

Shepherd Statement on the Lord's Supper

When Jesus established His church, He instituted two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:17-29, 28:18-20; 1 Cor 11:24-25). Baptism is observed upon a believer's profession of faith in Christ and serves as a one-time initiation into the visible church (Acts 2:38-41, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15, 18:8; Rom 6:1-3; 1 Cor 1:13-17). The Lord's Supper is a repeated remembrance of Christ together, in which we re-affirm and maintain our commitment to Him and one another (1 Cor 10:14-22, 11:17-34). Since we regularly observe the Lord's Supper at DRBC, the elders wanted to provide guidance to the congregation regarding three key questions surrounding it. This guidance helps us consider and respond rightly to the words of Christ: "do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24).

What is the Lord's Supper?

Our statement of faith says, "The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of Jesus' dying love through the sacred use of bread and the fruit of the vine, and is a response to the command of Christ." It goes on to refer to this ordinance as a "time of remembrance and anticipation of His second coming." The Supper finds its roots in God's redemptive work for Israel. God instituted the Passover feast as a yearly memorial of His redemption of Israel from their captivity in Egypt. On the night of His betrayal, while observing the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus presented Himself as the fulfillment of the feast and established a memorial of the redemption we have from sin and death through His death and resurrection. Since then, churches have regularly celebrated this meal to proclaim that Jesus is indeed the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*" (John 1:29), and that "*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*" (1 Cor 5:7).

Jesus established the Lord's Supper to help His people remember His death on the cross and the benefits it produced, to celebrate His resurrection from the dead, and as a corporate proclamation until His promised return. During this sacred partaking of bread and fruit of the vine (cf. Luke 24:18), His followers fellowship with Him and one another (1 Cor 10:16-17). The bread signifies the body of Christ, given for us. The cup of wine or juice signifies the blood of the new covenant. Our partaking of them signifies our faith in Christ and our participation with Him and His people. As we observe the Supper regularly, it strengthens our faith in Christ, marks our fellowship with one another as a church, and helps us anticipate His return.

Who should take the Lord's Supper?

According to our statement of faith, the Lord's Supper, "should be taken by believers in good standing with a gospel-preaching local church who prepare for the meal with self-examination to ensure holiness before God and unity with the church." Furthermore, according to our statement of faith, "Baptism is performed once, upon one's profession of faith, and is required for church membership." Because baptism serves as the one-time initiation into the visible church, we maintain the close connection between baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church membership.

Before the Lord's Supper is served, an elder will instruct those in attendance regarding who should participate in the meal. "Fencing the table" refers to the words used to clarify who should and should not partake of the Supper. Fencing the table ensures that Jesus is honored during the meal, that we are careful not to invite those who should not partake, and that people are protected from taking the Supper in a way that would bring judgment upon them (1 Cor 11:29-30). When a pastor stands up to fence the table, he will say something like, "This meal is for members of Del Ray Baptist Church in good standing. If you are a baptized believer in the regular fellowship of another local church that preaches the same gospel you've heard here today, and you would be invited to partake there, you're welcomed to join us here as well." An elder may emphasize, expand upon, or explain different aspects of this description while fencing the table from week to week. Yet, the essential elements remain the same: (1) believers, (2) who are baptized, (3) and in good standing with a local church.

First, the Lord's Supper is for *believers*. A *believer* is one who has conscious, explicit, and personal saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in Him alone for righteousness, forgiveness, and salvation. Given our understanding of the way of salvation from Scripture, we take the Lord's Supper because we have already received Christ by faith. No one should take the Lord's Supper in order to receive Jesus, either physically or spiritually.

Second, the Lord's Supper is for believers *who are baptized*. Believers who partake of the Lord's Supper should be baptized, according to Christ's command (Matt 28:19).¹ The implicit order of the ordinances in Scripture is both consistent and significant. As our statement of faith implies, baptism precedes church membership which precedes the Lord's Supper. Both biblically and theologically, baptism and the Lord's Supper are tightly and inseparably bound together.

