do Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders ascend, see the God of Israel, and eat and drink in his presence (24:9–11). They can eat in God's presence because the blood has been applied.

- **"Blood of the covenant":** The Hebrew *dam ha-berit* occurs in Exodus 24:8 and Zechariah 9:11. In the Septuagint, Moses says *idou to haima tēs diathēkēs* ("behold the blood of the covenant"). Jesus says *touto estin to haima mou tēs diathēkēs* ("this is my blood of the covenant"). The verbal link is unmistakable, and Hebrews 9:18–22 explicitly reads Exodus 24 as the pattern for the blood of Christ.
- **Word, sign, and meal:** The Sinai ceremony has the same three parts as the Reformed doctrine of a sacrament: the Word that explains, the sign (blood) that seals, and the meal that communicates fellowship with God.
- **Eating in God's presence:** "They beheld God, and ate and drank" (24:11) anticipates Jesus' promise that the apostles will "eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (Luke 22:30) and the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). The Supper is the new covenant's meal, but the full vision remains future.
- **Hebrews 12:24:** The church has come "to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

Exodus 16 and Deuteronomy 8 — Manna, the Bread from Heaven

Manna (*man hu*, "What is it?") was God's daily provision in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4, 14–35). It came only as needed, could not be hoarded, and stopped when Israel reached the land (Joshua 5:12). A jar of it was placed before the LORD in the ark (Exodus 16:32–34; Hebrews 9:4).

Psalms 78:24–25 (ESV) — *"He rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance."*

Deuteronomy 8:3 (ESV) — *“He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”*

- **Word and bread together:** Moses interprets manna as a lesson about the Word. Jesus quotes this verse against the tempter (Matthew 4:4) and then develops it in John 6, where the bread from heaven is himself.
- **Spiritual food:** Paul says that Israel “all ate the same spiritual food” (1 Corinthians 10:3). Manna was a real sign of Christ to Old Testament believers (Westminster Confession 27.5).
- **Provisional food for pilgrims:** The manna ceased at Gilgal when Israel ate the produce of the land. The Supper is likewise food for the wilderness journey, given “until he comes.”
- **Revelation 2:17:** The victorious church is promised “some of the hidden manna.”

The Rock — Exodus 17:1–7, Numbers 20:1–13, 1 Corinthians 10:4

Paul says of the water from the rock that “the Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). Many Reformed interpreters observe that the rock is struck once in Exodus 17:6 and commanded to be spoken to in Numbers 20:8. Moses’ second striking (20:11) blurs the type of a sacrifice made once. Whatever one makes of that detail, Paul’s claim is clear: the Old Testament people drank Christ, spiritually, and he was truly present to their faith. This supports the Reformed argument that Christ’s saving presence to faith does not depend on a local, bodily presence in an element.

Exodus 25:23–30 and Leviticus 24:5–9 — The Bread of the Presence

Twelve loaves of bread were set in two rows on a golden table before the LORD every Sabbath, with frankincense, along with vessels for drink offerings (Exodus 25:29). It was called *lechem ha-panim*, “bread of the Presence” or “bread of the face.” The priests ate it in a holy place as “a perpetual due” (Leviticus 24:9).

- **A table in God’s house:** The bread stands continually in God’s presence and represents all twelve tribes in fellowship with him. Hebrews 9:2 lists “the table and the bread of the Presence” among the furnishings of the first tent.
- **Priestly eating:** Only the priests could eat it. In Christ all believers are a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6) and may eat at the Lord’s table.
- **Jesus’ use:** Matthew 12:3–4 (1 Samuel 21:1–6): David ate the bread of the Presence in need. Christ’s greater priesthood means his people are fed at God’s table without profaning it.

SECTION 5: SACRIFICIAL MEALS — THE FELLOWSHIP AND THANK OFFERINGS

Leviticus 3 and 7:11–21 — The Peace Offering (Shelamim)

The fellowship offering is the Old Testament sacrificial meal proper. Three parties share in it: the fat and blood belong to the LORD, the breast and right thigh to the priests (7:31–34), and the remainder is eaten

by the worshiper and his guests in a state of ritual cleanness “before the LORD.” Leviticus distinguishes three kinds: the thank offering (todah), the vow, and the freewill offering (7:12–16).

- **Atonement first, communion after:** In the ordination and inaugural sequence, the sin offering and burnt offering precede the peace offering (Leviticus 9:8–22). Fellowship with God is enjoyed on the basis of atonement already made. The Supper is the meal of the reconciled and presupposes the cross.
- **Eaten the same day:** The thank offering must be eaten on the day it is offered (7:15) — no stored supply of grace, only fresh dependence.
- **Cleanness:** “But if anyone eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of the LORD’s peace offerings while an uncleanness is on him, that person shall be cut off from his people” (7:20). The seriousness of eating at God’s table unfit is old, and it lies behind Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27–30.
- **Communion:** Paul draws on this practice directly: “Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?” (1 Corinthians 10:18).

Deuteronomy 12, 14, 16, 27 — Eating and Rejoicing Before the LORD

Deuteronomy 12:7 (ESV) — *“And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.”*

- **Deuteronomy 14:22–27:** The tithe may be turned into money to buy “whatever your appetite craves — oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink” and eaten before the LORD with rejoicing (v. 26). The purpose is “that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always” (v. 23).
- **Deuteronomy 27:7:** At the covenant renewal on Mount Ebal, Israel is to “sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God.”
- **Doctrinal implication:** Joy is commanded at God’s table. The Supper is solemn, but it is not a funeral. Reformed liturgy has always sought to keep both reverence and gladness together.

The Prohibition of Blood — Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10–14

Leviticus 17:11 (ESV) — *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”*

Because blood was forbidden as food, “drink his blood” in John 6:53–56 would strike a Jewish hearer as doubly shocking. Augustine (On Christian Doctrine 3.16.24) reasoned that a command which appears to require a crime is a figure of speech, requiring us to share in the Lord’s passion. Protestants of every tradition have used this argument against a crude literal reading, while Lutherans and Catholics reply that the Supper is not cannibalistic because Christ’s body is present in a sacramental, not natural, manner.

The Thank Offering — Todah

- **Leviticus 7:12–15; Psalm 50:14; 107:22; 116:17:** The todah is offered by someone who has been delivered. He publicly declares what God has done, and the sacrifice is eaten with the community.
- **Parallels to the Supper:** Both are meals of thanksgiving for deliverance (eucharistia), both involve public proclamation (1 Corinthians 11:26), and both are shared with the covenant

community. Scholars across traditions note the connection as a conceptual background to the Christian thanksgiving meal, though the New Testament does not draw it explicitly.

The Priests' Portion and Hebrews 13:10

The priests ate portions of the sin offering and the grain offering (Leviticus 6:16, 26; 7:6, 31–34; 1 Corinthians 9:13). Hebrews 13:10–11 alludes to the fact that the sin offerings whose blood was brought into the sanctuary could not be eaten — their bodies were burned outside the camp (Leviticus 16:27). Christ suffered “outside the gate” (Hebrews 13:12), and his people feed on him by faith. See Section 13.

SECTION 6: THE PROPHETS AND THE MESSIANIC BANQUET

Isaiah 25:6–9 — The Feast on the Mountain and the Death of Death

Isaiah 25:6–8 (ESV) — *“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces...”*

- **God is the host:** The LORD himself spreads the table. The Supper is Christ's table, not ours.
- **For all peoples:** The feast is universal, as Christ's blood is shed “for many” (Matthew 26:28) and the kingdom includes those “from east and west” (Matthew 8:11).
- **The end of death:** The feast is inseparable from the destruction of death. Paul cites verse 8 in 1 Corinthians 15:54, and John echoes it in Revelation 21:4. The Supper proclaims the Lord's death and looks forward to death's end.
- **Already and not yet:** The Supper is a foretaste of this feast, celebrated “until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Isaiah 53 — The Servant Poured Out for Many

Isaiah 53:12 (ESV) — *“...because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”*

The interpretive frame for “poured out for many” (Mark 14:24) is Isaiah 53. “Many” (rabbim) recurs in 53:11–12, and Luke 22:37 places a citation of this very verse in the upper room (“And he was numbered with the transgressors”). The words of institution cast Jesus as the Suffering Servant whose death bears sin and whose body and blood are given for others.

Isaiah 55:1–3 — Come, Buy Wine and Milk Without Money

Isaiah 55:1 (ESV) — *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”*

The invitation is to eat and drink, and it is tied to hearing (“Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live,” 55:3) and to an “everlasting covenant.” The Supper offers grace freely to those with nothing to bring; it is for the hungry and thirsty. It also joins Word and meal: to hear is to eat.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 — The New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:33–34 (ESV) — *“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

Jesus’ words over the cup — “the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25) — are the New Testament’s most direct appropriation of this promise, and Hebrews 8:8–12 and 10:16–17 cite it at length. The four promises are an internal law, a covenant relationship, universal knowledge of God, and full forgiveness.

- **Reformed reading:** The “new” covenant is the covenant of grace in its final administration, not a different way of salvation (Westminster Confession 7.5–6). Its members include the visible church, with the covenant’s inward reality realized in the elect.
- **Baptist reading:** “They shall all know me” (v. 34) means the new covenant community is composed of regenerate people. This is a main reason Baptists limit baptism and the Supper to professing believers, and it has been the fault line between paedobaptist and credobaptist readings of the Supper’s participants.
- **Forgiveness at the Table:** Matthew alone adds “for the forgiveness of sins” to the cup word (26:28), which echoes Jeremiah 31:34.

Ezekiel 36–37 and 39 — Cleansing, Spirit, Covenant of Peace, and Two Feasts

- **Ezekiel 36:25–27:** God sprinkles clean water, gives a new heart, and puts his Spirit within his people. The efficacy of the sacraments in Reformed theology is the Spirit’s work in the covenant people.
- **Ezekiel 37:26–28:** “I will make a covenant of peace with them... My dwelling place shall be with them.”
- **Ezekiel 39:17–20:** A different feast: God summons birds and beasts to “a sacrificial feast” of the slain armies of Gog. Revelation 19:17–18 takes this up as “the great supper of God,” which sets the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9) beside it. There are two suppers and two destinies (Section 14).

Other Prophetic Texts

- **Zechariah 9:11:** “Because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.” The blood of the covenant liberates captives, in the context of the king who comes on a donkey (9:9).
- **Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13–14:** In the coming age the mountains “drip sweet wine.” The messianic age is depicted as one of overflowing wine.
- **Malachi 1:7–12:** The “table of the LORD” is despised by unworthy offerings, and God announces that “in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering” (v. 11). The early

church (Didache 14) applied this to the Christian Eucharist, and Roman Catholic theology makes it a proof-text for the Mass. The Reformers read it as the spiritual sacrifices of praise, prayer, and thanksgiving offered by the nations (Hebrews 13:15; Romans 12:1).

SECTION 7: THE PSALMS AND WISDOM LITERATURE

Psalm 22 — The Afflicted Shall Eat and Be Satisfied

Psalm 22:26 (ESV) — *“The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever!”*

Psalm 22 is the psalm of the cross (Matthew 27:46). Its second half follows the classic *todah* pattern: the delivered sufferer declares God’s name in the great assembly, fulfills his vows, and a meal follows in which the poor are satisfied (22:22–26). The ends of the earth “shall remember and turn to the LORD” (22:27). The crucified Christ is the deliverer whose deliverance becomes a meal for the poor.

Psalm 23:5, 34:8, 36:8 — The Prepared Table and the Taste of Grace

- **Psalm 23:5:** “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” Covenant hospitality is extended in the face of hostility. The Psalm does not mention the Supper, but Christian worship has long heard its resonance.
- **Psalm 34:8:** “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!” Cited in 1 Peter 2:3 to describe the believer’s experience of Christ.
- **Psalm 36:8:** “They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.”

Psalms 113–118 — The Egyptian Hallel and the Cup of Salvation

These psalms were sung at Passover, and Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26 report that after the meal Jesus and his disciples “sang a hymn” before going to the Mount of Olives. If this was the Hallel, Jesus went to Gethsemane and the cross with Psalm 118 in his mouth.

