



## THE PASTOR'S PEN

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### Doctrines of the Christian Church

This is the fourth installment in our series of brief reviews as we look at the beliefs and practices of the Christian Church (DoC). If there is some area of doctrine or practice of the Church that you would like James to comment upon, please contact him by email at: [fccpen@southernbell.net](mailto:fccpen@southernbell.net) or by phone at 850-477-1642.

#### The Ordinance of Communion

For the Christian Church (DoC), the ordinance of Communion is one of the cornerstones of our faith and practice. For generations we have been known as “A People of the Cup” by other religious groups in reference to our practice of observing weekly communion. In fact, communion is so much a central part of our worship that we use a red chalice with a white St. Andrew’s Cross on it as the symbol for our denomination. So what are the primary doctrines about communion that Disciples believe and follow in the practice of our faith?

**First of all, Disciples observe communion weekly.** We do this based upon scripture and in imitation of the practice of the Apostles and the Early Church. Right after the Church was established on the Day of Pentecost, we read in Acts 2:42, “*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*” This passage of scripture became the basic worship formula for the Early Church, so that now, a biblical worship service includes these four activities.

In the Christian tradition, the “breaking of bread” is a formal act and refers to sharing the loaf and cup as commanded by Jesus at His Last Supper. We see this term used in a special way in Acts 2, in Acts 20 and in 1 Corinthians 11 where Communion or The Lord’s Supper is the topic of the passage.

No doubt, many early Christians observed this “breaking of bread” on a daily basis. Jesus did not tell us how often we were to share in this communion meal. It was His command that as often as we eat this bread and drink from this cup we do it in remembrance of Him (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). However, by the middle of the first century we see in scripture and in practice that worship with communion was becoming a weekly event in the Church. Luke tells us in Acts 20:7 that he, Paul and the Christians of Troas, “*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.*” We know that the Church in Corinth and in Galatia met weekly for worship (1 Corinthians 16) and that Paul had to correct the Corinthians on their abuses in their observance of The Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11) when they met for worship.

Outside of scripture, we also have the testimony and historical writings of the Early Church Fathers that informs us that the normal practice of the Church was to celebrate communion at least on a weekly basis for the first six hundred years of the Church’s existence. So there is little doubt that the practice of weekly communion was the norm for the Apostles and Early Christians worldwide. Because of this body of scripture and teaching, we Disciples also observe this same biblical worship format on a weekly basis.

**Secondly, we as Disciples see the bread and the fruit of the vine used in Communion as symbols.** In other words, we see them as the emblems that represent the body and blood of Christ in our communion service. When we partake of these emblems, we are remembering Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. We also partake of these emblems as a proclamation of His impending return. service. When we partake of these emblems, we are remembering Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. We also partake of these emblems as a proclamation of His impending return. There is not enough room on this page, or on fifty such pages, to go into all of the scriptures and all of the teachings on the emblems used and on the

nature of communion itself. Simply put, there are about four basic views in the theological world on what takes place when we observe Communion by receiving the bread and the fruit of the vine. These four viewpoints are Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, Receptionism and Memorialism.

**Transubstantiation** is the doctrine that during the prayers and celebration of the communion service, the bread and the wine become the literal, physical body and blood of Jesus Christ. It is a teaching that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is renewed to provide fresh grace and to take away the sins of those receiving the cup and the loaf. This viewpoint is held by Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopalian and Coptic Churches.

**Consubstantiation** is the doctrine that while the bread and wine of communion are physically still bread and wine, they are simultaneously the body and blood of Christ. This doctrine contends that both are forms are present and real in the elements. It differs from Transubstantiation in that it does not see Jesus' sacrifice being renewed, but that His grace from the original crucifixion is still sufficient and still present for those receiving the loaf and the cup. This is the viewpoint of Lutherans and some of the other Reformation groups.

**Receptionism**, which includes the views of Pneumatic Presence, sees the bread and the fruit of the vine to be physically just that: bread and the fruit of the vine. In this doctrinal position, it is believed that Christ is spiritually present with the elements as they are received and that they impart grace to those who partake. This is the viewpoint of Calvinists, Reformed Churches, some Methodists, Presbyterians, and similar groups.

**Memorialism**, like Receptionism, is the doctrine that the bread and the fruit of the vine are physically just that: bread and the fruit of the vine. During the communion service there is no physical change in these elements. The meal is primarily a memorial or a remembrance of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. It is a reminder of His power over death and a proclamation of His grace. This viewpoint is held by some of the minor Anglican groups, some Methodists, the Christian Church and a few Reformation Churches.

It is in this last group, Memorialism, which Disciples find themselves most closely associated with in their doctrine. We see Jesus' command to: "*Do this in remembrance of me*" as the basis for our weekly observance of Communion.

**To sum up the Disciple's doctrines on communion** we need to see that beyond our desire to follow the biblical practice for worship that includes a weekly observance and to follow our Lord's command to His disciples, "*Do this in remembrance of me,*" we really do not hold to other formal doctrines on the subject. There is not an official stance about using grape juice or wine nor about having flatbread or whole wheat wafers. We allow the individual congregations to decide if they will have one cup or individual cups, a single loaf or separate servings of bread. We do not require a priest to bless the meal or restrict anyone from serving it. Any Christian can bless the cup and loaf and serve it to others.

As for who may receive the elements of communion in worship, the Disciple's position has always been to have an open table and leave it up to each person to examine themselves and judge for themselves. We believe that all Christians should come around this table as often as they can and remember their Lord in worship through prayers, teaching, fellowship and the breaking of bread. Disciples believe that the table worship through prayers, teaching, fellowship and the breaking of bread. Disciples believe that the table is the Lord's Table. That the table is open to all Christian's and that Christ alone has the right to invite or bar anyone from partaking. Since he has invited all of His disciple to continue in this meal, the final question that needs to be asked is: has He invited you?

Looking for you at the table next week,

*James*