



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

Communion

Remembering Jesus, Sharing His Table, and Proclaiming His Gospel

The Short Answer

Communion is the meal Jesus gave His followers to remember Him. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus took bread and gave it to His disciples. He told them that it represented His body, given for them. Then He took the cup and connected it with His blood and the New Covenant. And He told His followers: "Do this in remembrance of Me." Christians call this meal by several names: Communion. The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Table. The Eucharist. Different Christian traditions understand some aspects of Communion differently. But at the center of the meal stands something Christians share: Jesus Christ. His body given. His blood shed. His death for sinners. His people gathered. And His promised return. Communion does not repeat Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus offered Himself once for all. Nor is Communion something Christians do to earn salvation. We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But Communion should never be treated as meaningless. Jesus gave it to His church. Paul taught Christians to approach it seriously. And every time believers gather around the Lord's Table, they proclaim something extraordinary: Jesus died for us. Jesus has made us His people. Jesus is coming again.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Paul tells the church that whenever Christians eat the bread and drink the cup, they proclaim the Lord's death: "until He comes." Those final words matter. Communion does not only look backward. It also looks forward.

Opening Memory Anchor

Communion looks back to the cross. It looks around at Christ's family. It looks inward with honesty. And it looks forward to Jesus' return.



PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

1

START WITH JESUS

Read Luke 22:14-20.

It was the night before Jesus would be crucified. Jesus gathered with His disciples for a meal. But this was not just any meal. It took place in the setting of Passover. For generations, Jewish families had remembered how God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Now Jesus took familiar elements from the meal and pointed them toward something extraordinary: Himself. He took bread. He gave thanks. He broke it. He gave it to His disciples. He connected the bread with His body, which would be given for them. Then He took the cup. He connected it with the New Covenant in His blood.

Within hours, Jesus would be arrested. His body would be wounded. His blood would be shed. And He would die on a cross. Jesus gave His disciples a meal that would continually bring them back to the heart of the gospel.

Memory Anchor

Communion begins with Jesus. Not with a church tradition. Not with a denomination. Not with a ritual. With Jesus.

2

WHAT IS COMMUNION?

Communion is a meal of remembrance and proclamation that Jesus gave His followers. Christians eat bread and drink from the cup in obedience to Him. The bread points us toward Jesus' body. The cup points us toward His blood. Together they point us toward His sacrificial death.

Read Matthew 26:26-29. Read Luke 22:19-20. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Communion brings the church back to the cross again and again. Not because Jesus needs to die again. He does not. But because Christians never outgrow their need to remember what He has done.

3

WHY IS IT CALLED COMMUNION?

The Bible uses several ideas that have given Christians different names for this meal.

THE LORD'S SUPPER - Read 1 Corinthians 11:20. Paul calls it the Lord's Supper.

THE LORD'S TABLE - Read 1 Corinthians 10:21. Paul speaks of the table of the Lord.

COMMUNION - This word reflects the idea of sharing or participation. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

EUCCHARIST - This name comes from a Greek word connected with thanksgiving. The Gospels tell us that Jesus gave thanks before distributing the bread and cup.

Different traditions prefer different names. The names sometimes reflect different theological emphases. For simplicity, this study will usually use COMMUNION or THE LORD'S SUPPER. But whichever name is used, the focus should remain: Jesus Christ.

4

WHAT DOES THE BREAD MEAN?

Jesus took bread and connected it with His body. Read Luke 22:19.

His body would soon be given over to suffering and death. The bread therefore directs our attention toward the real physical sacrifice of Jesus.

Christianity is not built around the idea that Jesus merely taught some inspiring truths and then died tragically. He intentionally gave Himself for us. Read Isaiah 53:4-6. Read 1 Peter 2:24. Jesus bore our sins.

The bread calls us to remember: He gave Himself for us.



5 WHAT DOES THE CUP MEAN?

Read Matthew 26:27-28. Read Luke 22:20.

Jesus connects the cup with His blood and the New Covenant. Throughout Scripture, blood is associated with life and sacrifice. Jesus' blood points toward His life poured out in death.

But the cup also points toward something even larger: a covenant. God was accomplishing what the prophets had promised. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. God promised a New Covenant involving forgiveness, a transformed relationship with His people, and His law written upon their hearts.

At the Last Supper, Jesus declared that His death stood at the center of that New Covenant. The cup therefore says: Forgiveness came at a cost. Jesus gave Himself.

6 DOES COMMUNION SAVE US?

Communion must never replace Jesus. Eating bread cannot substitute for faith. Drinking from the cup cannot purchase forgiveness. Participating in a church service cannot make someone right with God apart from Christ.

Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Read Romans 3:22-26. Read Titus 3:4-7.

We are saved because of what Jesus has done. We receive salvation by grace through faith. Communion points us back to that salvation.

Different Christian traditions understand the way God works through Communion differently, and Part Two will examine those differences carefully. But no Christian should approach Communion thinking: "I am earning heaven by eating this bread." The bread did not die for us. The cup was not crucified. Jesus was.

Foundational Truth

Communion does not replace the gospel. Communion continually brings us back to the gospel.

7 WHY DO WE NEED TO KEEP REMEMBERING?

Jesus said: "Do this in remembrance of Me." Why? Because people forget.

We may remember the facts of Christianity while losing our sense of wonder about them. The cross can become familiar. Grace can become ordinary. Forgiveness can become expected.

Communion interrupts that forgetfulness. It places the gospel before our senses. We see the bread. We hold it. We eat it. We see the cup. We drink. And we remember: The Son of God gave Himself for us.

Communion is not merely remembering that an event happened. It is deliberately bringing the meaning of that event back before our hearts.

8 COMMUNION LOOKS BACK

Communion first points backward. Back to the cross. Read 1 Corinthians 11:26.

Paul says that when Christians eat the bread and drink the cup, they proclaim THE LORD'S DEATH. Not our goodness. Not our religious achievement. Not our worthiness. His death.

Every Communion table quietly announces: Jesus was crucified. Jesus gave Himself for sinners. Jesus accomplished what we could never accomplish for ourselves.

