

SHOULD A NON CHRISTIAN PARTAKE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

SHORT ANSWER

People who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that is, Christian, should not partake in the Lord's Supper (sometimes called communion). The Lord's Supper is an act of obedience to the Lord by those that love God – it is an act of worship of God. Non-believers are incapable of truly worshipping God, for if they did, they would believe in Him.

THE LORD'S SUPPER IS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

Although many focus on the saving grace of Christ during the celebration of the Lord's supper (and there is nothing much wrong with this), that is, they focus on the benefit to themselves of the crucifixion of Christ, the real purpose of the Lord's supper is to focus on the worth of the Son of God – Yeshua or Jesus, the Christ. It is thus an act of worship of God and therefore outward looking.

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5b)

This reason alone shows that a non-believer cannot possibly partake in the Lord's Supper for a non-believer does not know Christ and therefore cannot worship him. A non-believer is in darkness (John 3:19, 8:12) and the one in darkness has no fellowship with God (1 John 1:6) therefore cannot commune with God.

TAKING THE LORD'S SUPPER IN AN UNWORTHY MANNER

The orthodox church's view, in particular what the Catholic church practices, was proven to be a lie more than 500 years ago but remnants of the practice still prevails in many protestant churches, and even in some evangelical churches, today. In essence what the orthodox church calls communion, which is more rightly the Lord's Supper, is not a means by which a person can establish communion with God – only faith can do this. If one is a believer, then only repentance can restore communion (1 John 1:9). We see this in two places.

Firstly Jesus makes it plain that the believer cannot be joined with a non-believer in the same manner a non-believer cannot be joined with Christ. Communion is about being joined together into one body whose head is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:17; Colossians 1:18). It is about being in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-13). Time and time again the Holy Word speak of not being un-equally yoked, or joined with unbelievers. The Apostle Paul writes:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

This admonishment is plain and speaks to the heart of this question. The believer and the unbeliever standing side by side at the table of the Lord's Supper with the cup of wine and loaf of bread is untenable; one represents the righteousness of God and light, but the other lawlessness and darkness. One is justified and other condemned; one has hope, the other is lost. The Lord's Supper cannot remedy this; however, the subject of the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus Christ can, if and only if the unbeliever repents and puts his or her trust in Him.

The unbeliever cannot know the mind of God, thus cannot discern directions from Holy Spirit something a believer has through the indwelling of the Spirit (Romans 8:5-8). Paul also states that a carnally minded person – that is an unbeliever cannot please God. The Bible states this plainly – the one who pleases God (thus loves God) is the one that obeys the gospel of God (1 John 2:3; Romans 6:16) – a sinner who obeys God will put his or her faith in God. Thus there is no point in a non-believer taking the Lord's Supper for in doing so he is not pleasing God, for he cannot please God. The very essence of having faith in God is what pleases Him, and thus the very nature of the unbeliever is repugnant to God – and for this reason every non-believer has been judged and has been found wanting and is destined for Hell (John 3:36). The only escape is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

Secondly, Paul states in his instruction to all churches in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, in a chapter admonishing the church at Corinth for failing to treat the Lord's Supper with due reverence, that believers are not take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner:

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 11:27)

This raises the question; what does taking the supper in an unworthy manner mean? But Paul explains in the Corinthians passage; 1) what an unworthy manner is; 2) the means by which a believer can avoid taking Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner with an example and 3) the consequence of doing so.

These are all relevant to the non-believer who might partake of the Lord's Supper. Paul's illustrates unworthiness by example. These include 1) divisions within the congregation (v 18, 19) and 2) eating and drinking to excess at the supper, to the extent where drunkenness was occurring, (v 20-22). A believer and non-believer will always be at odds with each other – one is guided by the Holy Spirit and the other by the lust and pride of the desires of an unrepentant wicked heart (Psalm 10:2; 1 John 2:16). Thus for this reason alone unbelievers cannot partake of the Lord's Supper for there will always be division between the believer and unbeliever (Jude 1:19 provides an example). Noting that the supper is not an act that can be done alone – it is to be done (regularly) as a congregation to signify the unity of the Body of Christ as the Church (e.g. Ephesians 4:4). This is also the way Jesus performed the first supper – the group (disciples) all drank from the same cup and ate from the same loaf of bread seated at the same table; which was signifying the unity of the gospel to come.

It was Christ's blood that broke down the wall of enmity and division between sinners and God (Ephesians 2:14, 15) and in doing so has allowed believer to be united to Christ. How can a non-believer possibly fit into this model? He or she is still at war with God; they hate God (Romans 1:3), and have no connection or communion with God (2 Corinthians 6:14). It does not matter how many communions an unbeliever attends, they will never be brought any closer to God! As the Bible states – there is an insurmountable barrier (fence or partition) between non-believer and God (Ephesians 2:14).

We also see that for a believer there is a way to avoid taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, found in verse 28. A believer is to examine him- or her- self before attending church and taking communion. What does this mean? It means examining the motives; the heart and soul of what has transpired in that person's life, and to attend to remedying any sin and its consequence. The means to do this is the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11). No unbeliever can examine himself for he does not know right from wrong, for he has no measuring stick to do so. It is the Holy Spirit and the Word of God that provides this absolute certainty of what is right and what is wrong (Hebrews 4:12) and thus a believer, but not an unbeliever, can examine him or herself and see the sin they have, and can therefore remedy the consequence. This may be apologising to a wronged person (Colossians 2:13, 14 etc), repaying for the damage done, and in ANY CASE, confessing the sin to God. For unconfessed sin will place a barrier to having communion with our Heavenly Father. However, the love of the Father is so great He will forgive us our sins if we confess them to Him.

If we [believers] confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

But what for the unbeliever? It is obvious – before attending communion the unbeliever needs to pour out his heart and soul to the God of Heaven, seeking to put his or her faith and trust in Him (John 3:16). Of course such a person who cries out to the Lord and confesses His name is saved:

*[I]f you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "whoever believes on him will not be put to shame."
(Romans 10:9-11)*

And therefore logically all who come to communion will be saved if they obey the Word of God.

The consequence of taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner is that such a person cannot discern the Lord's body (v. 29). In the case the unbeliever – he or she cannot do this anyway – they do not have the Holy Spirit. For the believer, such a person eats and drinks judgement upon him- or herself (v. 29). Furthermore, an unbeliever will be at disunity with the congregation and thus will at grave risk of causing division (about which Paul is admonishing the Church at Corinth) which is contrary to the command of God (1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:4 etc.). In all essence the unbeliever will be totally disconnected from the congregation including the head, Jesus Christ; for without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 John 4:13 etc.) the unbeliever will never be able to contribute to the workings of the body of the church.

CONCLUSION

The congregation of the true Church of God is made up of born again (see John 3) believers; those that are in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1, 2; 2:10). The Lord's Supper is an act of worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. A non-believer can have no part in this; they do not know God and cannot know God – their heart can only hate God. Only if they obey the gospel of God, which is the power unto salvation, will this state of affairs change. And for the Catholic, Mass can never remove the sin of humans. Taking the Lord's Supper is not a means by which you can be saved, as the Bible says;

*And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which **can never take away sins**. But this Man [Jesus Christ], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:11-12).*

Salvation cannot be found in humans nor in anything humans do; it can only be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:15, 16), which believers need to proclaim (Romans 10:14, 15). For this reason the Church cannot save – only Jesus Christ can save as he said;

*"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."
(John 14:6).*