Psalm 116:12–13 (ESV) — *“What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.”*

- **Psalm 116:17:** “I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (*todah*).
- **Psalm 116:15:** “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”
- **Psalm 118:22–27:** The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone; “Hosanna” (v. 25); “the LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar” (v. 27).

Cup in Scripture	Reference	Meaning
Cup of salvation	Psalm 116:13	Deliverance celebrated in thanksgiving
Cup of wrath	Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15	Divine judgment against sin
Cup of suffering	Matthew 20:22; 26:39; John 18:11	Christ drinks the cup of wrath

Cup in Scripture	Reference	Meaning
Cup of blessing	1 Corinthians 10:16	Participation in Christ's blood
Cup of the covenant	Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25	The new covenant in Christ's blood
New cup in the kingdom	Matthew 26:29	The eschatological wine at the marriage supper

Christ drinks the cup of wrath so that his people may drink the cup of salvation. The single word “cup” holds the entire theology of substitution.

Psalm 41:9 — The Betrayer at the Table

Psalm 41:9 (ESV) — *“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.”*

John 13:18 applies this to Judas. To eat someone's bread was to enter into covenant fellowship with him; the betrayal is a covenant breach at the table. Every Supper is celebrated in the shadow of the betrayal: “on the night when he was betrayed” (1 Corinthians 11:23).

Psalm 78:19 — Can God Spread a Table in the Wilderness?

Israel's unbelieving question is answered by Christ, who spreads a table in the wilderness of a fallen world — in the feedings of the five thousand and four thousand and in the Supper he gives his church.

Proverbs 9:1–6 — Wisdom's Banquet

Proverbs 9:5–6 (ESV) — *“Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”*

Wisdom has “built her house,” slaughtered her beasts, and set her table (9:1–2). Folly sets a rival table (9:13–18). Two tables and two invitations anticipate Paul's “you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:21). Christ is “the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30).

Nehemiah 8:9–12 — Word and Feast Together

Nehemiah 8:10 (ESV) — *“Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”*

After the public reading and exposition of the Law, the people weep, and are told to celebrate. The pattern is Word, then meal, then joy, and the meal includes provision for the poor. Word and sacrament belong together, and a Table that ignores the poor (1 Corinthians 11:21–22) violates its own nature.

SECTION 8: THE TABLE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

The Feasting Messiah

Jesus was known for his meals. “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (Matthew 11:19). His table fellowship is enacted grace, and it explains the scandal of the Supper: the Lord who receives sinners at his table (Luke 15:2) calls his church to keep that table.

- **Mark 2:15–17:** Jesus reclines with tax collectors and sinners: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”
- **Luke 7:36–50:** A forgiven sinner anoints him at a Pharisee’s table.
- **Luke 19:1–10:** Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus’s house, and salvation comes to that house through a meal.
- **Luke 15:** The father’s feast for the returned son shows the heart of the God who hosts the Table.

The Reformed tradition draws two lessons. First, the Table is for sinners who come in repentance and faith, not for the self-righteous; the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 81) says it is for those who are displeased with themselves for their sins yet trust that they are forgiven. Second, the Table has a boundary, because the same Jesus who eats with sinners also says “do not give dogs what is holy” (Matthew 7:6) and commands church discipline (Matthew 18:15–20).

The Wedding at Cana — John 2:1–11

The first sign is a wine miracle at a wedding. Six stone jars for purification, holding twenty to thirty gallons each, are filled with water and become wine, and the master of the feast says, “You have kept the good wine until now” (2:10). The abundance recalls the wine of the age to come (Isaiah 25:6; Amos 9:13). Jesus says that his “hour has not yet come” (2:4); that hour arrives when “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (13:1), in the upper room. The sign is a preview of the messianic banquet, and the abundant wine looks ahead to the cup that Christ will pour out.

The Feeding Miracles

Jesus feeds five thousand (Mark 6:30–44; Matthew 14:13–21; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15) and four thousand (Mark 8:1–10; Matthew 15:32–39). In the manner of Elisha (2 Kings 4:42–44), and greater than Moses, he provides bread in the wilderness.

Passage	Verbs
Feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:41)	took (lambanō) the loaves, blessed (eulogeō), broke (klaō), gave (didōmi)
Feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:6)	took (lambanō), gave thanks (eucharisteō), broke (klaō), gave (didōmi)
Last Supper (Mark 14:22)	took (lambanō), blessed (eulogeō), broke (klaō), gave (didōmi)
Emmaus (Luke 24:30)	took (lambanō), blessed (eulogeō), broke (klaō), gave (epididōmi)
Feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:11)	took (lambanō), gave thanks (eucharisteō), distributed (diadidōmi)

The verbal pattern is real, and it is the ordinary action of a Jewish head of household at table. Roman Catholic and some Lutheran interpreters see the feedings as anticipations of the Supper. The Reformed tradition reads them as displays of Christ as the giver of bread and life (John 6:26–35), the Supper's meaning already at work in the ministry, without making the feedings themselves sacramental. In John's account the Passover setting (6:4) is explicit, and the miracle is followed by the discourse in which Jesus interprets the bread.

Parables and Sayings of the Kingdom Banquet

- **Luke 14:15–24:** The great banquet. “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (v. 15). Those invited make excuses; the poor, crippled, blind, and lame are brought in.
- **Matthew 22:1–14:** A wedding feast for the king's son. One guest without a wedding garment is cast out — the guest list is wide, but the invitation must be received as given.
- **Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28–29:** “Many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”
- **Luke 12:35–37:** The master who returns will “dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.”
- **Luke 22:29–30:** “I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.”
- **Mark 2:18–20:** While the bridegroom is with them, the guests cannot fast; “the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” The Supper is a wedding meal in an age of longing.

These sayings give the Supper an eschatological horizon. The Table is a foretaste of the banquet and a pledge that the Bridegroom will return.

SECTION 9: THE LAST SUPPER — THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVES

The Setting — Matthew 26:17–20; Mark 14:12–17; Luke 22:7–14

Peter and John are sent to prepare the meal (Luke 22:8). A man carrying a jar of water will show them a large upper room “furnished and ready” (Mark 14:15). “My time is at hand,” Jesus tells the householder (Matthew 26:18). When the hour comes, he reclines with the Twelve. Luke records the first word: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (22:15–16).

Was the Last Supper a Passover Meal?

The Synoptic Gospels present the meal as the Passover (Mark 14:12, 14, 16; Luke 22:7–15). John seems to place Jesus' death on the day of Preparation, before the Passover meal (John 18:28; 19:14, 31). Four main solutions have been proposed:

- **Passover meal, with John read as referring to the festival:** “Eat the Passover” (John 18:28) can refer to the whole festival, including the chagigah (festival offering) on the fifteenth, and “the

day of Preparation of the Passover” (19:14) can mean Friday of Passover week. This is the view of D.A. Carson, among others, and is common among Reformed commentators.

- **A different calendar:** Jesus and his disciples followed a different reckoning (solar or Galilean) and ate the meal earlier in the week than the Jerusalem authorities. This is a proposal built on the Qumran and Jubilees calendars and remains speculative.
- **A meal held before the Passover:** A solemn fellowship meal, not the paschal meal, on the eve. John’s chronology is followed, and the Synoptic “Passover” language is read loosely.
- **Passover typology regardless:** Whichever chronology is right, the Gospels intend the Supper to be understood in Passover terms: Luke 22:15–16; 1 Corinthians 5:7; John’s presentation of Jesus as the true Lamb.

The Reformed doctrine of the Supper does not rest on solving this problem.

The Four Accounts Compared

Text	Over the bread	Over the cup	Distinctive
Matthew 26:26–29	“Take, eat; this is my body.”	“Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”	“All of you”; only Matthew adds “for the forgiveness of sins”
Mark 14:22–25	“Take; this is my body.”	“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”	They all drank before Jesus spoke; the shortest account
Luke 22:15–20	“This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”	“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”	Two cups (vv. 17, 20); only Luke and Paul have “do this” and “new covenant”
1 Corinthians 11:23–26	“This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”	“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”	Written c. AD 54–55; “received from the Lord”; “as often as”; “you proclaim... until he comes”

Matthew and Mark are often grouped together (with “blood of the covenant, poured out for many”), and Luke and Paul together (with “new covenant” and “do this in remembrance”). The differences are of wording, not substance: all four record a body given and a covenant sealed in blood.

- **Textual note on Luke 22:19b–20:** A few Western manuscripts (Codex Bezae and some Old Latin) omit “which is given for you... the new covenant in my blood,” yielding the “shorter reading.” The longer text is very strongly attested and is accepted by the great majority of editors and translations, and it agrees with 1 Corinthians 11:23–25.
- **Textual note on 1 Corinthians 11:24:** The King James Version reads “which is broken for you”; the better manuscripts read simply “which is for you” (hyper hymōn). The idea of a broken body is nonetheless present in the breaking of the bread, and in Reformed liturgy the fraction has been an important act.

“Take, Eat; This Is My Body” — The Bread Word

Matthew 26:26 (ESV) — “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’”

- **The fourfold action:** Took, blessed, broke, gave. Breaking the loaf is the ordinary act of the head of the table, here charged with new meaning.
- **“This” (touto):** Grammatically neuter, while “bread” (artos) is masculine and “body” (sōma) is neuter. This is sometimes used to argue that “this” refers to the whole action or thing given rather than to the bread alone, but the argument is not decisive.
- **“Body” (sōma):** The whole self given for others. “Given for you” (Luke 22:19) marks it as substitutionary.
- **The speaker’s body:** When Jesus speaks, his body is sitting at the table, visible and whole. Reformed and Zwinglian interpreters argue that the identification must therefore be sacramental rather than literal. Lutherans respond that the words are to be taken as they stand, and that the identification is real but not natural.

The Copula “Is” — How Protestants Read It

The verb “is” is the center of the sixteenth-century debate. Every party agrees that “is” cannot mean physical identity in exactly the way a fact of nature would, since Jesus’ body is sitting at the table. The traditions differ on what kind of “is” it is:

Reading	What “is” means	Held by
Sacramental union	The body is really present with the bread, “in, with, and under,” by Christ’s promise	Lutheran
Sacramental identification (sign and thing signified)	The sign bears the name of the thing signified and truly gives it, by the Spirit, to faith	Reformed; Anglican (Articles 28–29); Wesleyan
Signification	“Is” means “represents” or “symbolizes”	Zwingli and the memorialist tradition
Substantial change	The substance of the bread becomes Christ’s body (for comparison)	Roman Catholic

The Reformed and memorialist argument from scriptural idiom is that “is” often means “signifies” when a sign is being explained. Examples: “The seven good cows are seven years” (Genesis 41:26); “it is the LORD’s Passover” (Exodus 12:11); “This is my covenant” (Genesis 17:10, of circumcision); “I am the true vine” (John 15:1); “I am the door” (John 10:9); “the rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4); “the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). Lutherans respond that in each case the context makes the figure obvious, and that at the Supper Jesus is establishing a new institution whose words are to be received as they stand. Both sides note that even in the cup word (“this cup is the new covenant,” Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25) a figure of speech is unavoidable: no one thinks the cup itself is a covenant.

Two further observations bear on the debate. First, Paul continues to call the elements “bread” and “the cup” after consecration (1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:26–28), and Jesus calls the cup “this fruit of the vine” (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25); this tells against transubstantiation, though Lutherans agree that the elements remain bread and wine. Second, the sacramental “is” must be read with Jesus’ own explanation in John 6:63 and with the ascension (Acts 1:9–11; 3:21), which Reformed theology treats as controlling how Christ is present.