9 COMMUNION LOOKS AROUND

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. Paul connects Communion not only with Jesus but with His people. There is one bread. And there is one body.



Communion is personal. But it is not merely private. When Christians receive Communion together, they are reminded: “I belong to Jesus.” And: “So do these people around me.”

The person beside you may look different, vote differently, come from another culture, have a different personality, have more money, have less money, be younger, be older, or have a very different story. But if both belong to Jesus, both come to the same table because of the same grace. The Lord’s Table has no VIP section.

Memory Anchor

At Communion, nobody comes because they deserve a better seat. We all come because we need the same Savior.

10 COMMUNION LOOKS INWARD

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-32. Paul tells Christians to examine themselves. That can sound frightening. Some believers hear those words and think: “I sinned this week. Maybe I should stay away.”

But Paul is not teaching that only perfect Christians may receive Communion. If perfection were required, the table would always be empty.

Self-examination means approaching the Lord honestly. Ask: Is there sin I am refusing to acknowledge? Am I treating Jesus casually? Am I harboring bitterness? Am I mistreating another believer? Am I participating thoughtlessly? Do I need to repent?

Communion gives us an opportunity to stop pretending. Confess. Repent. Receive grace. Remember Jesus.

Pastoral Truth

The Lord’s Table is not a reward for Christians who had a perfect week. It is a place where repentant Christians remember the perfect Savior.

11 COMMUNION LOOKS FORWARD

Read Matthew 26:29. Read 1 Corinthians 11:26.

Jesus spoke about drinking again in His Father’s kingdom. Paul says we proclaim the Lord’s death: UNTIL HE COMES.

Communion therefore contains hope. Every time Christians gather at the table, they remember: The crucified Jesus is not still in the tomb. He rose. He reigns. And He is coming again.

Communion looks backward to a finished sacrifice. And forward to a promised future.

12 THE FOUR DIRECTIONS OF COMMUNION

This gives us a simple way to remember what happens at the Lord’s Table.

LOOK BACK. Remember the cross.

LOOK AROUND. Remember Christ’s people.

LOOK INWARD. Examine your heart.

LOOK FORWARD. Remember that Jesus is coming again.

BACK. AROUND. INWARD. FORWARD.

Memory Anchor

Communion looks back to the cross, around at Christ’s family, inward with honesty, and forward to Jesus’ return.



13 WHO SHOULD TAKE COMMUNION?

At minimum, Communion is intended for people who belong to Jesus. The Lord's Supper is a Christian meal. It proclaims faith in Christ's death.

If someone has not trusted Jesus, taking Communion cannot create the faith the meal is intended to express. A person who does not yet believe does not need bread and a cup. That person needs Jesus.

This does not mean unbelievers should feel unwelcome at church. They should be welcomed warmly. They should hear the gospel. They should see Christians receive Communion with humility and joy.

But the Lord's Supper expresses belonging to Christ. So the first question is not: "Am I good enough to take Communion?" It is: "Do I belong to Jesus?"

14 DO I HAVE TO BE BAPTIZED FIRST?

Christians disagree about this. Many churches understand the New Testament pattern as FAITH → BAPTISM → CONTINUING LIFE IN THE CHURCH, including Communion.

For that reason, some churches require baptism before participating in the Lord's Supper. Other churches welcome any genuine believer in Jesus to Communion regardless of whether that person has yet been baptized.

Scripture does not contain a verse that simply says: "You must be baptized before taking Communion." But the normal New Testament pattern places baptism very early in Christian discipleship.

If you are a believer who has not been baptized, the better question may not be: "Can I take Communion anyway?" It may be: "Why have I not yet followed Jesus in baptism?" Study the issue carefully. And respect the Communion practices of the church where you are worshipping.

For a fuller study of baptism, see the 3Nails study Baptism: Going Public With the New Life Jesus Has Given You.

15 WHAT IF I SINNED THIS WEEK?

Then you are exactly the kind of person who needs to remember the gospel. That does not mean sin is unimportant. Communion should never become: "I can live however I want because grace covers everything." But neither should it become: "I failed, so I need to hide from Jesus."

Read 1 John 1:8-9. The Christian response to recognized sin is confession, repentance, and returning to God.

The question is not: "Did I have a flawless week?" The question is: "Am I willing to bring my sin honestly before Jesus?" Communion reminds us why forgiveness is possible. Christ gave Himself for sinners.

16 WHAT IF I AM STRUGGLING WITH THE SAME SIN AGAIN?

Bring it to Jesus again. Do not excuse it. Do not rename it. Do not surrender to it. But do not imagine that repeatedly needing grace means the cross has stopped being sufficient.

Sometimes Communion becomes especially meaningful during a long struggle. The bread and cup remind us: Our hope is not that we have become impressive Christians. Our hope is Jesus.

If you are trapped in serious or persistent sin, seek help from mature believers and trustworthy church leaders. Repentance may require difficult changes. But struggling against sin is not the same thing as peacefully embracing it.

17 WHAT DOES "UNWORTHY MANNER" MEAN?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27. Paul warns about eating the bread or drinking the cup in an unworthy manner. Notice what he does not say: Only worthy people may come.

The issue is the manner of participation. The Corinthian church had serious problems surrounding the Lord's Supper. Some people were eating excessively. Some were getting drunk. Some were humiliating poorer believers.

The gathering that should have demonstrated the unity of Christ's body was exposing selfishness and division. Paul's warning therefore should not be reduced to: "Did I commit any sin this week?" The Corinthians were treating

the Lord's Table in a way that contradicted the gospel the meal proclaimed.

18 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "EXAMINE YOURSELF"?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:28. Self-examination is not spiritual panic. It is honest reflection before God.

You might pray: "Lord, show me where I need to repent." "Show me where I have treated You casually." "Show me where I have hurt another person." "Show me where pride is hiding." "Thank You for the cross." "Thank You for Your grace."

Then respond to what God brings to mind. Communion can become a beautiful rhythm of REMEMBERING. CONFESSING. RECEIVING. THANKING. HOPING.

