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## 8. *The Means of Grace, Part 2: Communion*

*The Israelites were beginning to understand just how far God would go in order to save his people. In recent weeks and months God had brought a series of nine devastating plagues upon the land of Egypt as a warning and a judgment to the Egyptians for cruelly enslaving his people. The Nile had been filled with blood. . . the livestock had been wiped out by disease and hailstorms. . . the entire land had been afflicted by frogs, then gnats, then locusts, then darkness so thick that you could feel it. God promised that all these plagues would stop as soon as the Egyptians let his people go - but their ruler, Pharaoh, refused. He simply couldn't envision an Egypt without his free source of slave labor.*

*Finally, God gave one more command through his prophets Moses and Aaron. The Israelites had learned by now not to be surprised by anything God did, but this command seemed even stranger than usual. "Each household is to take a year-old male lamb without blemish or defect, and slaughter it at twilight. Roast the meat and eat it, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Then take some of the blood and spread it on the sides and the tops of your doorframes. Tonight I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn - man and animal - bringing my judgment upon the Egyptians and their idols. But when I see the blood on your doorframes, I will pass over your houses and you will not be harmed."*

*Everything happened just as the Lord had promised. When morning came, there was weeping and wailing in every house in Egypt, but the children of Israel were completely untouched. By the blood of a lamb God's people were saved from judgment, and were set free from their Egyptian enemies once and for all.*

*For the next 1500 years, the people of Israel celebrated the festival of the Passover, eating lamb and unleavened bread and drinking wine to remember the way that God had saved his people.*

*The night before Jesus died, he ate the Passover meal one last time with his disciples. Everything was coming full circle. The true Passover lamb was finally here, to give his life as a sacrifice not only for Israel, but for all the sins of the whole world. His blood would be painted, not on a wooden doorframe, but on the wood of the cross. By the blood of a Lamb God's people would once again be saved from judgment, and set free from their spiritual enemies once and for all.*

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*(adapted from Exodus 12 and Luke 22)*

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This lesson focuses on the sacrament of communion—its institution, its many blessings, and Christ's guidelines for its usage among Christians today. We rejoice that we have been saved through the blood of our Passover Lamb.

## WHAT IS COMMUNION?

*Read Matthew 26:26-28.*

Communion, also known as the Lord's Supper, is the Sacrament Christ instituted on the night before his death. It involves eating bread and drinking wine, through which God gives us Jesus' body and blood.

Are Christ's body and blood really present in this sacrament? Place close attention to Jesus' words as we read the other two Gospel accounts about this event.

*Read Mark 14:22-24 and Luke 22:19-20*

Jesus doesn't take time to explain how, but he assures us that yes, this is indeed his body and blood. We call this teaching **Real Presence**. As with other truths of Scripture that we cannot fully comprehend, we do not have to understand this miracle in order to believe and enjoy its benefits.

*Read 1 Corinthians 10:16.*

Paul also says that those who participate in the Lord's Supper are participating in the real body and blood of Christ. In fact, in the next chapter he explains that those who abuse communion are sinning against the body and blood of Christ! Like Jesus, Paul does not explain how this works but simply states the facts.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF RECEIVING COMMUNION?

*Matthew 26:28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

- Communion is “forgiveness we can taste” - a real, vital connection to what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross.

*Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

- Like baptism, communion's real power lies in the word of Jesus that stands behind it.
- Unlike baptism, communion is never used to plant faith for the first time. It is used to strengthen faith that is already there.

*Illustration: Critical Care Visiting Policy*

## WHO SHOULD TAKE COMMUNION?

*1 Corinthians 11:27-29* 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. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment upon themselves.

Communion should only be taken by those who have examined themselves.

- What does it mean to “examine ourselves?”
- Can you think of anyone who might not be able to do this?

*1 Corinthians 10:15-17* I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Communion should only be shared by those with the same confession of faith.

- It is an expression of both “vertical fellowship” and “horizontal fellowship.”

*Matthew 11:28-29* “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

- If I feel weak in my faith, should I come to communion?



## TAKING IT DEEPER

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**OPTIONAL:** Discuss “What Do Other Churches Teach About Communion?” - Appendix, p. 92

**OPTIONAL:** Discuss “How Can I Prepare My Heart for Communion?” - Appendix, p. 93

### Agree or disagree?

- Everyone who goes to Communion receives the same thing.
- Everyone who goes to Communion receives the forgiveness of sins.
- We go to Communion to earn the forgiveness of sins.
- As long as he believes in Jesus, anyone may go to Communion.

### Discuss

- Which of the following is an accurate description of Communion?
  - A. The true body and blood of Jesus
  - B. A way to remember what Jesus did for us
- How often should a Christian take Communion?
- Lutheran kids aren't allowed to take Communion until they have been “confirmed.” What is “confirmation,” and is it commanded in the Bible?