“This Cup Is the New Covenant in My Blood” — The Cup Word

Luke 22:20 (ESV) — “And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”

- **Blood of the covenant:** An echo of Exodus 24:8, the covenant ratified at Sinai, now given in its final form. Jesus is the sacrifice, the mediator, and the covenant meal.
- **“New covenant”:** Jeremiah 31:31. The blood provides what Jeremiah promised: a law written on the heart and full forgiveness.
- **“Poured out” (ekchynnomenon):** Sacrificial language (Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34 for pouring out the blood) and Isaiah 53:12. In Luke the participle grammatically modifies “cup,” but it is the blood that is poured out, so “cup” already stands for its contents: a figure of speech, even on the plainest reading.
- **“For many”:** From Isaiah 53:11–12. Whether “many” is restrictive or inclusive is debated within Protestantism (Reformed: particular redemption, John 10:15; Ephesians 5:25; others: universal provision, Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6). The text itself does not settle it; the question belongs to the doctrine of the atonement.
- **“For the forgiveness of sins”:** Matthew 26:28 only, echoing Jeremiah 31:34. Lutherans stress this as the central gift of the Supper; the Reformed hold that the Supper seals and applies forgiveness already promised in the gospel.

“Do This in Remembrance of Me” — Anamnēsis

Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24–25 give the command. The Greek is *eis tēn emēn anamnēsin*, “for my remembrance,” with the emphasis on the person: “of me.”

- **Zikkaron background:** Memorial in Scripture is not only mental recall. Memorial acts are performed before God and people (Exodus 12:14; Numbers 10:10; Leviticus 24:7), and the Mishnah’s requirement that each generation see itself as having left Egypt shows a participatory sense of memory.
- **Memorial as recollection:** Zwingli and the memorialist tradition: the Supper is a commemoration by which believers recall Christ’s death and strengthen faith.
- **Memorial as proclamation:** Paul explains “you proclaim the Lord’s death” (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Supper is public preaching in visible form.
- **Memorial as reminding God:** Joachim Jeremias argued that the anamnesis is directed to God, who is asked to remember his Messiah. This has been influential in ecumenical discussion but is a minority view among Protestant exegetes.
- **Memorial as re-presentation of sacrifice:** The Roman Catholic view. Protestants object from Hebrews 10:3, where the same word describes the Levitical sacrifices as a “reminder” of sin — an *anamnēsis* that does not remove sin — while Christ’s one offering “perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (10:14).
- **Reformed reading:** Remembrance is Spirit-wrought and covenantal. To remember Christ is to trust him again: faith is the memory that clings to a promise. The remembrance is real but is directed to the church and the world, and the Spirit uses it to strengthen faith.

“I Will Not Drink Again...” — The Eschatological Vow

Matthew 26:29 (ESV) — *“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.”*

Jesus takes a vow of abstention until the consummation. The Supper therefore sits between two meals: the upper room and the marriage supper. Christ does not drink the cup with his people now in the manner of the upper room, yet he promises a renewed fellowship (Luke 22:18, 28–30). The remark sets the eschatological horizon of every celebration: “until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Acts 10:41 notes that the apostles “ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead,” so the vow refers to the messianic banquet of the kingdom. It also implies that the Supper looks forward as well as back.

The Hymn, Gethsemane, and the Departure

“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). If the hymn was the second half of the Hallel (Psalms 115–118), it ended with “You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you” (Psalm 118:28). In Gethsemane Jesus prays about “this cup” (Matthew 26:39) and drinks it on the cross.

Judas at the Table?

Matthew 26:20–25 and Mark 14:17–21 place the announcement of betrayal before the institution; Luke 22:21–23 places it after; John 13:30 has Judas leave after receiving the morsel and does not narrate the institution. Interpreters divide: some hold that Judas received the bread and cup (following Luke’s sequence), others that he left before (following Matthew, Mark, and John). The question bears on the debates about unworthy reception, since the traditions differ about what unbelievers receive, but the texts are not specific enough to base doctrine on it.

SECTION 10: JOHN 6 AND THE UPPER ROOM IN JOHN

John 6 — The Bread of Life Discourse

John 6 is the most contested chapter in the Protestant debate about the Supper. The setting is the Passover season (6:4), following the feeding of the five thousand and the crossing of the sea. The discourse is delivered in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:59). It moves from the crowd seeking more bread (6:22–27), to the bread from heaven (6:28–40), to the Jews’ grumbling (6:41–51), to the flesh and blood saying and the crowd’s shock (6:51–59), and finally to the disciples’ offense and Peter’s confession (6:60–71).

John 6:35 (ESV) — *“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”*

John 6:53–56 (ESV) — *“So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on 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. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.’”*

John 6:63 (ESV) — *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”*

Four Readings of John 6:51–58

Reading	Summary	Representatives
Non-sacramental (faith)	Eating and drinking are metaphors for believing in Christ crucified. The passage is not about the Supper.	Augustine (“Believe, and you have eaten,” Tractates on John 25.12); Luther (who denied that John 6 speaks of the Supper); Zwingli; many evangelicals
Indirectly sacramental	The passage describes the reality (feeding on Christ by faith) that the Supper signifies and seals. It is not about the ritual, but the same doctrine.	Calvin (Institutes 4.17.4–5); most Reformed
Directly eucharistic	Verses 51c–58 refer to the Lord’s Supper (or to the flesh and blood as given in the sacrament).	Roman Catholic; some Protestant scholars
Secondary echo	The primary meaning is faith in Christ, but John’s readers, who know the Supper, would hear it as well.	Some evangelical commentators

Exegetical Observations

- **Believing and eating have the same result:** 6:40 and 6:47 promise eternal life to those who see and believe; 6:54 promises eternal life to those who eat and drink. The identical promise for the two verbs is the strongest exegetical argument that eating is another way of describing believing.
- **The impossibility of a merely ritual reading:** If 6:53 requires the sacrament for life, then the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) and every Old Testament saint would be without life. John 3:16, 5:24, and 6:40 make faith the condition of life.
- **Trōgō (6:54, 56–58):** The verb used for “feeds” is trōgō, sometimes said to mean “gnaw” or “chew” and thus to require a physical sense. But John uses it of Judas eating Jesus’ bread (13:18), and Matthew 24:38 uses it of ordinary eating before the flood.
- **Sarx versus sōma:** John speaks of “flesh” (sarx), consistent with “the Word became flesh” (1:14); the institution narratives speak of “body” (sōma). Ignatius uses “flesh” of the Eucharist (Smyrnaeans 7). The difference is not decisive either way.
- **“The flesh is no help at all” (6:63):** This cannot mean that Christ’s flesh is useless (6:51: “my flesh for the life of the world”). The usual reading is that “the flesh” is the merely human, unaided perception, and that it is the Spirit who gives life. Reformed theology draws the point that the Spirit is the bond of union and the agent of communion.
- **The ascension (6:62):** “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” The ascension controls the meaning of the saying and supports the Reformed emphasis that Christ’s flesh is spiritually communicated from heaven.
- **Mutual indwelling (6:56):** “Abides in me, and I in him” anticipates John 15:4–7 and is the language of union with Christ.

- **Old Testament idiom:** Eating is a familiar figure for receiving the Word: Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 3:1–3; Proverbs 9:5; Isaiah 55:1–3.

Jesus' Pattern of Spiritual Idiom in John

Passage	The literal response	Jesus' meaning
John 2:19–21	"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple"	The temple of his body
John 3:3–5	"Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?"	Birth of water and the Spirit
John 4:10–15	"Sir, you have nothing to draw water with"	A spring of eternal life; the Spirit (7:37–39)
John 4:31–34	"Has anyone brought him something to eat?"	"My food is to do the will of him who sent me"
Matthew 16:5–12	"We brought no bread"	The teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees
John 6:51–58	"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"	Reformed and memorialist: coming to and believing in him (6:35, 40, 47, 63)

This is the Reformed and memorialist argument from Jesus' own manner of speaking: the hearers take literally what he means spiritually. The Lutheran and Catholic reply is that in 6:51–58 Jesus does not correct the literal misunderstanding; he intensifies it, and the crowd's offense increases (6:52, 60–66). The reply has real force, and a fair reading acknowledges it. The Reformed answer is that Jesus does address the offense, by the ascension and by 6:63.

John 13 — The Upper Room in John's Gospel

John does not narrate the institution. This is a striking omission, and John may assume the church's knowledge of the Supper, having already taught the reality in chapter 6. In its place he gives the foot washing and the upper-room discourse.

- **John 13:1:** "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (eis telos)." The hour has come.
- **John 13:4–17:** Foot washing. "I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (v. 15). Some Anabaptist and Brethren traditions (and some Baptists) practice foot washing as an ordinance. Most Protestants, including Reformed, treat it as an example of humble service, noting that John calls it a hypodeigma (example) and does not attach the command "in remembrance of me."
- **John 13:18, 26–30:** Psalm 41:9 is cited, and Judas is identified by the morsel and leaves.
- **John 13:34–35:** "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." "New" here is kainē, the same word as in "new covenant." The Supper is a meal of the covenant of love.

John 15 and 17 — The Vine and the Prayer for Unity

- **John 15:1-11:** “I am the true vine.” The vine and abiding are the language of union with Christ, which the Supper nourishes. The connection with “the fruit of the vine” (Matthew 26:29) on the same night is suggestive, though John does not make it explicit.
- **John 17:20-23:** “That they may all be one.” The Supper signifies the unity of the church (1 Corinthians 10:17), and the church’s divisions at the Table are a standing rebuke.

John 19:34-37 and 1 John 5:6-8 — Blood and Water

John records blood and water from Jesus’ pierced side (19:34), and 1 John 5:6 says that Jesus “came by water and blood.” Augustine and many after him saw an allusion to baptism and the Supper. Most Reformed commentators regard this as a possible secondary resonance, with the primary significance being the reality of Christ’s death and the cleansing and atonement it accomplishes.

SECTION 11: THE RISEN LORD’S MEALS, ACTS, AND THE BREAKING OF BREAD

The Emmaus Road — Luke 24:13-35

Luke 24:30-31 (ESV) — *“When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.”*

Luke 24:35 (ESV) — *“Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.”*

- **Word, then table:** Christ first opens the Scriptures (“Did not our hearts burn within us...?” v. 32) and then is known at the meal. The pattern of the church’s worship — Word and sacrament — is set here.
- **The verbs:** Took, blessed, broke, gave: the same as Luke 22:19 and the feedings.
- **Presence and absence:** Christ is made known and then vanishes. He is present to faith in Word and bread, but his physical presence is not localized in the bread — the moment of recognition is followed by his withdrawal, and the disciples return to Jerusalem rejoicing. Reformed exegetes see here the pattern of the Supper: knowing the Lord by his Spirit, while he is at the right hand of the Father.
- **Caution:** The two disciples are not among the Eleven, and the meal takes place at home. Whether this is a “eucharistic” meal in the strict sense is disputed. All traditions agree it is a meal in which the Lord makes himself known.

Other Resurrection Meals

- **Luke 24:36-43:** He eats broiled fish to demonstrate that he is not a spirit.
- **John 21:9-14:** The breakfast on the shore: “Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’... Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish.”

- **Acts 10:41:** The witnesses “ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”

These meals show that the risen Lord continues to host his people at table. They also anchor the church’s meal in the resurrection: the Supper is celebrated in the presence of the living Christ.

Acts 2:42–47 — The Devotion of the First Church

Acts 2:42 (ESV) — *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*

Luke lists four devotions: the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship (koinōnia), the breaking of the bread (tē klasei tou artou), and the prayers. The phrase “the breaking of the bread” is definite and set beside teaching and prayer, and most interpreters take it to include the Lord’s Supper. Verse 46 adds that day by day they were “breaking bread in their homes” and receiving their food “with glad and generous hearts.”

Reading	Argument	Held by
The Lord’s Supper	The definite article; the list of worship activities; the parallel with Luke 24:35 and Acts 20:7	Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, many Reformed
The Supper within a fellowship meal	Verse 46 places the breaking of bread in homes with glad hearts, and 1 Corinthians 11 shows the Supper and the meal intertwined	Many Reformed and evangelical interpreters
Ordinary meals	“Breaking bread” is an ordinary expression for eating (Acts 27:35)	Some commentators

The most balanced conclusion is that the early church’s common meals and the Supper were originally joined, and that Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:33–34 begin to distinguish them.