19 SHOULD I TAKE COMMUNION IF I AM ANGRY WITH SOMEONE?

This requires wisdom. Christians sometimes assume that any unresolved disagreement automatically disqualifies someone from Communion. Scripture does not state that rule.

Some relationships cannot be repaired immediately. The other person may refuse reconciliation. The situation may be complicated. And in situations involving abuse or danger, reconciliation does not mean returning to an unsafe situation.

But Scripture takes bitterness, hatred, division, and refusal to forgive seriously. Read Matthew 5:23-24. Read Ephesians 4:31-32. Read Colossians 3:12-15.

If Communion exposes bitterness in your heart, do not merely feel guilty. Respond. Ask God to help you forgive. Seek reconciliation where appropriate and safe. The table reminds us: We are people who live by mercy.

20 WHAT IF I DO NOT FEEL EMOTIONAL DURING COMMUNION?

That is okay. Communion is not validated by tears.

Some days you may feel overwhelmed by gratitude. Other days you may feel quiet. Distracted. Tired. Numb. Or simply thoughtful.

Your emotions are not the measure of Christ's faithfulness. But do not participate carelessly. Slow down. Remember deliberately. Think about what the bread and cup proclaim.

Sometimes obedience leads emotion. Sometimes emotion follows. Sometimes it does not. Jesus remains worthy either way.

21 HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE TAKE COMMUNION?

The New Testament does not give the church a universal schedule. Some churches celebrate Communion every week, every month, several times each year, or according to another regular pattern.

Read Acts 2:42. The earliest believers devoted themselves to "the breaking of bread," although interpreters debate whether every reference to breaking bread describes the Lord's Supper. Read Acts 20:7. The believers gathered to break bread.

The important issue is not merely frequency. Communion should be regular enough to function as a meaningful rhythm in the life of the church. And whenever it is celebrated, it should be taken seriously.

22 DOES IT HAVE TO BE WINE?

At the Last Supper, the cup came from the fruit of the vine in a first-century Jewish meal. Historically, wine has been widely used in Christian Communion. Many churches today use grape juice.

Some do so because of concerns about alcohol. Others inherited the practice from temperance traditions. Does the exact beverage determine whether Communion is valid? Christians disagree. Some traditions prescribe wine. Others consider grape juice an appropriate representation of the fruit of the vine.

The central biblical emphasis is not the alcohol content. It is the blood of Jesus to which the cup points. Churches should take Scripture seriously while also showing pastoral wisdom toward people for whom alcohol may present a serious problem.

23 WHAT KIND OF BREAD SHOULD BE USED?

Christians also differ here. Some churches use unleavened bread because the Last Supper occurred in the context of Passover. Others use ordinary bread. Some use wafers. Some use gluten-free alternatives for people with medical needs.

The bread matters because Jesus gave bread to His disciples and told them to remember Him. But Scripture does not teach that a particular recipe possesses saving power. The sign should serve the reality to which it points.

24 WHAT DOES A COMMUNION SERVICE USUALLY LOOK LIKE?

Practices vary widely. A pastor or church leader may read Scripture. The congregation may pray. There may be time for confession or reflection. The bread may be distributed. Then the cup.

Some churches invite people to come forward. Others pass the elements through the congregation. Some receive them together. Others receive them individually. Some churches have elaborate liturgies. Others are very simple. Some call the gathering the Eucharist or Mass. Others call it Communion or the Lord's Supper.

The outward form varies. But Christians should never allow the mechanics of the service to hide the Person at its center: Jesus.

25 WHAT SHOULD I THINK ABOUT DURING COMMUNION?

You do not need to manufacture complicated thoughts. Remember Jesus.

You might think: Jesus loved me. Jesus gave Himself for me. My sin is serious. His grace is greater. I am not alone. I belong to His people. His sacrifice is enough. The tomb is empty. Jesus is coming again. Thank You, Lord.

26 BEGINNER REVIEW

Complete each statement.

1. Jesus gave Communion to His _____. Answer: followers / disciples.
2. The bread points us toward Jesus' _____. Answer: body.
3. The cup points us toward Jesus' _____ and the New Covenant. Answer: blood.
4. Communion does not _____ salvation. Answer: earn.
5. Communion looks back to the _____. Answer: cross.
6. Communion looks around at Christ's _____. Answer: family / people.
7. Communion calls us to examine our _____. Answer: hearts / ourselves.
8. Communion looks forward to Jesus' _____. Answer: return.
9. Taking Communion in an "unworthy manner" does not mean that only _____ people may participate. Answer: perfect.
10. Communion proclaims the Lord's death until He _____. Answer: comes.

Beginner Summary



Jesus gave His followers a meal: bread and a cup, simple things carrying an extraordinary message. His body would be given. His blood would be shed. The New Covenant would be established through His sacrifice. We look back: Jesus died. We look around: we belong to His people. We look inward: we examine our hearts. We look forward: Jesus is coming again. The Lord's Table is not a reward for Christians who have become worthy enough. Christ is worthy. We come because we belong to Him. We remember because we need Him. And we proclaim what He has done.

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

THE BIBLICAL STORY BEHIND THE TABLE

27 COMMUNION BEGINS BEFORE THE UPPER ROOM

To understand Communion deeply, we need to travel backward through Scripture. The Last Supper did not appear out of nowhere.

Its imagery reaches into the story of Passover, sacrifice, covenant, bread, blood, deliverance, and God dwelling with His people.

The Bible tells one unfolding story. And Communion gathers many threads of that story around Jesus.

28 PASSOVER AND THE EXODUS

Read Exodus 12. Israel was enslaved in Egypt. God was about to bring judgment and deliver His people. Each household was instructed to sacrifice a lamb. Blood was placed on the doorposts. The people ate the Passover meal. Judgment passed over the homes marked by the blood. Then God led His people out of slavery.

Generation after generation, Israel remembered that deliverance through Passover. Now return to the Last Supper. Jesus sits with His disciples in the context of Passover. And He directs their attention toward His body, His blood, His coming death.

The message is difficult to miss. A greater deliverance is coming.

