

# The Lord's Supper in the Prayer Book

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

---

*The Lord's Supper is a central and prominent part of corporate Christian worship and testimony, and its spiritual significance is emphasized in the Prayer Book and Articles.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:26, John 6:53, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:23, Ephesians 2:8

**Topics:** "Lord's Supper", "Sacramental Theology"

---

## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes the importance of understanding the teachings of the Church of England regarding the Lord's Supper, as outlined in the Prayer Book and Articles, to grasp its spiritual significance in worship and life. The sermon delves into the spiritual purpose, gift, effect, and blessing of the Lord's Supper as highlighted in the Catechism and the Service of Holy Communion. It also explores the theological statements in the Articles, emphasizing the Sacraments as signs of grace, badges of Christian profession, and means of redemption by Christ's death, while stressing the necessity of worthy reception and faith for spiritual benefits.

---

## Transcript

The need and importance of ascertaining the teaching of the Church of England on the Supper of the Lord is very evident on several grounds. The position "of the ordinance in the Prayer Book clearly requires us to understand its spiritual significance in our life and worship. We shall thereby be taught what is required in faith and practice of the members of the Church. In ascertaining the meaning of the Prayer Book and Articles we shall also be enabled to see whether the Church adheres to her own standard, laid down in Article VI and other Articles, which requires all essential doctrine to be based on or warranted by the Word of God.

At the same time we shall be afforded a touchstone wherewith to test everything that may come before our notice claiming to be Church doctrine. It is perhaps not wholly unnecessary to say that Church of England teaching on this subject is found in the Prayer Book and Articles and nowhere else, and is to be gathered from a due consideration and interpretation of every expression in those formularies. Of course, in any controversy as to interpretation, the views of the compilers of the Prayer Book are deservedly of very great weight, and the opinions of representative English theologians, together with the decisions of Courts, are worthy of careful thought.

But the ultimate and final Court of Appeal is the Prayer Book and Articles, and we must be acquainted first of all with what the Prayer Book and Articles actually say. We proceed, therefore, to collect the various

statements of the Prayer Book and Articles with reference to the Lord's Supper, and to consider them, as they stand, in their natural meaning. The Lord's Supper is brought before us in the Prayer Book in four places, and they are typical and representative of the variety of Church life.

First, we have the Catechism for the instruction of the young. This speaks of the Lord's Supper as one of the two Sacraments ordained by Christ in His Church; and defines a Sacrament as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given to us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same and a pledge to assure us thereof." Then, in answer to the question, "Why was the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ordained?" it says, "For the continual remembrance of the death of Christ and of the benefits which we receive thereby."

The "inward part or thing signified" in the Lord's Supper is described as "the body and blood of Christ which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper." The benefits of the Supper are said to be "the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the body and blood of Christ." The Catechism closes by emphasizing the need of preparation for and due reception of the Sacrament in a spirit of true repentance, living trust and practical love. The young are hereby taught: (1) The spiritual purpose of the Lord's Supper is the remembrance of the fact and spiritual power of the death of Christ. (2) The spiritual gift is union with Christ through the due reception of His body and blood. (3) The spiritual effect to the soul is strength and refreshment. (4) The spiritual blessing is limited to the "faithful"; i.e., those who have faith, those who are believers, those who fulfil the threefold requirement due from "them that come to the Lord's Supper."

Next comes the Service of Holy Communion for those worshippers who have been confirmed. The titles of the Service include the only two titles which we find given in the New Testament; "The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion". The introductory Rubrics speak of "the Lord's Table" and "the Table," while the Rubrics before the Church Militant Prayer have "the Holy Table" and "the Table". These are the only titles given in the Prayer Book to the Communion Table. In the service itself the following expressions are found: "Most comfortable Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ to be ... received in remembrance of His meritorious Cross and Passion"; "not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance in that Holy Sacrament"; "holy mysteries as pledges of His love"; "for a continual remembrance of His death"; "to our great and endless comfort"; "then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood"; "that our sinful bodies may be made clean ... and our souls washed ..."; "spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of our Saviour."