Acts 20:7–12 — Troas: The First Day and the Breaking of Bread

Acts 20:7 (ESV) — *“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.”*

The gathering is on the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection. Its stated purpose is “to break bread,” and the sermon is a Word-centered assembly. In verse 11, after Eutychus is raised, Paul “had gone up and had broken bread and eaten.” The passage is the clearest New Testament evidence for a regular Sunday assembly at which the Supper was celebrated. See also 1 Corinthians 16:2 and Revelation 1:10. The two adjectives kyriakos in 1 Corinthians 11:20 (“the Lord’s Supper”) and Revelation 1:10 (“the Lord’s Day”) suggest a link in the early church’s vocabulary between the Lord’s day and the Lord’s meal.

Acts 27:33–36 and Other Uses of “Break Bread”

In Acts 27:35 Paul takes bread, gives thanks in the presence of all, breaks it, and begins to eat. The passage is on a ship among mostly non-Christians, and nearly all interpreters read it as an ordinary meal with a prayer of thanks. It shows that the vocabulary of breaking bread does not automatically mean the Supper, and that each passage must be read in context.

SECTION 12: PAUL — 1 CORINTHIANS 5, 10, AND 11

1 Corinthians 5:6–8 — Christ Our Passover

1 Corinthians 5:7–8 (ESV) — *“Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”*

Paul applies Passover imagery to the whole church's life. The context is the discipline of an unrepentant brother (5:1–5), and 5:11 forbids association “not even to eat with such a one.” Two doctrines follow: the Supper is a Passover meal, whose “leaven” must be purged, and church discipline guards the Table. Reformed theology treats discipline as one of the “keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19; 18:18) and links it to the administration of the Supper (Westminster Confession 30; Belgic Confession 29 and 32).

1 Corinthians 10:1–13 — The Wilderness Sacraments and the Warning

1 Corinthians 10:1–5 (ESV) — *“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they were drinking from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”*

- **Sacramental parallel:** Paul pairs the crossing of the sea and the cloud (baptism) with the manna and the water from the rock (the Supper). The Corinthians, secure in their own sacraments, are told that Israel had the same and fell.
- **“All... nevertheless most”:** The external privilege was shared by all; the favor of God was not. This refutes any automatic efficacy of the sacraments apart from faith. The Reformed doctrine that sacraments do not work *ex opere operato* has its center in this text.
- **“Spiritual” (pneumatikos):** The food and drink were given by the Spirit to point to Christ. Old Testament believers truly fed on Christ by faith, so the substance of the sacraments was the same (Westminster Confession 27.5). This shows that Christ's saving presence does not depend on a localized, bodily presence in an element, an important argument in Reformed theology. Lutherans reply that the Old Testament sign was promise, while the Supper gives the body itself.
- **“The Rock was Christ”:** Another instance of sign-language, in which the type is named by what it signifies.
- **Purpose:** “These things took place as examples (typoi) for us” (10:6; cf. 10:11). The Supper is a place for warning as well as comfort.

1 Corinthians 10:14–22 — Participation, Unity, and the Two Tables

1 Corinthians 10:16–17 (ESV) — *“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."

- **Koinōnia:** The word means sharing or participation. Reformed exegetes take it as real communion with the crucified and risen Christ by the Spirit, a communion the sign seals. Lutherans read it as participation in Christ's actual body and blood. Memorialists read it as fellowship in the benefits of his death and among believers.
- **"One bread... one body":** The bread is a sign of unity. "Body of Christ" carries two senses at once: the body given for us and the church, which is his body (1 Corinthians 12:27). This double sense bears on 11:29.
- **"Participants in the altar" (10:18):** Israel's sacrificial meals were real fellowship at God's altar.
- **The demonic table (10:19–21):** Paul says that idol meals make one a partner (koinōnos) with demons and that "you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons." Reformed interpreters press this argument: if Paul treats the demonic meal as a real spiritual fellowship, the Lord's meal is not less real than that. Memorialists reply that the fellowship in both cases is one of allegiance, and that no one supposes the demonic table gives a physical presence of demons.
- **Exclusive loyalty:** The Table is a covenant boundary. To eat at the Lord's Table is to renounce every rival table.

1 Corinthians 11:17–34 — The Corinthian Abuse and Paul's Correction

The Situation (11:17–22)

Paul says that "when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse" (11:17). There are divisions (schismata) and factions (haireseis, 11:18–19). "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (11:20), because "each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk" (11:21). The likely picture is a church that met in a home for a common meal in which the wealthy ate and drank early and the poor arrived late to little or nothing. Paul asks: "Do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (11:22). Reconstructions of the details differ, but the moral picture is clear: the Table was being used to display and deepen social division.

The Tradition Received (11:23–26)

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (ESV) — *"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. 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."*

- **"Received... delivered":** Paul uses the language of authoritative tradition (paralambanō, paradidōmi) and traces it to "the Lord." The same verb (paradidōmi) stands behind "betrayed" (paredideto), so the Lord was "handed over" on the night the church's meal was "handed on."
- **"After supper":** The cup came after the meal. Paul's corrective (11:33–34) separates the Supper from the common meal.
- **"As often as":** The Supper is a repeated practice, with no fixed interval stated.

- **“You proclaim” (katangellete):** The Supper is preaching in visible form. Anyone who eats and drinks is declaring the Lord's death.
- **“Until he comes”:** The ordinance has a limit. It looks to the return of Christ, as in the Aramaic prayer *marana tha* (“Our Lord, come!,” 1 Corinthians 16:22; cf. Didache 10:6).

Unworthy Manner and Self-Examination (11:27–32)

1 Corinthians 11:27–30 (ESV) — *“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. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.”*

- **“In an unworthy manner” (anaxiōs):** An adverb of manner. The Corinthians ate in a way that despised the poor and the body of Christ. It does not require moral perfection, since no one would be worthy (Westminster Confession 29.8).
- **“Guilty concerning the body and blood”:** To profane the sign is to sin against what it represents — a serious offense, comparable to dishonoring the king's seal or image.
- **“Let a person examine himself” (dokimazetō):** The examination is by the communicant himself. It is not an examination of the doctrine of the Supper but of the manner and heart of approach. The church has a further duty: the elders guard the Table (Section 16).
- **“Discerning the body” (diakrinōn to sōma):** Three readings: (1) the sacramental body — recognizing that the elements are not ordinary food but the Lord's body (Calvin and many earlier commentators; Lutherans and Catholics); (2) the church as Christ's body — recognizing the fellowship and the poor (Gordon Fee and many recent commentators, on the basis of 10:17 and chapter 12); (3) both. Anthony Thiselton and many Reformed interpreters favor a combination. The context makes the ecclesial sense hard to exclude, while the phrase “body and blood of the Lord” (11:27) makes the sacramental sense hard to exclude.
- **Judgment and discipline:** Many were weak and ill, and “some have died” (koimōntai, “have fallen asleep”). Paul explains: “When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world” (11:32). The chastening is fatherly, not damning. The Reformed take this as evidence that the Supper is a real means of grace with real spiritual consequences; memorialists take it as a warning about profaning what is holy and dividing the church.

Practical Corrections (11:33–34)

“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.” Paul separates the ordinary meal from the Supper, and requires that it be shared in unity and with regard for the poor.

Other Pauline Texts Bearing on the Table

- **1 Corinthians 12:13:** All “were made to drink of one Spirit.” Some connect this to the cup; most take it as a reference to baptism and the Spirit.
- **Romans 14:1–15:7:** Table fellowship between strong and weak: “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17); “Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you” (15:7).

- **Galatians 2:11–14:** Peter withdrew from eating with Gentiles, and Paul opposed him publicly because their conduct was “not in step with the truth of the gospel” (2:14). The table is a visible expression of the gospel, and to divide the Table is to compromise the gospel.
 - **Ephesians 5:25–32:** Christ and his church as bridegroom and bride, the background to the marriage supper of the Lamb.
 - **Romans 3:25; 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Colossians 1:20:** The blood of Christ: propitiation, justification, redemption, peace. The Supper brings the church again and again to this blood.
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SECTION 13: HEBREWS AND THE ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE

Why Hebrews Matters for the Supper

Hebrews never names the Supper. But its theology of sacrifice, priesthood, and covenant defines what the Supper can and cannot be. It is the main New Testament basis for the Protestant rejection of the Mass as a re-offering of Christ, and it interprets the “blood of the covenant” (Exodus 24:8) that Jesus names in the upper room.

Hebrews 7:26–28; 9:11–14 — A High Priest Who Offered Himself Once

Hebrews 7:27 (ESV) — *“He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.”*

Christ’s priesthood is unique, his sacrifice is himself, and it is done once. “Once for all” (ephapax) appears in 7:27, 9:12, and 10:10.

Hebrews 9:15–28 — The Blood of the Covenant and the Will

- **9:15–17:** Christ is the mediator of a new covenant. *Diathēkē* means both “covenant” and “will,” and a will takes effect at death. The word Jesus used in the upper room carries both senses.
- **9:18–22:** Even the first covenant was inaugurated with blood (Exodus 24:6–8). “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (9:22).
- **9:26–28:** “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time.” The “many” echoes Isaiah 53:12, and the second appearing corresponds to the Supper’s “until he comes.”

Hebrews 10:1–18 — No More Offering for Sin

Hebrews 10:11–14 (ESV) — *“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”*

- **“He sat down”:** The priest of Israel stood because his work was never done. Christ sat because he was. The Supper cannot be a fresh offering without denying this.

- **Anamnēsis in 10:3:** “In these sacrifices there is a reminder (anamnēsis) of sins every year.” The Levitical sacrifices reminded of sin; the Supper reminds of a sacrifice that has removed it.
- **10:18:** “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.” The Reformers drew the conclusion that a propitiatory sacrifice repeated at the altar is incompatible with the letter to the Hebrews (Westminster Confession 29.2; Heidelberg Catechism Q. 80; Thirty-Nine Articles 31).
- **Session and ascension:** Christ is now in heaven (Hebrews 8:1; 9:24). Reformed theology presses this against a local presence of his body in the elements; Lutherans respond that “the right hand of God” is God’s omnipotent rule, not a location.

Hebrews 10:19–25, 29 — Access, Assembly, and Profaning the Blood

- **10:19–22:** “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Access to God’s presence on the basis of blood and water.
- **10:25:** “Not neglecting to meet together.” The Supper belongs to the gathered assembly.
- **10:29:** “How much worse punishment... will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.” A parallel to 1 Corinthians 11:27, with graver language. How “by which he was sanctified” is read divides Reformed and Arminian interpreters: the Reformed take it of a covenantal or external sanctification, the Arminian of the true believer who falls away.

Hebrews 13:9–16 — The Altar, the Food, and the Sacrifice of Praise

Hebrews 13:10 (ESV) — *“We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.”*

The verse is disputed. Three readings:

- **The altar is Christ’s cross:** Most Protestants: the “altar” is Christ’s sacrifice, and “eating” is spiritual participation in his benefits by faith, in contrast to the Levitical priests, who could not eat the sin offerings burned outside the camp (13:11).
- **The altar is the Eucharistic table:** Roman Catholic and some Anglo-Catholic readings, and some patristic interpreters.
- **Not about the Supper:** The context contrasts “foods” with “grace” (13:9): “it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods.” The passage is about Christ, not a ritual meal.

Whatever the reading of verse 10, verses 15–16 name the only sacrifices left for believers: “a sacrifice of praise... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name,” and “do not neglect to do good and to share what you have.” Romans 12:1, Philippians 4:18, and 1 Peter 2:5 say the same. The Reformed doctrine is that the Supper is the occasion for the church to offer such sacrifices of thanks, not to offer Christ.

SECTION 14: THE GENERAL EPISTLES AND REVELATION — THE MARRIAGE SUPPER

Jude 12 and 2 Peter 2:13 — Corrupted Love Feasts

Jude 12 warns of false teachers who are “hidden reefs at your love feasts (agapais), as they feast without fear, shepherds feeding themselves.” 2 Peter 2:13 has a parallel (with a textual variant between agapais, “love feasts,” and apatais, “deceptions”). The fellowship meals of the early church needed doctrinal and moral guardianship, and the false teachers exploited them.