29 JESUS OUR PASSOVER LAMB

Read 1 Corinthians 5:7. Paul calls Christ “our Passover.” Read John 1:29. John the Baptist calls Jesus “the Lamb of God.” Read 1 Peter 1:18-19. Peter describes Christ as a lamb without blemish or spot.

The Passover background helps us understand why the Lord’s Supper is not merely a sentimental memorial. It points toward sacrifice. Deliverance. Judgment. Blood. Redemption. Freedom.

The Exodus delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. Jesus accomplishes a greater deliverance: from sin and death.

30 THE NEW COVENANT

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. Centuries before Jesus, God promised a New Covenant. God would work within His people. He would forgive their wickedness. He would remember their sins no more.

At the Last Supper, Jesus takes the cup and announces: This is the New Covenant in My blood. Read Luke 22:20. Jesus is declaring that the promised covenant is arriving through Him. Communion therefore does not merely say: “Remember that Jesus died.” It says: “Remember what His death accomplished.”

31 BLOOD AND COVENANT

Read Exodus 24:3-8. When the covenant with Israel was confirmed at Sinai, blood played an important role. Moses spoke of “the blood of the covenant.”

Now compare Jesus’ words in Matthew 26:28. The echo is striking. Jesus speaks of “My blood of the covenant.” Jesus is presenting His death in covenant language. His blood establishes the New Covenant relationship promised by God.



32

BREAD IN THE BIBLICAL STORY

Bread carries rich biblical imagery. God gave Israel manna in the wilderness. Read Exodus 16. Jesus later fed thousands with bread. Read John 6:1-15. Then Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life. Read John 6:35.

Bread represents basic nourishment. Dependence. Provision. Life. Communion does not mean that ordinary bread possesses life in itself. It directs us toward the One who does. Jesus is not an optional spiritual accessory. He is life.

33

IS JOHN 6 ABOUT COMMUNION?

Read John 6:22-59. Jesus speaks dramatically about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Christians disagree about how directly this passage refers to Communion.

Catholic, Orthodox, and some other sacramental interpreters see a strong Eucharistic dimension. Many Protestant interpreters emphasize that the chapter is fundamentally about believing in and receiving Christ by faith.

Notice John 6:35. Jesus parallels coming to Him with not hungering, and believing in Him with not thirsting. The Lord's Supper had not yet been instituted when Jesus spoke these words.

For that reason, many interpreters caution against making John 6 primarily a Communion instruction. Others argue that John intentionally records language that Christians would later recognize Eucharistically. We should allow the debate to remain where Scripture leaves room for it. One conclusion is certain: Eternal life is found in Jesus.

Interpretive Principle

Do not force every biblical reference to bread, eating, blood, or drinking into Communion. Context determines meaning.

34

FOUR ACCOUNTS OF THE INSTITUTION

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

The accounts are closely related, but they are not word-for-word identical. Matthew and Mark emphasize Jesus' blood of the covenant being poured out for many. Luke emphasizes the New Covenant in Jesus' blood and records the command: "Do this in remembrance of Me." Paul's account in 1 Corinthians closely parallels Luke and adds the repeated proclamation: "until He comes."

Matthew and Mark especially highlight the sacrificial dimension of Jesus' death - His blood poured out for many - while Luke and Paul bring the covenantal and commemorative dimensions into sharper focus. These are complementary emphases, not competing meanings.

These differences do not require us to choose one account against another. Ancient authors often preserved the meaning and substance of spoken teaching without presenting every account as a modern verbatim transcript.

Together, the four accounts consistently preserve the central elements: Jesus. Bread. The cup. His body. His blood. Covenant. His coming death. His followers sharing the meal. Remembrance and proclamation.

Bible-Study Principle

Differences in wording between parallel biblical accounts do not automatically equal contradiction. Ask whether the accounts conflict in meaning or whether they preserve complementary details.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE LORD'S TABLE?



35

“THIS IS MY BODY”

These four words stand near the center of centuries of Christian disagreement. Jesus takes bread and says: “This is My body.”

What does “is” mean? Is the bread changed into Christ’s body? Is Christ present with the bread in a unique sacramental way? Is Christ spiritually present to believers? Does the bread symbolically represent His body? Faithful Christians have answered differently.

What should not be lost in the debate is the point Jesus makes unmistakably: The bread directs us toward Him. His body. Given for us.

36

MORE THAN “JUST A SYMBOL”?

Some Christians describe Communion as symbolic. That can be completely appropriate. The bread signifies Christ’s body. The cup signifies His blood.

But the word “symbol” can sometimes sound like: “It does not really matter.” Paul would reject that attitude. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-21. Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-32.

Whatever conclusion we reach about Christ’s presence in Communion, Paul clearly treats the Lord’s Supper as spiritually serious. So even Christians who understand the elements symbolically should never describe Communion as “just a symbol.” A symbol established by Jesus can carry profound meaning.

37

WHAT DOES “PARTICIPATION” MEAN?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16. Paul asks whether the cup is a participation in Christ’s blood and the bread a participation in Christ’s body.

The Greek word is *koinōnia*. It can communicate ideas such as fellowship, sharing, participation, communion. This is one reason the term “Communion” became so appropriate.

Paul’s language is stronger than merely: “We think about Jesus while eating.” There is genuine fellowship and participation associated with the Lord’s Table. Christians disagree about precisely how to explain that participation. But Paul clearly sees Communion as an act of profound identification with Christ and His people.

38

ONE BREAD, ONE BODY

Read 1 Corinthians 10:17. Paul moves from the bread to the church. Because there is one bread, Christians who partake are one body.

Communion therefore has a horizontal dimension. It does not only ask: “How is my relationship with Jesus?” It also asks: “How am I treating His people?” This becomes crucial for understanding the problems in Corinth.

39

THE LORD’S SUPPER AND THE LOVE FEAST

Modern Christians may picture Communion as a small piece of bread and a small cup. That can make 1 Corinthians 11 confusing. How could some Christians be going hungry while others were becoming drunk?

