

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

### Episode 11

### Introducing the Lord's Supper Series

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This is the first episode in a new series on the Lord's Supper, or communion.

### Transcript

Welcome back to the Naked Bible Podcast. Today we begin a new topic, and with it, a short series on a doctrine that most listeners will have heard of or experienced first-hand. I think it would be difficult to find anyone who has spent any time in a Christian church (or any denomination) who has not heard of the Lord's Supper, also known as communion or the Lord's Table. But while most listeners will have heard of the doctrine before, I'm willing to bet few have really thought about or—perhaps stated more precisely—have ever questioned what they've been taught about it in light of their own reading of the Scriptures.

Now, I've worshipped in a variety of traditions and taught theology for close to fifteen years. I'm not kidding when I say that I'm convinced that this doctrine is one of the least critically examined of all biblical doctrines. If I made a "Top Ten" list of things churches do without much thinking, this would be on the list for sure. I wish I had a dollar for every time I've heard one of the following unexamined statements about the Lord's Supper:

1. *Jesus' literal body and blood is somehow physically present in the bread and wine (or juice).* Now this, of course, is the Roman Catholic conception of communion, or transubstantiation—that is, where the bread and wine are transformed into the flesh and blood of Jesus at communion. Really? Does the Bible ever say that in connection with communion? Does Jesus (or do parts of Jesus) really spend time—even a moment—in a baked item or a cup, or our stomachs? If we're receiving grace, why does it have to come through our stomachs anyway? Do we expel part of Jesus when we go to the bathroom? What if a few crumbs fall on the floor and a mouse eats it? Is the mouse sanctified? Believe it or not, medieval Catholic theologians felt compelled to think about and argue about these sorts of things. It's understandable, given their theological position. Who said theology can't be entertaining reading? You ought to try some of that stuff!

Protestants have different ways of talking about the Lord's supper and what supposedly happens when believers partake of the bread and wine.

2. *The spirit of Jesus is present in the bread and wine (or juice).* What's that supposed to mean, and why is it necessary to even say, since the New Testament identifies the presence of Jesus with the presence of the Spirit? Isn't he everywhere in a spiritual sense already? And while we're at it, if we're talking about a spiritual presence anyway, why localize Jesus in these two items?

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3. *Jesus (or his spirit) is in and around the bread and wine, but not actually in it.* What this is saying is that Jesus' presence or spirit is sort of "in the room" or something, but not connected directly with the bread and the wine or juice. Is this presence different than Jesus' normal spiritual presence everywhere? If not, why consider his visit during communion any more special than any other context? And if so, where did we get that idea? Is there any passage in the Bible that says the presence of Jesus is heightened, or more special, at this event than any others? Why is Jesus more present at communion than, say, when someone is led to belief in Jesus? Or when the gospel is presented? Or when someone's suffering is helped in some significant way? It really makes little sense when you think about it.
4. *Children below a certain age must not partake of the Lord's Supper unless they have made a profession of faith*—and, of course, been baptized in some denominations. Now my question is, why? What is the scriptural basis for this idea? What other practice in church that laypeople do should be prohibited for children? Singing? Giving money? Listening to the sermon? Reading a Bible verse? Why aren't these things so sacred that children shouldn't be doing them? And is something mystical happening that shouldn't involve children?
5. *We need to confess known sin before we partake of the elements, or else we might become ill and even die at God's hand.* I have to wonder why God doesn't strike unrepentant people when they enter the church building, or maybe out in the parking lot! After all, if God's presence is everywhere (and frankly, for New Testament theology, sacred space—the dwelling of the presence of God—is the believer him/herself, not the church building). We don't have temples anymore like in the Old Testament. We *are* the temple, according to 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Maybe we think this way since we're thinking Jesus only shows up when we get the crackers and juice out, and that doesn't happen in the parking lot or anywhere else—only in the church. My point is, why doesn't God take action to punish unrepentant sin, such as when we see that other believer in church that we're feuding with and don't confess it, or when a lustful or bitter thought pops into our head? Would we be smitten for those things only if we were holding a communion wafer? I mean, is that how God works? Does this make any sense at all?
6. *The Lord's Supper is a means of grace.* Now, if you've ever heard that one, has anyone ever explained it to you? What exactly does the phrase "means of grace" mean? Is there some kind of grace only given when crackers and juice are present? If those items were removed from the service, would God be unable to dispense some particular grace? Has anyone ever explained to you how the idea *wouldn't* contradict salvation by grace through faith alone, or how forbidding children would make any sense if it's non-saving grace that God is giving out? Why shouldn't the kids have that, too?

If all this makes your head hurt or maybe makes you wonder how something as simple as sharing bread and wine turned into a quasi-mystical or paranormal event, you've come to the right place. This is certainly a job for the Naked Bible. I hope you'll stick with me over the next few podcasts.

Toward getting you prepped for the next episode, you should take a look at the New Testament passages that deal with this subject. There really aren't that many. The main passage for the Lord's Supper, as far as its meaning goes, is 1 Corinthians 11:17-33. The original event that spawned the institution is recorded in Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, and Luke 22:19-20. And you might be thinking, "Well, what about John?"

There's that bread and wine and flesh and blood passage in John 6." Well, you can go ahead and read that, but you're going to find something very interesting later in an episode of the podcast that will cause us to really question whether John 6 ought to even be in the discussion. These are texts from which our doctrine of the Lord's Supper ought to derive in some way or that relate in some way, so try to read them before listening to the next podcast. As you read, ask yourself a simple question: Where do we find any of the thoughts that I just ran through in these passages?

It's time to put your creeds aside, take off the denominational blinders, and focus on the biblical text.