

The Lord's Supper—Biblical and Early Church Passages

THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Matt. 25:26–29

²⁶Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; **this is my body.**”²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you,²⁸ for **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 again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

Mark 14:22–25

²²And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; **this is my body.**”²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.²⁴ And he said to them, “**This is my blood of the covenant**, which is *poured out for many.*²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Luke 22:14–20

¹⁴And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him.¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves.¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “**This is my body**, which is *given for you.* Do

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Italic: The benefits of the eating and drinking

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this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, **“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”**

1 Cor 11:17–32

¹⁷But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. ²⁰When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. ²¹For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²²What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, **“This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”** ²⁵In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”** ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹**For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself.** ³⁰That is why many of you are weak

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and ill, and some have died. ³¹But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³²But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

THE NATURE OF THE ELEMENTS

1 Cor 10:14–18

¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶**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?** ¹⁷Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?

EARLY CHRISTIAN CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Acts 2:41–47

⁴¹So those who received his word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 20:7

⁷On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break

bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

FLESH AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

John 6:35–51

³⁵Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

⁴¹So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴²They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” ⁴³Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

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THE EARLY CHURCH

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (AD 110–120)

Ignatius to the Ephesians

XX. Stand fast, brethren, in the faith of Jesus Christ, and in His love, in His passion, and in His resurrection. Do ye all come together in common, and individually, through grace, in one faith of God the Father, and of Jesus Christ His only-begotten Son, and "the first-born of every creature," but of the seed of David according to the flesh, being under the guidance of the Comforter, in obedience to the bishop and the presbytery with an undivided mind, breaking *one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which prevents us from dying, but a cleansing remedy driving away evil*, [which causes] that we should live in God through Jesus Christ.

Ignatius to the Romans

VII I desire *the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ*, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; and I desire the *drink of God, namely His blood*, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.

Ignatius to the Philadelphians

Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. **For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup of the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants**: that so, whatsoever ye do, ye may do it according to [the will of] God.

Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans

VII. They [the heretics] abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because **they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ**, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness,

raised up again.

JUSTIN MARTYR

First Apology (AD 150)

LXV

But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptised [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. This word Amen answers in the Hebrew language to *genoito* [so be it]. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.

LXVI

And this food is called among us *Eucharistia* [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which

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we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. **For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.** For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, "This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;" and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, "This is My blood;" and gave it to them alone. Which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithras, commanding the same thing to be done. For, that bread and a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn.

IRENAUS OF LYONS (AD 130–200)

Against Heresies

Book IV, Ch. XXVIII

5. Then, again, how can they say that the flesh, which is nourished with the body of the Lord and with His blood, goes to corruption, and does not partake of life? Let them, therefore, either alter their opinion, or cease from offering the things just mentioned. But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. **For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also**

our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.

Book V, Ch. II

2. But vain in every respect are they who despise the entire dispensation of God, and disallow the salvation of the flesh, and treat with contempt its regeneration, maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption. **But if this indeed do not attain salvation, then neither did the Lord redeem us with His blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist the communion of His blood, nor the bread which we break the communion of His body.** For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made. By His own blood he redeemed us, as also His apostle declares, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the remission of sins." And as we are His members, we are also nourished by means of the creation (and He Himself grants the creation to us, for He causes His sun to rise, and sends rain when He wills). **He has acknowledged the cup (which is a part of the creation) as His own blood, from which He bedews our blood; and the bread (also a part of the creation) He has established as His own body, from which He gives increase to our bodies.**

3. **When, therefore, the mingled cup and the manufactured bread receives the Word of God, and the Eucharist of the blood and the body of Christ is made, from which things the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they affirm that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God, which is life eternal, which [flesh] is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a member of Him?**

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