The answer appears to be that early Christian Communion was sometimes connected with a fuller communal meal. Christians later used terms such as LOVE FEAST or AGAPE MEAL for shared meals associated with Christian fellowship. Jude 12 refers to “love feasts.”

The precise relationship between every early Christian shared meal and the formal Lord’s Supper varied over time. But the Corinthian setting makes sense if Christians were gathering for a substantial meal in which the Lord’s Supper was embedded.

That explains the scandal. Wealthier believers could arrive earlier or bring more food. Poorer believers could receive less or nothing. Some could overeat or become drunk. The problem was not merely bad table manners. The meal that should have displayed unity in Christ had become a visible demonstration of social inequality.



40

WHAT WENT WRONG IN CORINTH?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-22. The church was gathering for something that was supposed to be the Lord's Supper. But Paul tells them: "It is not the Lord's Supper you eat."

Why? Their behavior contradicted the meaning of the meal. There were divisions. Some ate while others went hungry. Some became drunk. Poorer Christians were humiliated. The table that proclaimed grace had become a place where social inequality was displayed.

Paul was furious. The gospel says: You all need the same Savior. Their behavior said: Some of us matter more than others. Those messages cannot comfortably coexist.

41

WHAT DOES "DISCERNING THE BODY" MEAN?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:29. Paul warns about failing to discern the body. Christians interpret this in several ways.

Some understand "body" primarily as Christ's body represented or present in the bread. Others understand it primarily as the church - the body of Christ. Still others believe Paul may intentionally hold both ideas together.

The surrounding context strongly emphasizes mistreatment within the church. Paul has already called believers one body. Whatever interpretation is adopted, Communion demands recognition of something holy: Christ, His sacrifice, and the people He has made His own.

42

WHY WERE SOME CORINTHIANS SICK OR DYING?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:29-32. This is one of the most sobering Communion passages in Scripture. Paul says that improper participation had resulted in weakness, sickness, and even death among some Corinthians. He describes this as the Lord's discipline.

We should not soften the text simply because it makes us uncomfortable. God took their treatment of the Lord's Supper seriously. But we should also not turn this passage into superstition.

Paul is not teaching: "If you forget to confess one sin before Communion, God may kill you." The context involves severe, persistent abuse of the Lord's Table and mistreatment of fellow believers. The proper response is reverence. Not terror.

Important Distinction

Reverence says: "This is holy. I will approach carefully." Superstition says: "If I make one mistake, something terrible will happen." Paul calls us toward the first, not the second.

HOW CHRISTIANS UNDERSTAND COMMUNION

43

WHY DO CHRISTIANS DISAGREE SO MUCH?

Communion sits at the intersection of several major theological questions: What is a sacrament? How does God communicate grace? How should Jesus' words "This is My body" be understood? How is Christ present with His church? What does "participation" in Christ mean? What happens during Christian worship? How should church tradition relate to Scripture?

These questions produced substantial differences across Christian history. The goal of this study is not to pretend those differences are insignificant. Nor is it to caricature Christians who reach another conclusion. We want to understand the major positions accurately and then return to Scripture.



44

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING

Roman Catholic teaching calls the Communion meal the Eucharist. Within the Catholic Mass, the bread and wine are consecrated.

Catholic theology teaches TRANSUBSTANTIATION. This means that while the outward appearances of bread and wine remain, their underlying substance becomes the body and blood of Christ. Catholic teaching therefore understands Christ as truly, really, and substantially present in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is considered a sacrament and a means of grace.

Catholic theology also describes the Mass as making present sacramentally the one sacrifice of Christ. It does not officially teach that Jesus is crucified again as though Calvary were insufficient. That distinction matters when representing Catholic belief fairly.

This study does not adopt transubstantiation as the clearest explanation of the biblical evidence. But it should be described accurately rather than caricatured.

45

THE EASTERN ORTHODOX UNDERSTANDING

Eastern Orthodox Christianity also understands the Eucharist sacramentally. Orthodox Christians affirm that the bread and wine truly become or communicate Christ's body and blood.

However, Orthodox theology generally resists explaining the mystery through the same precise philosophical categories historically used in Western transubstantiation. The Eucharist is understood as a profound mystery in which believers genuinely participate in Christ. Orthodox worship therefore places the Eucharist near the center of the church's life.

46

THE LUTHERAN UNDERSTANDING

Lutheran theology strongly affirms Christ's real presence in Communion. Lutherans reject the idea that the Lord's Supper is merely a mental remembrance. They also reject the Roman Catholic philosophical explanation of transubstantiation.

Lutheran confessional language emphasizes that Christ's true body and blood are genuinely given and received with the bread and wine according to Christ's promise.

The popular term CONSUBSTANTIATION is often applied to Lutheran belief from outside the tradition, but many Lutherans reject that label as an inaccurate description of their own theology. It is better to allow traditions to describe themselves in their own language.

47

THE REFORMED UNDERSTANDING

Reformed theology historically rejected both transubstantiation and the idea that Communion is merely an empty memorial. John Calvin especially emphasized SPIRITUAL PRESENCE.

Christ's physical body remains in heaven. But through the Holy Spirit, believers genuinely participate in and are nourished by Christ as they receive the Lord's Supper in faith. The meal therefore involves more than mental recollection. God truly ministers grace to believers through the sacrament.

48

THE MEMORIAL VIEW

Many Baptists, Anabaptists, and evangelical Christians emphasize Communion primarily as a memorial ordinance. This view is often associated historically with the Reformer Huldrych Zwingli, although modern memorial understandings vary.

The bread represents Christ's body. The cup represents His blood. The Lord's Supper remembers and proclaims Christ's completed sacrifice. The elements themselves do not become Christ's physical body and blood.

This study leans toward this general understanding while also emphasizing that "memorial" should never mean casual, empty, or spiritually insignificant. Jesus commanded the meal. Paul treats it with great seriousness. The Holy



Spirit is present with Christ's gathered people. And remembering the gospel together is itself profoundly formative.

49

THE ANGLICAN UNDERSTANDING

Anglican Christianity contains a range of Eucharistic understandings. Historic Anglican formularies reject transubstantiation while affirming that faithful believers genuinely partake of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

Some Anglican churches today emphasize a Reformed understanding. Others have a more Catholic sacramental emphasis. This is an important reminder: Denominational labels do not always tell us every detail of what an individual congregation believes.

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PENTECOSTAL AND NONDENOMINATIONAL APPROACHES

Many Pentecostal and evangelical nondenominational churches understand Communion similarly to Baptist memorial theology. The bread and cup symbolize Christ's body and blood. The meal remembers His sacrifice and proclaims the gospel.

Some place additional emphasis on healing, the active presence of the Holy Spirit, spiritual renewal, or experiencing God during Communion. Because independent and nondenominational churches do not share one universal confession, beliefs can vary substantially.

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A SIMPLE COMPARISON

ROMAN CATHOLIC - Christ truly and substantially present; transubstantiation; sacrament and means of grace.

EASTERN ORTHODOX - Real sacramental participation in Christ; mystery emphasized.

LUTHERAN - Real presence of Christ's body and blood with the bread and wine according to His promise.

REFORMED - Real spiritual participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

BAPTIST / MANY EVANGELICALS - Memorial ordinance; bread and cup represent Christ's body and blood; emphasis on remembrance and proclamation.

ANGLICAN - Range of views, historically affirming genuine participation while rejecting the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation.

PENTECOSTAL / MANY CHARISMATIC CHURCHES - Often memorial in basic understanding, sometimes with stronger emphasis on spiritual experience, healing, or the present work of the Holy Spirit.

These summaries are necessarily broad. Readers should consult each tradition's official doctrinal sources when investigating further.

Our Emphasis in This Study

This study leans toward understanding Communion as a Jesus-commanded memorial ordinance in which the bread and cup represent His body and blood. But "memorial" does not mean "merely symbolic and therefore unimportant." Communion is a sacred act of remembrance, proclamation, fellowship, self-examination, thanksgiving, and hope. The church gathers in the presence of God. The Holy Spirit is at work among His people. And the gospel is placed visibly before us.

HISTORY AND PRACTICE

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WHAT DID THE EARLY CHURCH DO?

The New Testament itself shows Christians gathering around shared meals and the breaking of bread. Early Christian writings outside Scripture also demonstrate that Communion quickly became central to Christian worship.

One important early source is THE DIDACHE. The Didache contains prayers associated with the cup and broken bread and emphasizes thanksgiving and the gathered unity of the church. Other early Christian writers also describe regular Eucharistic gatherings.



These historical writings are valuable. But they do not carry the authority of Scripture. Church history helps us understand how early Christians interpreted and practiced their faith. Scripture remains the final authority.

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HOW EARLY DID CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE COMMUNION?

Very early. Acts shows the first Christians devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

By the second century, Christian sources clearly describe regular gatherings involving Scripture, prayer, thanksgiving, bread, and the cup. Communion was not a medieval invention. Its origin lies with Jesus Himself.

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DID EARLY CHRISTIANS BELIEVE IN THE REAL PRESENCE?

Some early Christian writers use very strong language about the Eucharist and Christ's body and blood. Sacramental traditions point to these texts as evidence that early Christianity understood Communion realistically rather than as a bare symbol.

Memorial-oriented Protestants respond that strong sacramental language does not automatically establish later doctrines such as transubstantiation. Both observations matter.

It would be historically inaccurate to portray the early church as uniformly holding a modern low-symbolic view. It would also be inaccurate to assume that every later doctrinal formulation existed fully developed in the first century. Church doctrine developed its vocabulary over time as Christians wrestled with Scripture.

Historical Principle

Do not force later theological categories backward onto early Christians. Let historical sources speak in their own context.

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FASTING BEFORE COMMUNION

Some Christians prepare for Communion through fasting. This practice developed very early and remains especially important in several historic traditions.

Eastern Orthodox Christians commonly practice forms of fasting before receiving the Eucharist. Roman Catholic practice has also historically included fasting before Communion, though the required discipline has changed over time. Other Christians may choose to fast voluntarily as an act of prayer and preparation.

Fasting can help a believer slow down, pray, and approach Communion intentionally. But Scripture does not establish one universal pre-Communion fasting rule for all Christians.

Therefore we should distinguish BIBLICAL COMMAND from HISTORICAL OR SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE. A helpful practice should not be presented as though Scripture commands it when Scripture does not.

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OPEN, CLOSE, AND CLOSED COMMUNION

Churches differ over who may receive Communion.

OPEN COMMUNION generally welcomes all professing Christians.

CLOSE COMMUNION may welcome believers who share certain convictions - often including believer's baptism - or who belong to churches of similar faith and practice.

CLOSED COMMUNION restricts participation more narrowly, sometimes to members of that particular church or denomination.

Sacramental traditions may also limit Communion according to church membership, baptism, confirmation, confession, or doctrinal communion. Why? Because receiving Communion can be understood as declaring not only: "I belong to Jesus," but also: "I share the faith and fellowship represented at this table."

If you visit a church with a different practice, respect its instructions. You can refrain from receiving Communion without rejecting Jesus.



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INTERCOMMUNION AND BLENDED-TRADITION FAMILIES

This issue becomes especially practical when Christians from different traditions worship together. For example: Can a Protestant receive Communion at a Catholic Mass? Can a Catholic receive Communion at a Baptist church? Can an Orthodox Christian receive Communion at a Protestant service? What happens when spouses come from different church traditions?

Churches answer these questions differently. Some churches practice broad intercommunion and welcome Christians from many traditions. Others restrict Communion because receiving it is understood as expressing full doctrinal and ecclesial unity with the church offering it.

A church may therefore ask a sincere Christian visitor not to receive Communion without necessarily declaring: "You are not a Christian." The restriction may instead mean: "We understand Communion to express a degree of shared doctrine and church unity that does not presently exist between our traditions."

If you are unsure: Read the church's instructions. Ask a pastor or priest respectfully. Do not assume. And do not turn a Communion practice into an occasion for hostility. Christian unity matters. So does theological honesty.