1 Peter 1:18–19; 2:2–5, 9

- **1:18–19:** Redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”
- **2:2–3:** “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk... if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).
- **2:5, 9:** Believers are “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” All believers, not a sacrificing caste, come to the Table.

1 John 1:3, 7; 5:6–8

- **1:3:** Fellowship (koinōnia) with the Father and the Son, and with one another.
- **1:7:** “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”
- **5:6–8:** “This is he who came by water and blood — Jesus Christ... the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.” Primarily about Jesus’ baptism and death, against a docetic denial of the cross; some hear a secondary echo of the two sacraments.

Revelation — Promises at the Table

- **Revelation 2:7:** The tree of life “in the paradise of God” is given to the one who conquers. The garden’s sacrament returns.
- **Revelation 2:17:** The hidden manna.

Revelation 3:20 (ESV) — “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

This verse is often applied to evangelism, but the context is Christ’s letter to the church in Laodicea (3:14–22). The invitation is to a lukewarm church (3:15–19) to repent and share table fellowship with him. It is a picture of the Supper’s invitation: the risen Lord comes to sup with those who respond.

- **Revelation 7:9–17:** The multitude before the throne: “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore... the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd.”
- **Revelation 21:6; 22:1–2, 14, 17:** The water of life “without payment” (echoing Isaiah 55:1), the river, the tree of life, and the invitation: “let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”

Revelation 19 — Two Suppers

Revelation 19:9 (ESV) — “And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God.’”

Feature	Marriage Supper of the Lamb	Great Supper of God
Reference	Revelation 19:6–9	Revelation 19:17–21
Host	The Lamb	God (the angel calls the birds)
Guests	The called, the bride, the redeemed	The birds of prey
Menu	Fellowship, joy, the fulfillment of the covenant	The flesh of kings, captains, and armies
Background	Isaiah 25:6–8; 55:1–3	Ezekiel 39:17–20
Meaning	Salvation consummated	Judgment executed

Every Supper is celebrated between these two suppers. The Table signifies which of them a person is looking toward. The Supper’s “until he comes” is the church’s promise that the marriage supper will come, and its warning that the great supper of God will come as well.

The Supper and the Consummation

- **Already and not yet:** The Supper is the pledge of the marriage supper, celebrated by the bride who has been betrothed but is not yet wed (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25–27).
- **Reformed emphasis:** The Supper is an eschatological ordinance. It looks back to the cross, up to the ascended Christ, in to the believer’s union with him, around to the fellowship of the church, and forward to the kingdom.

SECTION 15: A HISTORICAL ORIENTATION — FROM THE DIDACHE TO THE REFORMATION

Protestant positions on the Supper cannot be understood without seeing what the Reformers inherited and what they rejected. The following table follows the main lines of development.

Period / Source	Witness	Emphasis
Didache 9–10, 14 (late first / early second century)	Thanksgiving prayers over the cup and bread; assembly on the Lord’s own day	Confession of sins beforehand; “sacrifice” language for prayer and thanks (cf. Malachi 1:11); eschatological cry “maranatha”
Ignatius (c. 107–110)	Smyrnaeans 7: the Eucharist is “the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ”; Ephesians 20: “medicine of immortality”	Realist language against docetists; how literal it is intended is debated
Pliny, Letter 10.96 (c. 112)	Christians met before dawn on a fixed day, sang to Christ, and later reassembled to share a meal	Non-Christian witness to worship and a shared meal

Period / Source	Witness	Emphasis
Justin Martyr (c. 155)	First Apology 65–67: Sunday liturgy of Scripture, sermon, prayers, bread and wine	The elements are “not common bread,” but the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus, by analogy with the incarnation
Irenaeus (c. 180)	Against Heresies 4.18.5: the Eucharist “consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly”	Cited by Lutherans and Reformed as an early expression of sacramental union
Tertullian (c. 207)	Against Marcion 4.40: “This is my body, that is, a figure of my body”; On the Resurrection 8: the flesh feeds on Christ’s body and blood	Both figure and realism; each is quoted by Protestants
Cyprian (c. 250)	Letter 63: the cup must contain wine; the priest “offers” the sacrifice	Growing sacrificial and priestly language
Augustine (c. 400)	Sign and thing signified; “Believe, and you have eaten”; Sermon 272: “Be what you see, receive what you are”	Claimed by both Catholics and Reformers; the sacrament is a visible word, and the Supper makes the church
Radbertus and Ratramnus (c. 831–844)	Radbertus: the eucharistic body is the historical body; Ratramnus: a spiritual presence	The first extended controversy in the West
Fourth Lateran Council (1215)	Uses “transubstantiated”	Substance changes; accidents remain (Aquinas explains with Aristotelian categories)
Council of Trent (1551–1562)	Session 13 on the Eucharist; Session 22 on the sacrifice of the Mass	Reaffirms transubstantiation and the propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass

The Reformation Divisions

- **Luther’s “Babylonian Captivity” (1520):** Three “captivities” of the Supper: the withholding of the cup from the laity, transubstantiation as a philosophical imposition, and the doctrine of the Mass as a sacrifice. Luther retained a real bodily presence but rejected all three.
- **Zwingli (1525–1531):** The elements are signs and the Supper is a commemoration and pledge; Christ’s body is in heaven (Commentary on True and False Religion, 1525; On the Lord’s Supper, 1526).
- **Marburg Colloquy (1529):** Luther and Zwingli agreed on fourteen and a half of fifteen articles. The one point of disagreement was the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper. Luther is said to have chalked *hoc est corpus meum* on the table.
- **Calvin:** Institutes 4.14–17; Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper (1541). A mediating position: a true participation in Christ’s body and blood by the Holy Spirit through faith, with Christ remaining in heaven.
- **Consensus Tigurinus (1549):** The agreement between Calvin and Bullinger that bound Geneva and Zurich in a shared account of the sacraments.
- **The confessions:** Belgic (1561), Heidelberg (1563), Thirty-Nine Articles (1563/1571), Formula of Concord (1577), Westminster (1646), Second London Baptist (1689) — each fixes a tradition’s doctrine (Sections 16–17).
- **Leuenberg Agreement (1973):** Lutheran and Reformed churches signing it declared that the historic condemnations on the Lord’s Supper no longer apply to their partners, while acknowledging that questions remain.

SECTION 16: THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Doctrine in Brief

The Reformed tradition teaches that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament instituted by Christ, a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, in which Christ, through the Holy Spirit and by faith, truly nourishes his people with his crucified and risen self. The bread and wine remain bread and wine. Christ's human nature remains in heaven, at the Father's right hand. The Spirit unites believers to the ascended Christ, so that they truly receive him and all his benefits, "as surely" as they receive the elements with their mouths. This is neither a mere memorial, on the one side, nor a local or physical presence in the elements, on the other. Calvin (Institutes 4.17) described it as a mystery he would rather experience than explain.

The Sacrament as Sign and Seal of the Covenant of Grace

Westminster Confession of Faith 27.1 — *"Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word."*

Westminster Confession of Faith 27.2 — *"There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other."*

- **Sign:** The visible elements and actions (bread, wine, breaking, pouring, eating, drinking) represent Christ, his death, and the nourishment he gives (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 10:16).
- **Seal:** God confirms his promise to each believer (Romans 4:11). The sacrament does not add a second promise; it seals the gospel promise to the individual.
- **Sacramental union:** The sign is not the thing signified, and it is not separated from it. Because of this union, Scripture can call the bread "my body" and the cup "the new covenant in my blood," and the effects of the reality are attributed to the sign. This is what the "is" of the words of institution means in the Reformed reading.
- **One covenant, one substance:** "The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New" (Westminster Confession 27.5). Passover and Supper are two administrations of one covenant of grace (1 Corinthians 5:7; 10:1–4).
- **Two sacraments:** Christ instituted only two: baptism and the Supper (Matthew 28:19; 26:26–28; Westminster Confession 27.4). Baptism is the once-for-all sign of entrance and cleansing; the Supper is the repeated sign of nourishment (Westminster Larger Catechism 177).

Union with Christ and the Presence of Christ

Calvin's whole doctrine of the Supper rests on union with Christ. Believers are grafted into Christ by the Spirit through faith (John 15:1–5; Romans 6:5; Ephesians 5:29–32). The Supper does not create that

union; it nourishes and confirms it. The Spirit is the bond by which the ascended Christ, though distant in place, communicates his life to his people (Institutes 4.17.10, 12, 31–33).

Westminster Confession of Faith 29.7 — *“Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.”*

- **“Really... but spiritually”:** In the Reformed vocabulary “spiritual” does not mean “unreal.” It means by the Holy Spirit. The presence is real; it is not local.
- **The ascension:** Christ’s human nature is now in heaven and will return (Acts 1:9–11; 3:21; Colossians 3:1–2; Hebrews 9:24). It is not present in many places at once. Christ is fully present as the God-man to his people through the Spirit.
- **Sursum corda:** The ancient call “Lift up your hearts” expresses the Reformed conviction: in the Supper, the church is lifted by the Spirit to where Christ is (Colossians 3:1), and does not bring him down.
- **Chalcedonian Christology:** The two natures are “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” The Reformed reject the Lutheran communication of divine attributes (ubiquity) to the human nature as a confusion of the natures, and they insist that Christ’s body remains a true, finite human body. They also hold that the divine Word is not confined to the flesh, even in the incarnation (the “extra Calvinisticum”).
- **The life-giving flesh:** Calvin held that Christ’s flesh is life-giving because it is the flesh of the eternal Word, and that believers truly partake of his flesh and blood, not merely his benefits (Institutes 4.17.8–9). The Spirit’s work is not a mere figure but a genuine communion.

Westminster Shorter Catechism 96 — *“The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ’s appointment, his death is showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.”*

Faith, the Spirit, and the Efficacy of the Sacrament

- **Efficacy from the Spirit:** The grace of a sacrament is not conferred by any power in the elements, nor does its efficacy depend on the piety or intention of the minister; it depends on the Spirit’s work and the word of institution, with its promise to believers (Westminster Confession 27.3).
- **Faith as instrument:** Faith is the “hand and mouth of the soul” (Belgic Confession 35). It does not make the sacrament, but it receives what God gives.
- **Not automatic:** 1 Corinthians 10:1–12 (Israel had the signs and perished), Hebrews 4:2 (the word did not benefit them because it was not “mixed with faith”), and John 6:64 (the words are spirit and life, but “there are some of you who do not believe”) show that the sacraments are not effective by mere performance (ex opere operato).
- **Unbelievers:** The wicked and ignorant who partake receive only the bread and wine, and they eat and drink judgment on themselves (Westminster Confession 29.8; Thirty-Nine Articles 29). In this the Reformed differ from the Lutherans.

- **A means of grace:** The Supper is one of the ordinary means by which the Spirit strengthens faith, along with the Word and prayer (Westminster Shorter Catechism 88). It is not the only means and not a magical one.

What the Supper Does — Past, Present, Future, and Communal

- **Memorial (past):** It proclaims Christ's death (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:26).
- **Communion (present):** It is a participation in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16), a renewal of covenant, and a sealing of assurance.
- **Thanksgiving:** It is a eucharist, a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15).
- **Unity:** It signifies and strengthens the unity of the church (1 Corinthians 10:17; John 17:21).
- **Hope (future):** It anticipates the marriage supper of the Lamb (Matthew 26:29; 1 Corinthians 11:26; Revelation 19:9).

The Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 75) expresses assurance in a way that shows how the Reformed tradition understands “seal”: as surely as I see the bread broken and the cup shared with me, and taste them, so surely Christ's body was offered and broken for me and his blood shed for me, and so surely he himself feeds and nourishes my soul to eternal life. The sign is a pledge that the promise is as sure as the sensory experience.