These practically include all the aspects of the spiritual meaning and blessings of the ordinance as stated in the service. The Rubrics concerning the Alms and the Elements are also to be noted. In the case of the former there is a distinct offering: "humbly present and place it upon the Holy Table." In the case of the elements the Rubric reads, "The Priest shall then place upon the table so much bread and wine as he shall think sufficient." The difference between these two Rubrics is to be carefully noted.

Neither here nor in the Rubric for the Consecration of additional Bread and Wine is there any order for an oblation of the elements. The Prayer of Consecration commemorates the uniqueness and perfection of the offering on Calvary, recites the Lord's words of institution of the Supper, and speaks of our "receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine, in remembrance of His Death and Passion," and prays that the communicants may thereby "be made partakers of His most blessed body and blood."

The elements are given with a form of words which is partly prayer and partly exhortation. The prayer is that "the body of Christ which was given for thee" (the words underlined evidently pointing back to the Cross) may "preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life"; and the exhortation is to "take," "eat" and "drink" the elements in thankful remembrance of Christ's death and blood-shedding, and to "feed on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving." The service has a Rubric at the end, commonly called "The Black Rubric," which explains the meaning of receiving the Communion kneeling, and declares that no adoration is intended "either unto the sacramental bread or wine or unto any corporal presence of Christ's natural flesh and blood."

All these statements in the most devotional and solemn service of the Prayer Book are the necessary and proper amplification of the instruction already received through the Catechism. We observe how emphatically the Church of England in this service prepares the communicant for worthy reception according to the threefold requirement of repentance, faith, and love, as laid down in the Catechism. The whole Communion Service up to the moment of the call to Thanksgiving (*Sursum Corda*, "Lift up your hearts") is built up on this threefold foundation, thrice emphasized: (1) In the Ante-Communion Service (Commandments, Epistle, Gospel and Creed, Offertory and Church Militant Prayer); (2) In the Long Exhortation; (3) In the Short Exhortation, followed by Confession, Absolution, and Comfortable Words.

Only then is the communicant regarded as presumably ready for due participation. The Lord's Supper is also provided for private use in the case of the sick, the ordinary service being almost wholly employed. The one point calling for notice here is the third Rubric, which is as follows: "If a man ... by any ... just impediment do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, the Curate shall instruct him, that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed His blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefore, he doth eat and drink the body and blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth."

It is to be observed that the elements are here called "the sacrament," and that, in the absence of the opportunity of receiving the elements, full spiritual communion is assured on true repentance, faith and thanksgiving. [Cf. Augustine's *Crede et manducasti*, Believe and thou hast eaten.] Lastly, and perhaps in some respects most important for our present purpose, we pass from the warm and glowing language of devotion to the precise theological statements of the Articles. In view of the definite purpose of the Articles, and of their prominent doctrinal position in the Church of England, it is necessary to consider with the utmost care what they teach on this subject.

The Articles, like the Catechism, give the name "Sacrament" to this ordinance. The term is not found in Scripture, but in view of its original meaning of the Roman soldier's oath on enlistment (*sacramentum*), it is peculiarly appropriate as expressive of allegiance to our Lord. It is limited in the Church of England to the two ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they alone fulfill the Church's definition of a Sacrament as an ordinance which has both an outward sign and an inward grace, and was ordained by Jesus Christ.

Article XXV defines Sacraments as "badges or tokens of Christian men's profession," and "certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's goodwill towards us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in Him." "Effectual signs" (*efficacia; signa*), i.e., not only "signs," but "effectual signs," and yet effectual as signs. They do the work of signs effectually. The epithet does not destroy the substantive and make the thing defined

something other than "signs"; just as "spiritual" defines but does not destroy the idea of "body" in the "spiritual body" of 1 Cor. 15.

