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The Sacrament of Holy Communion— from Martin Luther’s Small Catechism

As the head of the family should teach it in the simplest way to those in his household.

THE INSTITUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

First: *What is the sacrament of Holy Communion?*

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Where is this written?

The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the Apostle Paul tell us: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

THE BLESSINGS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Second: *What blessing do we receive through this eating and drinking and drinking?*

That is shown us by these words, “Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Through these words we receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in this sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

THE POWER OF HOLY COMMUNION

Third: *How can eating and drinking do such great things?*

It is certainly not the eating and drinking that does such things, but the words, “Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words are the main thing in this sacrament, along with the eating and drinking. And whoever believes these words has what they plainly say, the forgiveness of sins.

THE RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

Fourth: *Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament?*

Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words, “Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” But whoever does not believe these words or doubts them is not prepared, because the words “for you” require nothing but hearts that believe.



Matthew 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.”

²⁷ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.”²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

²⁹ “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.”

²³ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.²⁴ “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them.

²⁵ “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.”

Luke 22:14–21

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.
¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.
¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you.”¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

¹⁹ 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.”

²⁰ 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.

²¹ “But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table ...”

1 Cor. 11:23–25

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,²⁴ 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.”

²⁵ 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.”

1. After Jesus instituted holy baptism once he rose from the dead, he had one man (Matthew) write it down (28:19). How many men did he have write down his instituting of holy communion?



2. Which men?

a.



b.

c.

d.

3. We know (from comparing Luke's records in Acts with inscriptions that archaeologists have found) that Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians by about 55 A.D. What is the probable chronological order, then, of the four accounts of the instituting of the Lord's Supper which the Spirit inspired us to have in writing?

a.

b.



c.

d.

4. Judging by the fact that only Matthew records the institution of holy baptism, but *four* writers tell us how Jesus instituted holy communion, how important is what Jesus said and did as he instituted holy communion? (What was Jesus aiming at in us, in your own words?)



5. Which writer tells us the most about the institution of holy communion?



6. What may be confusing about the order in which he relates the events?



7. We can clear this up, at least a little, by focusing on what was going on at the meal that evening. Turn to Matthew 26:17–20. When did this evening meal and its ritual take place?



(Based on ancient lunar and solar records, this seems to be Thursday evening, April 6, 30 A.D.)

8. When was this on the Jewish calendar . . .

a. according to Exodus 12:1–6?



b. according to Exodus 23:15? (Confer Nehemiah 2:1, for a name change.)



9. Where did these things take place, according to Matthew 26:18?



10. Who was at the meal, according to Matthew 26:20?



11. What was the meal, according to Matthew 26:17–19?



12. Matthew was writing originally to Jewish believers, who knew what the Passover meal and ritual was like, typically, just like you know what an average American Christian Christmas celebration is like. Not everyone celebrates Christmas, of course, or celebrates it like we do, so let's review Passover.

a. *Turn to Exodus 12:3–4.* What was each Jewish household to do on the tenth day of Abib/Nisan?



b. What kind of animals was each household to set aside, according to 12:5?



c. When on the fourteenth day of the month were all the Jews to slaughter their Passover lambs/goats?



Note from the New Evangelical Translation: “Literally in Hebrew this is ‘between the two evenings.’ This expression has had a good deal of discussion.

“(1) *Targum Onqelos* says ‘between the two suns,’ which the Talmud explains as the time between the sunset and the time the stars become visible. More technically, the first ‘evening’ would be the time between sunset and the appearance of the crescent moon, and the second ‘evening’ the next hour, or from the appearance of the crescent moon to full darkness (see Deut 16:6 – ‘at the going down of the sun’).

“(2) Saadia, Rashi, and Kimchi say the first evening is when the sun begins to decline in the west and cast its shadows, and the second evening is the beginning of night.

“(3) The view adopted by the Pharisees and the Talmudists (*b. Pesahim* 61a) is that the first evening is when the heat of the sun begins to decrease, and the second evening begins at sunset, or, roughly from 3–5 P.M. The Mishnah (*m. Pesahim* 5:1) indicates the lamb was killed about 2:30 P.M. – anything before noon was not valid.

“S. R. Driver concludes from this survey that the first view is probably the best, although the last view was the traditionally accepted one (*Exodus*, 89–90). Late afternoon or early evening seems to be intended, the time of twilight perhaps.”

d. The reason for bringing up all this— besides showing how Jews of old wrapped themselves up in needless controversies— is to show part of the reason why some people today, similarly, have gotten wrapped up in knots of needless controversy over which day of the week Jesus instituted holy communion (confused by verses such as Matthew 12:40, Luke 22:7 or John 19:14).

It must have been Thursday night that year, because of the simple facts in John 19:31:

