

Close communion

For this reason, the congregations of the [Evangelical Lutheran Synod](#) practice [close communion](#). Some also call this membership communion. Few churches practice this today, but it is the practice the Bible teaches and requires. What is it and why?

- Close communion is the Biblical practice of admitting to communion only those members of the congregation who are in good standing (who confess sin, seek to turn away from it, and trust in Jesus for forgiveness) and who are united with the congregation in faith and understanding.
- Close communion protects those who do not understand the danger of communing without self-examination or without recognizing the presence of the Lord's body and blood with the bread and wine.

Do you want to learn more?

The Christians of the first few centuries after Christ insisted that people be catechized (thoroughly instructed in the faith) before being admitted to the Lord's Supper. With the same concern for the well-being of each individual soul, we follow their example and ask that those who haven't yet joined our fellowship meet with the pastor for thorough instruction before communing. Through such study, the prospective member can examine us and what we teach, comparing it to the Bible to see if it is so. (For a Bible example of this, read Acts 17:10-12.) In this way the Bible is honored and the unity it commends and promises is given. We look forward to communing with you in the unity of faith!



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The Lord's Supper - What Everyone Needs to Know



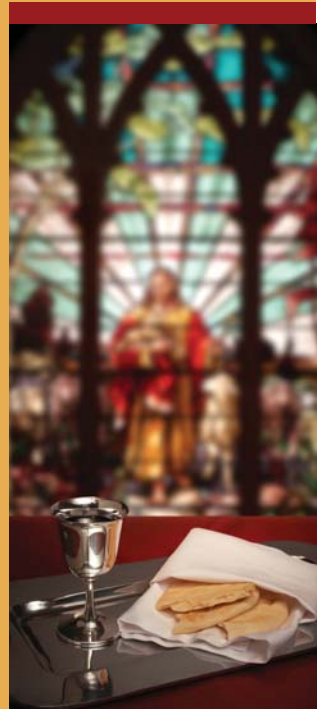
One Thursday evening Jesus and his disciples were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem to commemorate Israel's exodus from Egypt, the Passover celebration. It would be no ordinary Passover. Something vitally important was about to happen, of which his already anxious disciples were not aware. This very night Jesus would be betrayed by Judas Iscariot, arrested and put on trial. The next day, which Christians have come to call Good Friday, Jesus would go to the cross. God's eternal Son, having lived sinlessly as a human being, would give his holy life to atone for the sins of all people. Before this would happen, he desired to leave behind a testament (promise) of forgiveness, life and strength for his disciples and for all who would follow him by faith: the Lord's Supper. The Bible describes the scene, **"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.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'"** (Matthew 26:26-28).

Why did Jesus institute his Supper?

The chief blessing of the Lord's Supper is [forgiveness of sins](#) (Matthew 26:28). How can this meal bring forgiveness? When the believer eats the bread and wine, he is also receiving Jesus' [physical](#) body and blood, which was given once for all sins at the cross. The Apostle Paul expressed this fact in his New Testament letter to the congregation in Corinth, Greece: **"Is the cup of blessing which we bless not a communion [with](#) the blood of Christ? Is the bread that we break not a communion [with](#) the body of Christ?" (First Corinthians 10:16)?¹** His body is present with the bread. His blood is present with the wine. When the communicant receives the bread and the wine, his body and his blood are truly present and received along with it for the forgiveness of sins.

How can Jesus' body and blood be present in his Supper?

Jesus plainly said, **"Take and eat; [this is my body](#),"** and **"Drink from it, all of you. [This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.](#)"** This is a wondrous mystery, that his body is joined with the bread and his blood is joined with the wine. Jesus' word and promise make it so!



¹God's Word to the Nations (GWN)

Who should commune?

The Bible says,

“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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself” (First Corinthians 11:27-31).

The Lord Jesus has given his Supper to bring forgiveness and blessing to all who commune. Believe it, because he has promised! But not everyone is to commune. Those who do not properly examine themselves, and so do not recognize the presence of the Lord’s body and blood in the Supper, bring themselves into judgment before God. Why is this? The act of communing in the Supper is a sacred act; it is an intimate, personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

What is self-examination?

The medical community directs us to do self-exams for our physical health. The Bible directs us to give ourselves a *spiritual* self-exam as a protection against God’s judgment (First Corinthians 11:31). In Second Corinthians 12:5 we learn what it means to examine oneself: **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?”** To prepare properly to receive the Lord’s body and blood in the bread and wine, we must examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith. To do this, we may ask ourselves the following questions:

1) Am I sorry for my sins? Do I desire to turn away from my sins and live a new life?

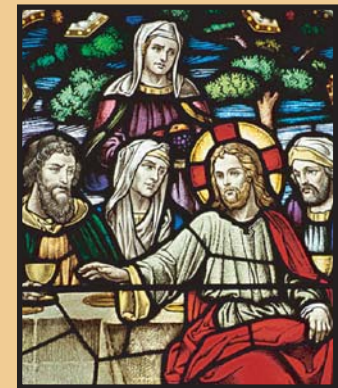
2) Do I believe that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was born a sinless human being and died on the cross to save me from my sins, and then rose bodily from the grave to bring me eternal life?

3) Do I believe that I am saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ?

4) Do I believe that the body and blood of the Lord Jesus are truly present with the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins?



If we answer “no” to any of these questions, we should refrain from communing. If we are unsure how to answer any of these questions we should refrain from communing. Otherwise, we put ourselves at risk of eating and drinking judgment on ourselves.



The Lord’s Supper is a fellowship meal

The Bible says that the Lord’s Supper is a fellowship meal. The Book of Acts describes the life of the early church. **“They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).** These early Christians were united in their devotion to and understanding of God’s Word. They worshipped in unity of doctrine of the Apostles, prayed in unity of faith, and received the Lord’s Supper (breaking of bread) in unity of confession, the confession that **“Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2).** The Apostle Paul said of this fellowship: **“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (First Corinthians 10:17).**

This unity or oneness should not be surprising. The Apostle Paul encourages all Christians: **“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you maybe perfectly united in mind and thought” (First Corinthians 1:10).** Paul is not directing Christians to ignore differences, but to study the Bible diligently and be united in faith and understanding based on it. Christians who visit a congregation not their own should not seek to commune until they know what is preached and taught there, and see that it agrees with the Bible.