One Sacrifice — The Rejection of the Mass

The Reformed reject the doctrine that in the Supper the priest offers Christ again to the Father in a propitiatory sacrifice, on the grounds of Hebrews 7:27, 9:25–28, and 10:10–18. The Westminster Confession (29.2) says that “Christ is not offered up to his Father” in the sacrament, but there is “only a commemoration of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the cross, once for all, and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same.” The language of the Confession about the Mass is sharp in tone, as is the Heidelberg Catechism's Q. 80, reflecting the polemical setting of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

- **Table, not altar:** The Supper is a table (1 Corinthians 10:21). The only altar is the cross (Hebrews 13:10).
- **Transubstantiation:** Rejected as unscriptural, since the elements are called “bread” and “the cup” after consecration (1 Corinthians 11:26–28; Matthew 26:29) and since Christ's body is in heaven (Westminster Confession 29.6).
- **Adoration and reservation:** Rejected, since the elements are used by Christ's appointment for eating and drinking, not for worship (Westminster Confession 29.4). The worship is of Christ himself.
- **The cup for all:** Rejected: withholding the cup from the laity contradicts “Drink of it, all of you” (Matthew 26:27; Westminster Confession 29.4).

Worthy Reception, Fencing the Table, and Church Discipline

- **Who may come:** Baptized persons who make a credible profession of faith, are repentant, and are in good standing in the church. The elders are responsible to guard the Table (1 Corinthians 5:11; Matthew 16:19; 18:15–20; Westminster Confession 29.8; 30.3).

- **Preparation:** Westminster Larger Catechism 171–175 direct self-examination before the Supper (of one's being in Christ, sins, knowledge, faith, repentance, love, and new obedience), diligent attention during it, and reflection afterward.
- **Not the perfect but the hungry:** The Table is for those who are displeased with their sins and yet trust that they are forgiven and desire to grow in faith (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 81). It is medicine for the sick, not a reward for the healthy. Reformed pastors have always had to guard against two abuses: laxity that admits the impenitent, and scrupulosity that keeps the weak away.
- **Ministers:** The Supper is administered by an ordained minister of the Word (Westminster Confession 29.3), who gives the words of institution, prayer, and thanksgiving, and distributes the elements, in the presence of the congregation.

Confessional Statements Compared

Document	Date	Main teaching on the Supper
Consensus Tigurinus	1549	Calvin and Bullinger: sacraments are not bare signs; God truly works through them; Christ remains in heaven
Belgic Confession, Art. 35	1561	A heavenly and spiritual manner; the body and blood are received by faith, “the hand and mouth of the soul”; rejects the Mass and mere signs alike
Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 75–82	1563	Assurance (“as surely as”); rejects the Mass (Q. 80); those who may come and the keys of the church (Q. 81–82)
Second Helvetic Confession, ch. 21	1566	Bullinger: distinguishes spiritual eating (by faith) from sacramental eating (outward); the Supper is more than a bare sign
Westminster Confession, ch. 29	1646	The classic Reformed statement: commemoration, spiritual presence, worthy receivers, rejection of the Mass
Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 168–177; Shorter Catechism, Q. 96–97	1648	Definition, preparation, and the duties of communicants
Second London Baptist Confession, ch. 30	1689	A Baptist confession that closely follows Westminster on the spiritual presence and the rejection of the Mass

Diversity Within the Reformed Tradition

The Reformed tradition has never been uniform on the Supper. The main variations:

Figure / Stream	Emphasis
Zwingli (Zurich, 1520s)	Signs and commemoration; Christ present to the faith of the believer; a pledge of allegiance. Often summarized as “memorialist,” though his view was richer than the caricature.
Bullinger (Zurich)	Moved beyond Zwingli toward Calvin; spiritual eating; co-author of the Consensus Tigurinus with Calvin.

Figure / Stream	Emphasis
Calvin (Geneva)	True participation in Christ's body and blood by the Spirit, through faith, with Christ in heaven. The tradition's benchmark.
John Williamson Nevin (Mercersburg, 1846)	The Mystical Presence: argues that Calvin taught real participation in Christ's life-giving humanity, and that American Reformed theology had lost it.
Charles Hodge (Princeton, nineteenth century)	Critiqued Nevin; taught that believers receive the "virtue" or efficacy of Christ's body and blood, not the substance (a view sometimes called receptionism or virtualism).
R.L. Dabney (Southern Presbyterian)	More cautious than Hodge about "real presence" language and closer to a memorial with spiritual efficacy.
Contemporary Reformed	Robert Letham, Keith Mathison, and Michael Horton defend Calvin's account of the Spirit-mediated communion with Christ's humanity, and the 1689 Baptist Confession represents a Baptist form of the same doctrine.

SECTION 17: OTHER PROTESTANT READINGS

This section presents the other major Protestant positions as their adherents would state them. Each is a large tradition, and the summaries are necessarily compressed. Where a tradition has internal variations, they are noted. For each position, the section gives its main arguments, key sources, and the points at which it differs from the Reformed view, along with the Reformed reply.

Overview Table

Tradition	Christ's presence	Nature of the Supper	Key texts	Key voices / documents
Reformed	Real, spiritual presence to faith by the Holy Spirit; Christ's human nature in heaven	Sacrament: sign and seal; means of grace	1 Cor. 10:16; 11:26; John 6 (indirectly); Heb. 10	Calvin; Heidelberg; Belgic; Westminster ch. 29
Lutheran	Real bodily presence "in, with, and under" the bread and wine; received orally by all	Sacrament: gift of forgiveness through Christ's word	Matt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:27–29	Luther; Augsburg Art. X; Chemnitz; Formula of Concord VII
Anglican	Heavenly and spiritual, received by faith (Art. 28); range from Reformed to objective presence	Sacrament / Eucharist; means of grace	1 Cor. 10:16; Articles 25, 28–31	Cranmer; Hooker; Book of Common Prayer
Wesleyan / Methodist	Real presence by the Spirit; a "mystery"	Sacrament: means of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace; open to seekers	Luke 22:19; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16	Wesley; Hymns on the Lord's Supper; Art. XVIII
Zwinglian / Memorialist	Christ present by the Spirit to the gathered church, not in the elements	Ordinance: memorial, proclamation, pledge	Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24–26; John 6:63	Zwingli; Hubmaier; Baptist Faith and Message

Tradition	Christ's presence	Nature of the Supper	Key texts	Key voices / documents
Anabaptist / Believers' Church	Christ present in the gathered, reconciled body	Ordinance: covenant of unity and accountability	1 Cor. 10:17; Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15-20; John 13	Schleitheim; Hubmaier; Dordrecht

(A) The Lutheran View — Real Presence and Sacramental Union

Lutherans confess that in the Supper the true body and blood of Christ are truly present “in, with, and under” the consecrated bread and wine, and are received by mouth by all who commune. Believers receive them for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation; unbelievers receive them to their judgment. Lutherans reject transubstantiation, the Mass as a sacrifice, and the label “consubstantiation,” which they consider a philosophical description of something they do not teach.

Luther's Small Catechism, Part 6 — *“What is the Sacrament of the Altar? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.”*

Key Arguments

- **The plain words:** “This is my body” is to be believed as it stands (Matthew 26:26). At Marburg (1529) Luther insisted that he could not depart from the words of Christ. Every alternative reading appears to Lutherans to replace the words with human reason.
- **1 Corinthians 10:16:** Koinōnia in the body and blood of Christ means sharing in the thing itself.
- **1 Corinthians 11:27-29:** Unworthy eating makes one “guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.” If the unworthy can be guilty concerning the body and blood, they must be receiving it. The presence does not depend on faith; only the benefit does.
- **Christology:** The personal union of the two natures means that the human nature shares in the attributes of the divine (communicatio idiomatum). The “right hand of God” is God’s power, present everywhere. Christ can therefore be bodily present wherever he promises to be (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII-VIII). The Reformed axiom “the finite cannot contain the infinite” (finitum non capax infiniti) is rejected as rationalism.
- **The Word makes the sacrament:** It is Christ’s word of institution and promise, not the faith of the minister or the communicant, that makes the presence. Faith receives what is given; unbelief does not cancel the gift.
- **Gospel gift:** “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” is the center of the Supper. It is a means by which Christ delivers the gospel promise to the individual.
- **Presence in the use:** Lutherans teach the presence in the sacramental action, from consecration to reception, and typically do not hold that the elements are to be adored or reserved.
- **Practice:** Weekly or frequent communion is the norm in confessional Lutheran churches. Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod churches practice “close” communion (communicants are those who share the confession); the ELCA practices open communion for the baptized.

Key Theologians and Documents

- Martin Luther: Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper (1528); Small and Large Catechisms (1529). Philip Melancthon: Augsburg Confession, Article X (1530). Martin Chemnitz: The Lord’s

Supper (1561). Formula of Concord, Epitome and Solid Declaration VII (1577). C.F.W. Walther, Francis Pieper, and Hermann Sasse (This Is My Body, 1959).

Points of Disagreement with the Reformed View

- **Sign-language:** Lutherans see the Reformed “is = signifies” reading as an evasion of the text. Reformed reply: the sign-language idiom is a pattern of scriptural speech (Genesis 17:10; Exodus 12:11; 1 Corinthians 10:4) and both sides admit the cup word is figurative.
- **The ascension:** Lutherans hold that Reformed exegesis limits Christ by a spatial reading of “the right hand.” Reformed reply: Acts 1:11 and 3:21, and the confession that Christ has a true human body, require his humanity to be located in heaven until he returns; his presence with his people is by the Spirit.
- **Unbelievers:** Lutherans say the Reformed make Christ’s presence depend on faith. Reformed reply: Christ’s promise is to believers; the ungodly profane the sign (1 Corinthians 11:27) but do not receive Christ.
- **Convergence:** The Leuenberg Agreement (1973) and the Formula of Agreement (1997, between the ELCA and several Reformed churches) show that many Lutheran and Reformed churches regard their remaining differences as not church-dividing, though confessional Lutherans dissent.

(B) The Zwinglian and Memorialist View

For memorialists, the Lord’s Supper is chiefly a commemoration of Christ’s death, a public proclamation and thanksgiving, and a pledge of loyalty to Christ and to the church. The term “ordinance” is preferred to “sacrament,” to stress that Christ commanded it and that believers perform it in obedience. Christ is present as he is wherever his people gather in faith (Matthew 18:20) and by his Spirit, but not in or with the elements. Huldrych Zwingli himself taught more than “bare” memorial. He held that believers feed spiritually on Christ when they trust in his death, and that the sacrament is a public pledge (the Latin sacramentum, “oath”). But his followers, and especially the Baptist and free-church traditions, developed the memorial emphasis.

Key Arguments

- **The stated purpose:** “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24–25). Christ himself states what the meal is for.
- **John 6:63:** “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.” What gives life is Christ received by faith and the Spirit, not the physical eating of anything. Zwingli argued that eating and drinking in John 6 are metaphors for believing (6:35, 47).
- **The ascension and session:** Christ’s body is in heaven until he returns (Acts 3:21; Hebrews 8:1; 9:24). His words “it is to your advantage that I go away” (John 16:7) imply that the Spirit is his presence with his people now.
- **Idiom:** “Is” means “represents” or “signifies,” as in “I am the door” and “the rock was Christ.”
- **Once for all:** Hebrews 10:10–14 excludes any suggestion of a repeated sacrifice, and any theology of presence seems to open the door to priestly power and superstition.
- **Faith rather than mechanism:** Grace comes through the Word and faith. The Supper is a sign and confession of the faith already present; it is the church’s public act of obedience and testimony. The Baptist Faith and Message (2000) calls it “a symbolic act of obedience whereby

members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.”

- **Pastoral clarity:** It keeps the Supper simple, guards against superstition, and keeps the focus on the preaching of Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Who Holds It

- Most Baptist churches (especially in North America), evangelical free and independent churches, and many non-denominational churches. Plymouth Brethren celebrate weekly, with lay participation, as a “breaking of bread” of remembrance and worship. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are usually memorialist in doctrine, though many expect the Lord’s manifest presence, and some connect healing with the Table (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:30). A few Protestant groups, such as the Quakers and the Salvation Army, do not observe the outward ordinance, holding that the reality is spiritual.
- **Internal diversity:** Historic Baptist confessions are not uniformly memorialist. The Second London Confession (1689) follows Westminster closely; and a movement of “Baptist sacramentalists” (Cross and Thompson, eds., *Baptist Sacramentalism*, 2003) argues that Baptists should recover a richer doctrine of Christ’s presence.