Third, the Lord's Supper is for believers who are baptized and are in good standing *with a local church*. We believe that the local church is necessary for partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34). At our church, we formalize the relationship of Christians to each other through church membership. We recognize that not all churches use the language of "church membership," but we believe the New Testament is clear that all Christians are expected to be in a defined relationship with a local church, where they are known, cared for, and accountable to one another. This sort of membership in a church is not optional for Christians (Heb 10:24-25), and is essential for discerning whether or not a person will be able to partake in a worthy manner. Without such accountability, partaking of the Lord's Supper misses the full significance of the ordinance. In short, we cannot declare ourselves to be in good standing and thus partaking in a worthy manner; we need the local church to help us make that declaration.

Also, believers who are baptized must be in *good standing* with a local church. Those in good standing with a local church are repentant toward God and reconciled to one another. The "unrepentant" are those who willfully and consciously persist in serious and outward sin. The "unreconciled" are those who have refused to pursue peace with a brother or sister in the body of Christ, giving evidence that they may not know God (1 John 4:7-12). At our church, the elders may specifically exhort individuals in unrepentant sin or unreconciled relationships to abstain from taking the Supper, along with a solemn warning to turn from sin and trust freshly in Christ. Such a reproof should sober the sinning Christian, and prompt the pursuit of reconciliation and restoration to the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14). It follows as well that anyone under formal church discipline would be excluded from the Lord's Supper.

How should we take the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper should be taken with a spirit of *celebration* and *sobriety*. We come to the table to celebrate the work of redemption accomplished through the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Individually, we thank God for saving us from our sin. Corporately, we rejoice in God's grace to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Together we celebrate the greatest gift given to mankind. Gathering around the table of grace reminds us that because God has provided for our greatest need, we live in the joy of fully restored fellowship with Him, and we can trust Him to care for our every need between now and when we see Him face to face (Rev. 22:4).

The Lord's Supper should also be taken with sobriety. We are commanded to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5) and if we are walking faithfully with the Lord (1 Cor 11:28). If we are convicted of unrepentant sin or sin against someone, we ought to pursue repentance and reconciliation before partaking of the Supper. In cases where wisdom is needed, we urge members of our church to process specifics with a pastor.

Those who partake must do so in a worthy manner, through prayer and preparation. This will help guard us from falling into empty religious practice. The Supper is intended to feed and fuel our faith, which requires us to actively engage in remembering Jesus as He commanded us to do (2 Cor. 3:18). To that end, there are several ways we "look" by faith in the days leading up to the gathering and as we receive and partake of the elements²:

Look Up — Pray to God and praise Him for being merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, and righteous. Consider Christ who lived perfectly, died sacrificially, rose victoriously, and now intercedes faithfully for us. Ask God to fill your heart with thankfulness for the invitation to His table through His Son, Jesus. Plead with Him to warm your heart toward Him and strengthen your affections for Him.

¹This practice is also in keeping with some of the earliest of Christian churches. Though not inspired Scripture, the *Didache*, an early manual for Christian worship which was likely written in the late first century, says, "But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord" (9.5).

² Taken, in part, from *What Should I Think About During the Lord's Supper?* by Erik Raymond, TGC, April 16, 2019

Look In — When we see God for who He is, we have a better view of ourselves. Such self-examination is essential for two reasons. First, we must humbly reflect on our sin and our need for a Savior. We are to examine ourselves so that we do not eat or drink judgment on ourselves (1 Cor 11:27-28). Second, it is also important to look in and see the progress God has produced in your life. Our walking with Jesus will produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Take time to thank God for changing you and pray for Him to help you grow all the more into the image of Jesus (2 Cor 3:18).

