

## 211 What's this 'Holy Communion'?

Whether you call it 'Holy Communion' or 'Eucharist' or 'The Lord's Supper' or 'Mass', and whether your church tradition has a highly complex ritual or a relatively simple (even if subliminal) liturgy attached to it, what IS it? If a Martian (or a non-churchgoer!) asked what you were doing *and why*, what would you say?

On the basis of challenging 'what I've always been taught', I'd like to go back to first principles, and so I have to try hard not to read *back* into the pages of Scripture what we do in 2022.

This all started as I was writing out the words of Luke 22, where it says that he took the cup, gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you". But *then* he takes the bread, gives thanks and gives it to them. Hang on, that's the wrong way round!

Luke 22:15-22 *And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him."*

So what else do the Scriptures give us?

Matt 26:26-29 *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."*

Mark 14:22-25 *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."*

1 Cor 11:23-26. *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

That's not a lot to go on. How did we get from that to what we do in 2022 – and the complex beliefs that we attach to it?

But I suppose we should add this, which seems to be about having **an actual meal together**:

1 Cor 11:27-34 *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, **when you come together to eat**, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that **when you meet together** it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.*

Not a lot to go on, is there? It looks as if we're right to "do this" (Passover meal) more often than once a year, and it looks as if it's about remembering, and about giving thanks.

But I wonder if we've lost the significance that must have been huge in the minds of first believers: this is God with us in the Passover – a once-and-for-all Passover.

But as I say, how did we get from this to what we do and believe today?!

Answers on a postcard, please.

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