Key Theologians and Documents

- Huldrych Zwingli: *Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525); *On the Lord’s Supper* (1526); *Fidei Ratio* (1530). Balthasar Hubmaier: *A Form for Christ’s Supper* (1527). First London Baptist Confession (1644/1646). *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), Article VII.

Points of Disagreement with the Reformed View

- **Sacramental language:** Memorialists worry that terms such as “means of grace” and “seal” invite sacramentalism, and that the Reformed doctrine of presence has little explicit New Testament warrant.
- **Reformed reply:** 1 Corinthians 10:16–21 treats the Supper as a real participation, parallel with the real fellowship of the demonic table. 1 Corinthians 11:29–32 attributes real consequences to the way the Supper is received. Romans 4:11 calls a sign a “seal.” Christ chose visible signs as the means of confirming faith. Memorialists respond that the Corinthian judgment concerns sin against the community and not a sacramental mechanism, and that fellowship with demons is one of allegiance.
- **Baptism and the Table:** Baptists differ from Presbyterians on who is a covenant member (Jeremiah 31:34) and therefore who may come. See Section 18.

(C) The Anglican View

Anglicanism has never adopted a single doctrine of the Supper. The formularies (the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer) express a Reformed-leaning doctrine of a spiritual presence received by faith, while the Anglo-Catholic tradition emphasizes the objective presence and eucharistic sacrifice, and the Evangelical tradition tends toward the Reformed or memorial pole. This breadth is sometimes described as the Anglican “via media,” and sometimes as its unresolved tension.

Article 28 of the Thirty-Nine Articles — *“The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is Faith.”*

Key Statements and Arguments

- **Articles 25, 28–31:** The sacraments are “effectual signs of grace” (Art. 25). Transubstantiation “cannot be proved by Holy Writ” and “overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament” (Art. 28). The wicked do not eat the body of Christ (Art. 29). Both kinds are to be given to the laity (Art. 30). The sacrifice of Masses is “a blasphemous fable” (Art. 31).
- **Book of Common Prayer (1552, 1662):** The words of administration in 1552: “Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving.” The Prayer of Humble Access (“We do not presume to come to this thy Table...”) and the “Black Rubric” (that kneeling implies no adoration of the elements or of a natural presence) belong to the same Reformed-leaning tradition.
- **Hooker’s “receptionism”:** Richard Hooker (Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, V.67) taught that the real presence of Christ’s body and blood is not to be sought in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of it.
- **The Anglo-Catholic tradition:** Tractarians such as E.B. Pusey and John Keble taught an objective real presence and the Eucharist as a sacrificial memorial, reading the Articles in a Catholic sense.
- **Evangelical Anglicans:** J.C. Ryle and many later Evangelicals hold a view close to Calvin’s or, in some Australian and English circles, to a fuller memorialism.
- **Practice:** A weekly or frequent Sunday Eucharist, celebrated by an ordained priest, in a set liturgy with the Word read and preached.

Key Theologians

- Thomas Cranmer: A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament (1550).
Nicholas Ridley; John Jewel; Richard Hooker; J.C. Ryle; E.B. Pusey (Anglo-Catholic).

Points of Disagreement with the Reformed View

- **Breadth:** Reformed critics see in Anglican comprehensiveness a toleration of doctrines the Articles exclude. Anglo-Catholics see the Reformed reading of the Articles as reducing what the Prayer Book affirms about the Eucharist. Anglican Evangelicals respond that the formularies, read in their historical setting, are the same as the Reformed confessions.

(D) The Wesleyan and Methodist View

John Wesley, an Anglican priest, held a high view of the Supper as a means of grace: ordained by Christ, best received frequently, and open to seekers as well as believers. He and Charles Wesley held that Christ is present in the Supper by the Spirit in a way they called a mystery and refused to define. Their Hymns on the Lord’s Supper (1745) express both the sacramental presence and the memorial and sacrificial dimensions with great warmth.

Key Arguments

- **A means of grace:** In “The Means of Grace” (1746) Wesley lists prayer, searching the Scriptures, and the Lord’s Supper among the instituted means by which God ordinarily conveys grace. The Supper conveys not only the sanctifying grace of the believer but the preventing and justifying grace by which sinners are drawn to Christ.
- **Constant communion:** In “The Duty of Constant Communion” (Sermon 101) Wesley argued that it is the duty of every Christian to receive the Supper as often as he can: because Christ

commanded it, because it is the food of the soul, and because the early church did so daily or weekly. Wesley himself communed several times a week whenever he could.

- **A converting ordinance:** Wesley defended admitting to the Table those who desired grace, even if they lacked assurance, because the Supper was ordained to convey grace to those in need of it. This is the source of the Methodist practice of an open table.
- **Doctrinal standards:** The Methodist Article XVIII calls the Supper “a sacrament of our redemption by Christ’s death,” in which the body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten “after a heavenly and spiritual manner,” with faith the means of reception.
- **Brevint’s threefold pattern:** The Wesleys included in their 1745 hymnbook an abridgment of Daniel Brevint’s *Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice* (1673), which presents the Supper as a memorial of past sufferings, a sign and means of present grace, and a pledge of glory to come.
- **Modern Methodism:** The United Methodist statement *This Holy Mystery* (2004) affirms Christ’s real presence through the Holy Spirit and invites all who respond to Christ’s love. Unfermented grape juice is the common practice, growing out of the nineteenth-century temperance movement (Section 18). Holiness traditions (Nazarene, Free Methodist) differ in emphasis.

Key Theologians and Documents

- John Wesley: Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace”; Sermon 101, “The Duty of Constant Communion.” Charles and John Wesley: *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (1745). Daniel Brevint: *Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice* (1673). Modern studies: J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (1948); Ole Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments* (1972).

Points of Disagreement with the Reformed View

- **The open table:** Reformed churches fence the Table by baptism, profession, and discipline (1 Corinthians 11:27–29). Wesleyans argue that the Supper is for the needy and the seeking. Reformed reply: the Table is for the weak in faith, but not for those who reject Christ or refuse repentance (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 81–82); the “converting ordinance” idea shifts the Supper from a covenant meal toward an evangelistic one.
- **Arminian theology:** Wesleyans hold that grace can be resisted and lost, so the Supper is a means of persevering. Reformed hold that the Spirit’s work in the elect is effectual and that the Supper strengthens the faith that God has given.
- **Sacrificial language:** The Wesleys’ hymns speak of the Supper as a memorial sacrifice presented before the Father. Reformed writers appreciate the doxology but caution that Hebrews 10 allows no offering of Christ, only the sacrifice of praise.

(E) The Anabaptist and Believers’ Church View

For the Anabaptist tradition (Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, Brethren), the Supper is the church’s meal: a covenant of fellowship among baptized believers who have committed themselves to one another under Christ. Its dominant themes are unity, reconciliation, mutual accountability, and separation from the world. The Supper is an ordinance, not a sacrament that conveys grace by itself, but a solemn act of the community. Christ is present in the gathered and reconciled body (Matthew 18:20).

Key Arguments and Practices

- **One bread, one body:** 1 Corinthians 10:17 makes the Supper a sign of the church’s unity. Those who eat together must be at peace: “First be reconciled to your brother” (Matthew 5:24); see

also Matthew 18:15–20. Many Old Order communities hold a preparatory council meeting before communion to secure reconciliation, and communion may be postponed if there is unresolved conflict.

- **Closed communion:** Only baptized members in good standing take part. The Schleithem Confession (1527, Article 3) states that those who break one bread in remembrance of Christ's body must first be united by baptism in one body, and separated from evil; it cites 1 Corinthians 10:21 ("You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons").
- **A pledge of love:** Balthasar Hubmaier taught that in the Supper believers publicly pledge themselves to love one another to the point of giving their lives for one another.
- **Memorial, with communal presence:** The bread is not the body of Christ; the Supper is a sign. Christ is present as the church gathers and as the Spirit unites it.
- **Foot washing:** The Church of the Brethren (in its "Love Feast": a fellowship meal, foot washing, and then bread and cup), and some Mennonite groups, treat John 13:14–15 as an ordinance. The Dordrecht Confession (1632) includes an article on the washing of the saints' feet.
- **Frequency:** Commonly semiannual or quarterly among traditional communities; more frequent in many contemporary Mennonite congregations.

Key Sources

- Schleithem Confession (1527); Balthasar Hubmaier, *A Form for Christ's Supper* (1527); Menno Simons on the Supper; Dordrecht Confession (1632).

Points of Disagreement with the Reformed View

- **A pure church:** Anabaptists hold that the Table shows the visible, gathered, regenerate church and must be kept pure by close discipline. Reformed reply: the visible church contains wheat and tares until the end (Matthew 13:24–30); discipline is required (Matthew 18; 1 Corinthians 5), but the church cannot judge the heart. The Reformed agree on the importance of discipline and disagree on how perfectly it can be achieved.
- **Infant baptism:** Anabaptists deny that infant baptism admits to the covenant and therefore to the Table. Reformed reply: the sign of entrance to the covenant was given to the children of believers in the Old Testament (Genesis 17:12) and the New (Acts 2:39; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Colossians 2:11–12), with the Table following upon profession.

SECTION 18: PRACTICAL AND DISPUTED QUESTIONS

Doctrine shapes practice, but Scripture leaves several practical matters open, and Protestants have answered them differently. This section sets out the main questions, the biblical evidence, and the range of answers.

How Often?

The New Testament gives no fixed interval. Acts 2:42 and 20:7 suggest regular, probably weekly, assembly around the Word and the breaking of bread, and 1 Corinthians 11:26 says only "as often as." Calvin (*Institutes* 4.17.43–46) held that the Supper should be set before the church at least weekly, and

he called the once-a-year custom of his day an invention of the devil. The Geneva magistrates would not allow it, and Geneva settled on a quarterly pattern, which influenced much of the Reformed world.

Tradition	Typical practice	Notes
Reformed / Presbyterian	Monthly or quarterly; a growing number weekly	Calvin's ideal was weekly; Scottish "communion seasons" made the Supper a rare, prepared event
Lutheran	Weekly or every other week	The historic norm since the Reformation
Anglican	Weekly or monthly	Sunday Eucharist in most parishes
Wesleyan / Methodist	Monthly (Wesley urged constant communion)	Weekly is increasingly encouraged
Baptist / free church	Monthly or quarterly	Brethren assemblies observe it weekly
Anabaptist	Semiannual to monthly	Preceded by reconciliation; Brethren Love Feast annually or semiannually

- **The argument for weekly:** Acts 2:42; 20:7; the pairing of Word and table (Luke 24); and the fact that the Supper is a means of grace the church needs regularly.
- **The argument for less frequent:** The Bible does not command a weekly rhythm; rarity can heighten reverence and preparation; and frequent celebration can breed carelessness. Reformed writers who favor a monthly or quarterly pattern often appeal to the need for proper preparation (1 Corinthians 11:28).

The Elements

The Bread

The accounts say *artos*, ordinary bread. If the meal was a Passover, the bread was unleavened (Mark 14:12). Practice varies: unleavened wafers or bread in the West, leavened loaves in the East, and any bread in many Protestant churches. No Reformed confession requires either. The breaking of one loaf (1 Corinthians 10:17) is prized by many Reformed and Brethren congregations as a sign of unity, and Reformed liturgies have traditionally included the fraction.