Look Back — Jesus instituted the Supper to instruct us about His work on the cross (Matt. 26:17-30). When we consider the bread, we should remember that Jesus' body was given for our sin. When we consider the cup, we should remember that He said, "*this is My blood of the covenant.*" It is by His blood that our sins are forgiven and we are ushered into covenant relationship with God and granted the privileged honor of calling Him "Father" (Jn. 1:12). Use the Supper as an opportunity to look back to Jesus' death for you.

Look Around — The Lord's Supper is not a solo event; we take it corporately, as a body. It is a unifying act and we are remembering and proclaiming that unity each time we eat and drink together (1 Cor 10:16-17; Eph 4:1-3). Look around as the elements are distributed and consumed, reminding yourself that Christ loves the brothers and sisters around you. Remember afresh our privileged responsibility to love, serve, forgive, and edify one another on our way to heaven. The Supper is also a reminder of our responsibility to actively pursue reconciliation with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Look Ahead — The Apostle Paul said, "*as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Cor 11:26). As we eat the meal, the Lord intends for it to stir anticipation for the greater meal that is yet to come. Today we eat and drink by faith, but one day soon we will eat with the Lord and all His people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Isa 25:6-9; Rev 19:6-9). This means that as we lift our cups, we do so in celebration knowing that soon and very soon we will feast with King Jesus in His eternal kingdom.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As pastors of Del Ray Baptist Church, we wanted to address what the Lord's Supper is, who should take it, and how we should take it. These are the most important matters, but they are not the only relevant details on this subject. Although this Shepherd Statement cannot address all issues, questions, or circumstances which arise with the Lord's Supper, we hope to provide clear and concise answers to a few frequently asked questions on the final pages of this statement.

In what setting should the Lord's Supper be observed?

The Lord's Supper should only be celebrated when we gather as a congregation. The Supper is not a meal for individual Christians, families, small groups, or a private gathering of believers, but a public celebration for the local church, as the repeated "*when you come together*" implies (1 Cor 11:17-34). Taking the Supper together expresses and encourages the unity of the church. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, "*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 all of us share that one bread.*" Our corporate unity in Christ is deepened and displayed when the church gathers as one body to partake of the one bread "in remembrance" of Jesus (1 Cor 11:24). The church in Corinth was exhorted to "wait for one another" in order to "come together to eat" the Supper (1 Cor 11:33).

How often do we take the Lord's Supper?

The New Testament indicates that the early church observed the Lord's Supper regularly. In Acts 2:42, we find they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." In Acts 20:7, Luke recalls the church assembling "[o]n the first day of the week, when we gathered to break bread."

To "break bread" in Scripture often refers to the Lord's Supper, (Luke 22:19, 24:35; Acts 2:42; 20:7, 11; 1 Cor 10:16, 11:23-24), though it can also refer to eating a meal together (John 21:9; Acts 2:46). Though there is no explicit statement as to how often the church celebrated the Lord's Supper, the accounts imply they did so frequently. When Paul uses the phrases "as often as you drink it" and "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup" in 1 Corinthians 11:25-26, he implies that the church regularly observed the Supper.

Apart from these instances, we have no explicit scriptural prescription about the frequency with which we should take the Lord's Supper. In light of its purpose, we believe the Supper should be observed frequently, though each local congregation ought to determine the exact pattern of regularity. At this time, our church celebrates the Lord's Supper together on the second and fourth Sunday of each month. We have found this pattern provides a regular opportunity to remember our Lord's death, resurrection, and return.

Do the elements of the Lord's Supper change into the actual body and blood of Christ?

There is no change in the substance of the elements; the bread and cup do not in any way become the body and blood of Jesus. Jesus is not present in the elements in a way that He is not present on weeks when we are not taking the Lord's Supper. The Supper is a spiritual act of incredible meaning and import whereby we are nourished spiritually and our faith is strengthened (1 Cor 10:16-17). The significance lies primarily in the corporate taking of the elements in a way that remembers Christ by faith, not in anything mystical or magical taking place in the elements themselves.