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CHILDREN AND COMMUNION

Christian traditions differ significantly here. Some churches welcome baptized children to Communion from a very young age. Eastern Orthodox churches traditionally commune baptized infants.

Other traditions wait until a child can profess personal faith, has been baptized, has completed instruction, or has reached another milestone. Scripture does not provide a universal numerical age.

For churches emphasizing personal profession of faith, the important question is whether the child understands, at an age-appropriate level: Who Jesus is. What He did. Why the bread and cup matter. And that Communion belongs to those trusting Him.

As with baptism, children should not be pressured into a religious act simply because everyone else is participating.

59

COMMUNION AT HOME

Can Christians take Communion at home? The New Testament normally presents the Lord's Supper in the context of the gathered church. Its corporate dimension matters. Communion is not merely a private devotional snack between an individual and Jesus.

However, churches sometimes bring Communion to the sick, the homebound, hospitalized believers, or others unable to gather physically. Some Christian groups also practice Communion in small groups or homes.

The key question is not simply location. It is whether the meal remains connected with Christ's gathered people, biblical teaching, reverence, and the meaning Jesus gave it. Communion should not become casual simply because it occurs outside a church building.

60

CAN COMMUNION BECOME EMPTY RITUAL?

Absolutely. Anything repeated can become routine. A person can eat the bread, drink the cup, hear the words, and barely think about Jesus.

But the solution to empty ritual is not necessarily eliminating ritual. The solution is recovering meaning. God repeatedly gave His people practices of remembrance because human beings forget.

Ritual can become empty. But meaningful repetition can also shape us. Communion continually rehearses the gospel.

PASTORAL AND DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS



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WHAT IF COMMUNION MAKES ME FEEL GUILTY?

Some guilt may be appropriate. The cross reminds us that sin is serious. If God exposes something that needs repentance: repent.

But Communion should not leave the repentant Christian trapped in condemnation. The table does not only say: "Your sin was terrible." It also says: "Jesus gave Himself for you."

Look at the bread. Look at the cup. Your sin is real. But so is His grace.

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WHAT IF I DO NOT FEEL WORTHY?

You are not worthy because you had a good week. Neither is the person sitting beside you. Christ is worthy.

The question is not whether you have earned your place. The question is whether you are trusting Him. This does not eliminate reverence. It creates it. We approach humbly precisely because the invitation is grace.

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SHOULD I SKIP COMMUNION IF I NEED TO REPENT?

Sometimes a church leader may appropriately counsel someone to refrain from Communion because of serious, unrepentant sin or church discipline.

But ordinary Christian repentance does not necessarily require avoiding the table. Communion itself can become the place where you recognize sin, confess it, turn back toward God, and remember why forgiveness is possible.

Do not use Communion to pretend everything is fine. But do not use your failure as an excuse to run from grace.

64

WHAT IF I COME FROM A DIFFERENT CHURCH TRADITION?

Approach with humility. If you are visiting another church, learn its Communion practice.

A Catholic Mass, Orthodox Divine Liturgy, Lutheran service, Presbyterian church, Baptist church, and nondenominational congregation may each handle Communion differently. You may encounter a table you are not permitted to receive from.

Do not immediately interpret that as personal hostility. Communion carries theological meaning about church unity, doctrine, and belonging. You can respectfully observe while continuing to love fellow Christians with whom you disagree.

65

COMMUNION AND UNITY

Read 1 Corinthians 10:17. The Lord's Table should demonstrate unity. Yet ironically, Communion has sometimes become one of Christianity's greatest areas of division.

Doctrine matters. Truth matters. We should not pretend significant disagreements are meaningless. But Christians should discuss those disagreements without hatred, mockery, or careless misrepresentation.

The table itself should humble us. Every Christian comes because of Jesus.

66

COMMUNION AND GRATITUDE

Remember one of the historic names: EUCHARIST. Thanksgiving.

Communion should produce gratitude. Thank You for Your body given. Thank You for Your blood shed. Thank You for forgiveness. Thank You for the New Covenant. Thank You for Your church. Thank You for grace. Thank You that death did not win. Thank You that You are coming again.

The Lord's Supper is solemn. But solemn does not mean joyless.



67

COMMUNION AND JOY

The cross is serious. Sin is serious. Self-examination is serious. But Communion is also celebration.

Jesus saved us. The tomb is empty. We belong to Him. We belong to one another. And one day faith will become sight.

Read Revelation 19:6-9. Scripture ends with another extraordinary meal: the marriage supper of the Lamb. The story moves toward celebration.

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FROM THE UPPER ROOM TO THE COMING KINGDOM

Think about the biblical movement. Israel ate Passover while preparing to leave slavery. Jesus ate with His disciples while preparing to go to the cross. The church eats the Lord's Supper while waiting for Jesus to return.

Deliverance remembered. Deliverance accomplished. Deliverance completed. Communion places us inside that story.

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WHAT THIS STUDY CONCLUDES

After considering the biblical evidence, this study emphasizes:

1. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and commanded His followers to continue it.
2. Communion centers on Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death.
3. The bread represents and directs us toward Christ's body given for us.
4. The cup represents and directs us toward Christ's blood and the New Covenant.
5. Communion does not earn salvation.
6. Christ's sacrifice was sufficient and completed once for all.
7. Communion is more than a casual ritual.
8. Christians should approach the Lord's Table with reverence and self-examination.
9. Self-examination does not mean Christians must become sinlessly worthy before participating.
10. Communion expresses fellowship with Christ and His people.
11. The Lord's Supper proclaims the gospel.
12. Communion looks forward to Jesus' return.
13. Christians disagree substantially about Christ's presence in the meal and how grace relates to Communion.
14. Those disagreements should be represented accurately and respectfully.
15. Historical practices such as fasting may be valuable disciplines but should not be confused with universal biblical commands.
16. Communion practices may also express doctrinal and church unity, which helps explain restrictions on intercommunion.
17. This study leans toward a memorial understanding while recognizing that biblical remembrance is active, sacred, communal, and spiritually significant.

THE ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE

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DOES COMMUNION SACRIFICE JESUS AGAIN?