Wine or Grape Juice

- **The evidence:** "The fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29) was a Jewish idiom for wine (Mishnah Berakhot 6:1 uses it in the blessing over wine). The Passover cup was wine, and 1 Corinthians 11:21 speaks of some getting drunk (*methyei*) at the Corinthian meal, though that was an abuse.
- **Historic practice:** Wine was the universal practice until the nineteenth century, and the Reformed catechisms speak of "bread and wine" (Westminster Larger Catechism 168).
- **Grape juice:** Unfermented grape juice became widespread in the nineteenth-century temperance movement. A Methodist communicant, Thomas Welch, is commonly credited with pasteurizing grape juice for communion in 1869. It remains the norm in most Baptist and Methodist churches in North America, and is used in many Presbyterian ones.
- **The case for juice:** Pastoral concern for recovering alcoholics and children, the wide sense of "fruit of the vine," and avoidance of causing a weaker brother to stumble (Romans 14:21).

- **The case for wine:** Fidelity to Christ's institution and the church's historic practice. Many Reformed churches offer both.

One Cup or Many

The common cup expresses koinōnia and unity ("the cup of blessing that we bless," 1 Corinthians 10:16). Individual cups came into wide use in the late nineteenth century, on hygienic grounds, and are now standard in most Protestant congregations. Some Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, and Brethren congregations still use a common cup, and many others use intinction. Scripture does not command a particular vessel, and the question is one of wisdom and charity.

Who May Participate?

Baptism as the Gate

Nearly all Protestants require baptism before the Supper, as circumcision preceded the Passover (Exodus 12:48; Colossians 2:11–12). The difference is between those who baptize infants (Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist) and those who baptize only professing believers (Baptists, Anabaptists, and most free churches).

Open, Close, and Closed Communion

Practice	Meaning	Who practices it
Open	Any baptized Christian, or in some cases anyone who desires Christ, may come	Most Methodists, many Anglicans and evangelicals, the ELCA (for the baptized)
Close	Baptized believers who share the church's confession and are in good standing	Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, many Reformed and Baptist churches
Closed	Only members of the local congregation or denomination	Many Anabaptist groups, some Strict Baptists and Brethren

- **For guarding the Table:** 1 Corinthians 5:11; 10:21; 11:27–29; Exodus 12:43–49; Matthew 7:6; 18:15–20; Didache 9:5 (only the baptized may eat and drink).
- **For a wider welcome:** Jesus' table fellowship with sinners (Luke 15:2); Wesley's "converting ordinance"; and the concern that a high fence makes the church the judge of hearts, which only God can see.

Children and the Table

Infant communion was widely practiced in the ancient church (Cyprian, On the Lapsed 25 describes a child at the cup) and remains the practice of the Eastern churches. The West gradually restricted communion to those who had reached an age of discretion. The Reformers required instruction and examination before first communion, and Reformed confessional churches such as the PCA and OPC require a credible profession of faith. A minority of Reformed writers (for example Peter Leithart and Douglas Wilson) argue for "paedocommunion."

- **For paedocommunion:** Children of believers are covenant members and, in the Old Testament, ate the Passover (Exodus 12:3–4; Deuteronomy 16:11–14). Baptism gives a right to the Table. The Supper is a meal of nourishment for the whole household.

- **Against:** 1 Corinthians 11:28 requires self-examination and 11:29 discerning the body, which infants cannot do. Old Testament children were catechized as they ate (Exodus 12:26–27). The Supper is a sign requiring faith to receive; and 1 Corinthians 11:30 shows the danger of eating unworthily. Baptists reject paedocommunion along with infant baptism.

Who May Administer?

- **Reformed:** An ordained minister of the Word (Westminster Confession 29.3), with elders assisting in distribution.
- **Lutheran and Anglican:** A duly called and ordained pastor or priest.
- **Baptist and free church:** The pastor or an authorized member, with deacons assisting; there is no theology of a priestly consecration.
- **Brethren and some Anabaptist groups:** Any qualified member of the congregation, according to the group's practice ("lay presidency").

The Reformed reasoning is that because the Supper is joined to the Word, it belongs to those charged with the Word. Those who differ appeal to the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) and to the New Testament's silence about who presided.

Order, Posture, and Liturgy

- **Common elements:** Reading and preaching of the Word; an invitation and warning (the "fencing"); the words of institution (1 Corinthians 11:23–26); a prayer of thanksgiving; the breaking of bread; distribution; prayer and a hymn (Matthew 26:30).
- **Posture:** Kneeling (Anglican, Lutheran), standing, and sitting in pews all occur. The Black Rubric of the Prayer Book and Reformed tradition insist that kneeling is not adoration of the elements. In Scotland, communicants sat at tables, echoing the upper room.
- **Sick and homebound:** Many traditions have provision for communion with those unable to attend, held with the church's authority.
- **After the Supper:** The Westminster Larger Catechism (175) directs reflection on one's conduct, thanksgiving, and renewed resolve. The Supper is meant to shape the week that follows.

The Traditions Compared

Question	Reformed	Lutheran	Anglican	Wesleyan	Baptist / memorialist
Christ's presence	Spiritual, real, by the Spirit	Bodily, in, with, and under the elements	Heavenly and spiritual (Art. 28); a range	Real, by the Spirit; a mystery	By the Spirit to the gathered church
Term	Sacrament	Sacrament	Sacrament / Eucharist	Sacrament	Ordinance
What do unbelievers receive?	Only bread and wine; judgment	Body and blood, to judgment	Only bread and wine (Art. 29)	Only bread and wine, to judgment	Bread and wine; a profaned ordinance
Means of grace?	Yes, by the Spirit through faith	Yes; the Word makes the gift	Yes; effectual signs	Yes; even a converting ordinance	Usually described as a testimony of faith
Who may come	Baptized professing members; fenced	Baptized, catechized; close (LCMS) or open (ELCA)	Baptized; often confirmed	Open table	Baptized believers; varies

Question	Reformed	Lutheran	Anglican	Wesleyan	Baptist / memorialist
Frequency	Weekly to quarterly	Weekly or biweekly	Weekly or monthly	Monthly; weekly encouraged	Monthly or quarterly
Elements	Bread and wine or juice	Bread and wine	Bread and wine	Bread and grape juice	Bread and juice
Administrator	Ordained minister	Ordained pastor	Ordained priest	Ordained pastor	Pastor or authorized member

SECTION 19: SYNTHESIS AND STUDY CONCLUSIONS

What Is Not Disputed

Across the Protestant traditions in this study, the following are widely affirmed:

- The Supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed (1 Corinthians 11:23).
- Bread and wine (the fruit of the vine) are the elements, and the Supper proclaims the Lord's death (1 Corinthians 11:26).
- Christ's death was once for all, a sufficient sacrifice for sin, and the Supper does not repeat it (Hebrews 10:10–14).
- The Supper belongs to the covenant community and is to be received with faith and repentance, with reverence and self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:27–32).
- The Supper is for the strengthening of faith and the unity of the church (1 Corinthians 10:16–17).
- The Supper looks forward to Christ's return and the marriage supper of the Lamb (Matthew 26:29; Revelation 19:9).
- Baptism and the Supper are the two rites Christ himself ordained for his church.
- Christ is truly present to his people in worship. The debate is about how, and in what way, this is connected to the elements.

The Central Exegetical Tensions

The disagreements return again and again to a handful of texts and questions:

- **“This is my body” (Matthew 26:26):** What kind of “is”? Substantial change, sacramental union, sacramental identification, or signification (Section 9)?
- **“Participation” (1 Corinthians 10:16):** Is koinōnia in Christ's body and blood a real communion, or a fellowship in the benefits (Section 12)?
- **“In remembrance” (Luke 22:19):** Does anamnēsis mean commemoration, proclamation, or re-presentation (Section 9)?
- **“Discerning the body” (1 Corinthians 11:29):** The sacramental body, the church, or both (Section 12)?
- **John 6:51–58:** Faith, sacrament, or both (Section 10)?

- **The ascension:** Does Christ's ascended humanity limit how he can be present (Acts 3:21; Hebrews 9:24), or does his exaltation make him present everywhere he wills to be?
- **What unbelievers receive:** Bread and wine only (Reformed, Anglican), or also the body and blood to judgment (Lutheran)?
- **Covenant membership and the Table:** Are children of believers covenant members with a claim to the Table, or does the new covenant include only the regenerate (Jeremiah 31:34)?

No single verse decides these questions. The most responsible reading holds several truths together: the Supper is a memorial, a proclamation, a communion with the living Christ by the Spirit, a covenant sign and seal, a bond of the church, and a foretaste of the kingdom. Which of these should govern the church's doctrine and practice is the ongoing debate, and each tradition emphasizes a different member of the list.

Master Cross-Reference Table

Theme	Old Testament	Gospels and Acts	Epistles and Revelation
Lamb and blood	Exodus 12:1–13; Leviticus 17:11	John 1:29; 19:36	1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:6
Covenant	Genesis 15; 17; Exodus 24:8; Jeremiah 31:31–34	Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20	1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 8–10
Meal in God's presence	Exodus 24:11; Deuteronomy 12:7	Luke 22:30; Luke 24:30–35	Revelation 3:20; 19:9
Memorial	Exodus 12:14; Numbers 10:10	Luke 22:19	1 Corinthians 11:24–25; Hebrews 10:3
Communion / participation	Leviticus 7:15–21; Deuteronomy 27:7	John 6:56; 15:4	1 Corinthians 10:16–18
Bread from heaven	Exodus 16; Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 78:24	John 6:31–58	1 Corinthians 10:3; Revelation 2:17
The cup	Psalm 116:13; Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17	Matthew 26:39; 26:27–28	1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25
Thanksgiving	Leviticus 7:12; Psalm 50:14; 116:17	Luke 22:19; Luke 24:30	Hebrews 13:15
Unworthy eating	Leviticus 7:20; 2 Chronicles 30:18–20	Matthew 22:11–13	1 Corinthians 11:27–32; Hebrews 10:29
Unity of the church	Exodus 12:3	John 17:21	1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12–13
Messianic banquet	Isaiah 25:6–9; 55:1–3; Proverbs 9	Luke 14:15; 22:29–30; Matthew 26:29	Revelation 19:6–9; 21:6; 22:17
Once-for-all sacrifice	Leviticus 16; Isaiah 53:10–12	John 19:30	Hebrews 7:27; 9:26–28; 10:10–14
Sign and seal	Genesis 9:12; 17:11	Luke 22:19–20	Romans 4:11; 1 Corinthians 10:1–4

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does Scripture join a death and a meal at the center of both the Passover and the Supper? What does the pairing say about how God saves and how he feeds his people?
2. Read Exodus 24:1–11 and Luke 22:14–20 side by side. What does each add to the other?
3. Trace the Word-and-meal pattern through Nehemiah 8, Luke 24, Acts 20, and your own church's worship. Where does yours keep the pattern, and where does it break?
4. What is at stake in whether "is" means "signifies," "is united with," or "becomes"? Which arguments do you find most and least persuasive, and why?
5. Paul warns of judgment for those who eat and drink "without discerning the body." What would it look like in your congregation to discern the body in both senses?
6. How should a church decide who may come to the Table, and who decides? Where do you see a right balance between guarding and welcoming?
7. How does the Supper's "until he comes" shape the mood of the celebration, both solemn and joyful?
8. Which Protestant tradition in Section 17 represents your own most faithfully, and which of its criticisms of the others do you find strongest?

A Final Word

Calvin confessed that how Christ feeds his people in the Supper is a secret too lofty for him to comprehend or declare, and that he would rather experience it than explain it (Institutes 4.17.32). Whatever the disagreements, the Lord's Supper stands at the point where the whole biblical story converges. It goes back to the meals of Eden and the blood of Passover, the covenant feast at Sinai, and the promises of Isaiah and Jeremiah. It gathers the table fellowship of Jesus and the upper room and reaches to the marriage supper of the Lamb. For the Reformed tradition it is the place where the crucified and risen Christ, present by his Spirit, feeds his people with himself, seals the promise of the gospel to each believer, and binds them together as one body. In the words of Paul, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

KEY SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Language and Reference Resources

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- Second London Baptist Confession (1689), chapter 30; Baptist Faith and Message (2000), Article VII.
- Augsburg Confession (1530), Article X; Luther's Small and Large Catechisms (1529); Formula of Concord (1577), Article VII.
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