What is the self-examination required at the Lord's Supper?

In 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, Paul instructs the church, "*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.*"

Those who take the Lord's Supper should *look outwardly* to "discern the body." Our relationship with God cannot be entirely divorced from our relationships with those in our local church. If you have sinned against a fellow believer and not attempted to reconcile, you should refrain from the celebration and take time to plan how you will pursue reconciliation (cf. Matt 5:23-24, 18:15; Rom 12:18).

Also, those who take the Supper should *look inwardly* and ensure they are not harboring unrepentant sin. This does not mean we must be sinless to participate in the meal. All believers struggle with sin, but we must never allow sin to remain

unaddressed. If you know you are in unrepentant sin, we exhort you to either repent before you partake or else refrain from taking the elements until you have repented (Ps 32, 51).

Some believers who have a tender conscience may struggle to know whether they have “done enough” to be worthy to partake of the Supper. If this resonates with you and you desire help processing your situation, please reach out to one of the pastors, who would be happy to speak with you.

Who should lead and serve the Lord’s Supper?

The elders of DRBC lead the Lord's Supper. In the ordinance, the gospel is proclaimed and “made visible” which accords with the charge of the overseers to labor in the Word and prayer. Since the Lord's Supper accords with the teaching of the Word, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the shepherding of the flock, it is fitting for one of our pastors to guide us through it. Because distributing the elements does not involve teaching or oversight, any member in good standing with our church can serve the elements at the discretion of the elders.

What if I have concerns about someone I saw taking or not taking the Lord's Supper?

As we take the Lord’s Supper, we are commanded to “discern the body.” Hopefully, most people will be celebrating in good faith. There may, however, be reason for concern about those around us.

For instance, we may see someone taking the supper who should not be. This may include an unbaptized person, someone in unrepentant sin, someone under church discipline, or some other spiritually concerning situation. Similarly, you may observe someone not taking the Lord’s Supper whom you would expect to be taking it.

If you observe something concerning, we first encourage you to pray. We always want to avoid a judgmental spirit that assumes the worst in others. Ultimately, it is the Lord who knows the heart. At the same time, we have a responsibility to care for one another, which may include you reaching out to the person to check in. We encourage you to ask God for wisdom and consider contacting an elder for counsel about next steps.

What about Christians with different convictions on baptism at the Lord’s Supper?

While all members at DRBC will have been baptized as believers, we recognize that paedobaptist believers will frequently fellowship with us. We fence the table in a way that makes our conviction regarding baptism clear (that one should be baptized before taking the Lord’s Supper), while understanding that our authority over visitors is one of declaration and not enforcement. There may be some who partake with us because they understand themselves to have been baptized, even though we would disagree. We do not believe that the ordinances are a matter of conscience, nor do we think lightly of our Lord’s command to be baptized. But we do recognize that this is a secondary issue, and all people will ultimately give an account to God (Rom 14:1-12).

Why do we take the elements the way we do?

Though we believe Jesus and his disciples used wine during their Last Supper, our practice is to use grape juice as a type of “the fruit of the vine” (Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). While the use of grape juice instead of wine may lose some of the imagery that would otherwise have been present throughout most of church history, it allows us to take prudential considerations into account in our practice. Similarly, we use gluten free bread in order to allow more people to partake of the Supper together.

Different churches will utilize different methods of taking the elements. Three of the most common are the “corporate elements” method (everyone drinks from the same cup and tears from the same loaf), the “intinction” method (participants dip individual pieces of bread into a common cup), and the “individual elements” method (the elements are portioned out individually from a common cup and common loaf). This third method has been our practice at DRBC, though we believe that any of these methods would be appropriate ways to celebrate the Lord’s Supper together. These methods serve as pictures to aid in our looking back to the death of Jesus and looking forward to feasting with Jesus in His kingdom (Matt 26:29; Luke 22:18; Mark 14:25; Rev 19:6-8; Isa 25:6).