Read Hebrews 7:26-27. Read Hebrews 9:24-28. Read Hebrews 10:10-14.

Hebrews repeatedly emphasizes the sufficiency and finality of Christ's sacrifice. Jesus does not need to die repeatedly. His sacrifice was ONCE FOR ALL.

This is foundational. Any understanding of Communion must preserve the completed sufficiency of the cross.



Roman Catholic theology, as noted earlier, does not officially claim that Jesus is crucified again at each Mass. It understands the Eucharistic sacrifice as the sacramental making-present of Christ's one sacrifice. Many Protestants remain unconvinced that this framework best fits the New Testament and Hebrews. But the disagreement should be stated accurately.

The central truth remains: Calvary cannot be improved upon. Jesus finished the work.

Memory Anchor

Communion does not add another sacrifice to the cross. It points us back to the sacrifice that is enough.

THE MOST IMPORTANT INVITATION

Perhaps you are reading about Communion and realizing: "I have taken Communion many times, but I am not sure I actually know Jesus."

The bread cannot save you. The cup cannot save you. A church cannot save you. Jesus can.

The symbols point beyond themselves. They point toward a Savior. Jesus lived without sin. He gave Himself for sinners. His body was wounded. His blood was shed. He died. He was buried. And He rose again.

He calls us to repent and believe the good news. Do not hide behind religious participation. Come to Jesus Himself. Trust Him. Receive the grace you cannot earn.

Then the Lord's Table becomes something entirely different. It is no longer merely bread and a cup. It becomes a repeated reminder: The Savior I trust gave Himself for me.

ONE FAITHFUL SUMMARY

On the night before the cross, Jesus gave His disciples a meal. Bread. A cup. And a command: Remember Me.

The bread directs us toward His body given for us. The cup directs us toward His blood shed for us and the New Covenant established through His sacrifice.

The Lord's Supper does not repeat Calvary. It does not earn salvation. It does not reward Christians for having a flawless week. It brings Christians back to Jesus. Again. And again. And again.

We look back: Jesus died. We look around: We are one body. We look inward: Lord, search us. We look forward: Jesus is coming again.

Different Christian traditions understand precisely what happens at Communion differently. Those differences matter. But no disagreement should obscure the Person standing at the center of the table.

Jesus Christ. His body given. His blood shed. His grace offered. His people gathered. His return promised. Until He comes.

CONTINUE STUDYING

Read these passages slowly: Exodus 12:1-28; Exodus 24:3-8; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20; John 6:22-59; Acts 2:42-47; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Hebrews 7:23-28; Hebrews 9:11-28; Hebrews 10:10-25; Jude 12; Revelation 19:6-9.

- What does this passage actually say?
- What does it teach about Jesus?
- What does it teach about His sacrifice?
- What does it teach about covenant?
- What does it teach about the church?
- Is Communion explicitly being discussed, or am I making a connection?
- What is clear? What is inferred?
- Where do faithful Christians interpret the passage differently?
- Do parallel accounts actually contradict one another, or are they preserving complementary details?
- Does my interpretation preserve the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice?
- Does it take the Lord's Supper as seriously as Scripture does?



- Most importantly: Does my understanding of Communion keep Jesus at the center?

FURTHER VERIFICATION AND STUDY

Scripture is the primary authority for this study. Because Christians have significant differences concerning Communion, readers who want to investigate those differences further should consult primary and official sources whenever possible.

THE DIDACHE

Especially chapters 9-10 and 14. These sections contain early Christian prayers and instructions associated with thanksgiving, the cup, broken bread, unity, confession, and gathering for worship.

ROMAN CATHOLIC TEACHING

Catechism of the Catholic Church. See especially the section on The Sacrament of the Eucharist, including the discussions of Christ's presence, transubstantiation, sacrifice, Communion, and the Eucharist as thanksgiving.

LUTHERAN TEACHING

The Augsburg Confession, especially Article X: Of the Lord's Supper. Also see Martin Luther's Small Catechism: The Sacrament of the Altar.

REFORMED / PRESBYTERIAN TEACHING

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 29: Of the Lord's Supper. The Heidelberg Catechism also discusses the Lord's Supper in its treatment of the sacraments.

ANGLICAN TEACHING

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, especially Article XXV - Of the Sacraments and Article XXVIII - Of the Lord's Supper.

BAPTIST TEACHING

Historic and contemporary Baptist confessional statements commonly discuss the Lord's Supper alongside baptism as ordinances of the church. Readers may compare representative Baptist confessions and the doctrinal statements of the Baptist church or association being studied.

EASTERN ORTHODOX TEACHING

Official Orthodox catechetical and jurisdictional resources can help readers understand the Divine Liturgy, Eucharist, real participation in Christ, fasting, and preparation for Communion.

PENTECOSTAL AND EVANGELICAL TEACHING

Because Pentecostal, charismatic, and independent evangelical churches vary significantly, consult the doctrinal statement of the specific denomination or congregation rather than assuming one universal position.

A Good Research Habit

When investigating another Christian tradition: Read what that tradition actually says. Do not rely only on what its critics say it believes. Then return to Scripture. Test every claim carefully.

Scripture and Quotation Approach

Scripture references are provided so readers can read each passage in a complete Bible. Short direct quotations in this study use public-domain World English Bible (WEB) wording where a specific translation is required; some brief phrases are teaching summaries or common renderings rather than full verse quotations. Compare reliable translations when wording affects interpretation, and verify every quotation in context.



FINAL REFLECTION

The next time you receive Communion, slow down.

Look at the bread. Remember: His body was given.

Look at the cup. Remember: His blood was shed.

Look around. These are people Jesus loves.

Look inward. Is there something you need to bring honestly before Him?

Then look forward. The story is not finished. The table is temporary. One day we will no longer proclaim His death while waiting for Him to come. The King Himself will be with His people.

Until then: Remember. Give thanks. Examine your heart. Love His people. Proclaim the gospel. And hope.

Final Memory Anchor

Communion looks back to the cross. It looks around at Christ's family. It looks inward with honesty. And it looks forward to Jesus' return. Until He comes.