The meaning of "sign" is that of a seal or pledge that has God's word of promise behind it. As such the Sacraments are "efficacia signa." The Books of the Homilies are referred to in Article XXXV as containing "godly and wholesome doctrine," and although it is not to be understood that the Church of England necessarily endorses every expression in them, yet in view of their use at the time our Prayer Book was compiled, the definition of a Sacrament found in one of them is worthy of notice as an illustration of "effectual signs."

Sacraments are defined as "visible signs to which are annexed promises." [Homily of Common Prayer and Sacraments, The Homilies, p. 356. Cambridge, 1850.] St. Augustine's definition may also be noted. "Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit Sacramentum." [Ad Johann, Sermon 272.] The Sacraments in this connection are thus analogous to those visible things in the Old Testament which were from time to time associated with truths and promises of God; e.g., the rainbow, the circumcision, the Passover, the fleece, the brazen serpent, etc.

Article XXVIII says that the Lord's Supper is "a sign of love" between Christians, and also a "Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death"; that to those who "rightly, worthily and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ." It states that the change of the substance of bread and wine is unscriptural, subversive of the very idea of a Sacrament, and has been the cause of much superstition.

It goes on to say that the "body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the Supper only after a heavenly and spiritual manner," and that "the means whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten is faith." It closes by asserting that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance "reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped". Article XXIX says that the wicked and those who have not living faith, although they "carnally and visibly press with their teeth the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, in no wise (nullo modo) are they partakers of Christ, but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing."

Article XXX refers to the necessity of observing "Christ's ordinance and commandment," and administering both bread and wine to all Christian men alike. All these statements may be summarized as follows: - The Lord's Supper according to the Prayer Book is: (1) for a remembrance of Christ and His death (this is the first and prominent characteristic); (2) an effectual sign of grace; (3) a means of grace; (4) a pledge of God's love; (5) a badge of Christian profession; (6) a sign of Christian love; (7) a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death.

It will also have been noticed that as in the Catechism and Service of Holy Communion, so the Articles are very emphatic as to a worthy as distinct from an unworthy use of Sacraments. They are to be "duly used" and "worthily received," "according to Christ's ordinance" (Article XXV), and the Lord's Supper is to be received "rightly, worthily and with faith" (Article XXVIII). The Articles are equally clear that the spiritual effects are conditional on this right reception, that the blessings are displayed to and bestowed through faith, and that only in such case have they "wholesome effect or operation" (Article XXV, cf.

Article XXIX). This distinction between worthy and unworthy reception, thus made so clear and prominent, is evidently a keynote of Church of England teaching on the Sacraments. It remains for us to notice the general position of the Lord's Supper in the Church of England. To it, as the normal public expression of

our Christian life, baptism and confirmation clearly lead. It is associated with the joys of marriage and childbirth. It is linked with the discipline of sickness. It is part of the solemnity of ordination.

It is also prominently connected with the observances of Holy Days. It is assumed that as a general rule everywhere, and as an absolute rule in certain places, there will be a communion every Sunday. The Lord's Supper is thus regarded as the ordinance round which our corporate Christian worship will turn, and of which in times of special experience the individual life will be a thankful partaker. It is therefore central and prominent in the life of public worship and testimony, because of its close association with that fact which is central and prominent both in the revelation of God and in all Christian experience; the "precious blood shedding" of our Lord.

This, in brief, is the answer of the Church of England to the question, What is the Lord's Supper? The Prayer Book carefully considered and interpreted does not give any other answer. From a comparison of these results with the references to the Lord's Supper in Holy Scripture, it will be seen that the New Testament aspects are all illustrated and covered (though of course amplified) by Prayer Book expressions. It is not too much to say that there is nothing in the Prayer Book that is not found in the New Testament, and nothing in the New Testament that is not found in the Prayer Book. There is the same simplicity of statement, the same spiritual standpoint, the same general view of the institution.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/the-lords-supper-in-the-prayer-book/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**