THE QUESTION

What did the early church believe about the Eucharist?

Asked by a THF member on May 20, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 13 numbered quotations · the 38 early Christian passages and 109 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-the-early-church-believe-about-the-eucharist

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

The early church believed the Eucharist was not common bread and wine. After the prayer of thanks, writers such as Justin and Irenaeus call it the body and blood of Christ. They also treated it as a thanksgiving, a pure offering to God, a sign of the Church's unity, and food that points to the resurrection.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 8

It was not common bread and drink

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin Martyr wrote to explain Christian worship to outsiders. He says believers do not receive the Eucharist as ordinary food. He compares it to the way the Son of God took on real flesh and blood. In the same way, he says, the food blessed by Christ's word and prayer is the flesh and blood of Jesus.

1

> "We do not receive these as common bread and drink, but in the same way that Jesus Christ our Savior became flesh by the Word of God and had flesh and blood for our salvation, we have been taught that the food blessed by His word and prayer, which nourishes our blood and flesh through transformation, is the flesh and blood of Jesus who became flesh."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 9, page 8 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 8

Blessed bread holds an earthly and heavenly reality

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus says that when bread receives the calling on of God, it is no longer common bread. It becomes the Eucharist, which he describes as both earthly and heavenly. In another place he says the cup and bread receive the Word of God and become the Eucharist of Christ's body and blood.

2

> "For just as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 14, page 8 Read it in the library ›

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3 “When, therefore, the mixed cup and the made bread receive the Word of God, and the Eucharist of the blood and body of Christ is formed, from which the substance of our flesh is grown and sustained, how can they claim that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life, when this flesh is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord and is a part of Him?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book V* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 13, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 8

The Eucharist points to the body's resurrection

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus argues against teachers who said the body cannot be saved. If that were true, he says, the cup and bread would not be a true sharing in Christ's blood and body. Ignatius calls the bread the medicine of immortality. Both men tie this meal to the hope of everlasting life for the whole person.

4 “If the flesh does not attain salvation, then the Lord did not redeem us with His blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist a communion of His blood, nor the bread we break a communion of His body.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book V* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 18, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

5 “I will especially do this if the Lord makes known to me that you come together, individually, in common through grace, in one faith, and in Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David according to the flesh, being both the Son of man and the Son of God, so that you obey the bishop and the presbytery with an undivided mind, breaking one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote to prevent us from dying, but causes us to live forever in Jesus Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 4, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 4 OF 8

The church asked the Spirit to come down

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

An old church prayer from the Apostolic Constitutions remembers the Last Supper and Christ's death. Then it asks God to send the Holy Spirit on the bread and cup. The prayer asks the Spirit to show the bread to be the body of Christ. The change is pictured as God's work, not the priest's own power.

6

> "Accept them, to the honor of Your Christ, and send down Your Holy Spirit upon this sacrifice, the Witness of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, that He may show this bread to be the body of Your Christ, and the cup to be the blood of Your Christ, so that those who partake of it may be strengthened for piety, may obtain the remission of their sins, may be delivered from the devil and his deceit, may be filled with the Holy Spirit, may be made worthy of Your Christ, and may obtain eternal life through Your reconciliation to them, O Lord Almighty."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 36, page 9** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 8

It was a meal of thanks and unity

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. The Didache, a very early church manual, gives prayers that thank the Father for life and knowledge given through Jesus. It also uses the bread as a picture of the Church. Just as scattered grain became one loaf, the Church is asked to be gathered into one kingdom.

7

> "We thank You, our Father, for the life and knowledge that You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "Just as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and then was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 9 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 6 OF 8

Only baptized believers could receive it

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Both the Didache and Justin say the Eucharist was not open to everyone. Only those who had been baptized, believed the Church's teaching, and lived as Christ taught could take part. This shows how holy they held the meal to be. It was a sign of belonging to Christ, not a public snack.

8 “But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving, or Eucharist, except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 9 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

9 “This food is called among us [the Eucharist], and only those who believe that our teachings are true, have been washed with the washing for the remission of sins and renewal, and live as Christ instructed, are allowed to partake.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 9, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 8

They saw it as the pure offering

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin and Irenaeus both read the prophet Malachi as a promise that the nations would offer a pure sacrifice everywhere. They see that promise fulfilled when the Church offers the bread and cup of the Eucharist. Justin also says Christ set up this meal to remember the suffering He endured for us.

10 “So He then speaks of those Gentiles, namely us, who in every place offer sacrifices to Him, such as the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of the Eucharist, affirming that we glorify His name, while you profane it.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 10, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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11 “The Church, receiving this from the apostles, offers it to God throughout the world, to Him who provides us, in the New Testament, with the means of subsistence—the first-fruits of His gifts—about which Malachi, among the twelve prophets, spoke beforehand: “I have no pleasure in you, says the Omnipotent, and I will not accept sacrifice from your hands. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, My name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense and a pure sacrifice are offered to My name; for great is My name among the Gentiles, says the Omnipotent.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 16, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 8 OF 8

Sharing it kept believers joined to Christ

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian says believers received the Eucharist daily as the food of salvation. He warns that being kept from communion because of grave sin means being cut off from Christ's body. Ignatius urges one Eucharist under one bishop, because there is one flesh of Christ and one cup. For both, the meal held the Church together in Christ.

12 “When, therefore, He says that whoever eats of His bread shall live forever, it is clear that those who partake of His body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion are living.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 31, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

13 “Take care, then, to have only one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to show the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants: so that, whatever you do, you may do it according to the will of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 6, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These writers do not explain exactly how the bread and cup become Christ's body and blood, so they do not settle later debates about that question.
- Some passages also use the language of symbols and pictures, such as scattered grain or mixed water and wine, alongside plain statements about Christ's body and blood.
- These passages say little about how often every church held the Eucharist in the earliest years.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 38 early Christian passages and 109 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–38, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 39–57, in Bible order), then 90 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *38 passages from 11 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 9 **Quotes 7, 8, pages 4, 5** “bread was scattered over the hills, and then was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 14 (1885 English; on point 7) “every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 3–8*

3 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (on point 8) “His blood, which was shed for us, is one… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* **Quote 5, page 3** If Jesus Christ graciously permits me through your prayers, and if it is His will, I will, in a second little work which I will write to you, further reveal… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (on point 8) their office. Let no one do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let a proper Eucharist be considered as such when it is administered either by the bishop… [continues online] **read ›**

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6 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* **Quote 13, page 6** "care, then, to have only one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to show the unity of His blood; one altar; as… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (on point 1) "abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not acknowledge the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins, and whom… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (on point 8) "Let no one do anything related to the Church without the bishop. Consider that to be a proper Eucharist which is administered by the bishop or by someone he has… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 9–12*

9 *First Apology* **Quotes 1, 9, pages 2, 5** "food is called among us [the Eucharist], and only those who believe that our teachings are true, have been washed with the washing for the remission of sins and renewal… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Dialogue with Trypho* **Quote 10, page 5** to be presented on behalf of those purified from leprosy, was a symbol of the bread of the Eucharist. This celebration, our Lord Jesus Christ established in remembrance of the… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Dialogue with Trypho* (on point 7) we offer through this name, which Jesus the Christ commanded us to offer, specifically in the Eucharist of the bread and the cup, and which Christians present everywhere around the… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *First Apology* (1885 English; on point 5) "he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 13–18*

13 *Against Heresies: Book V* **Quote 3, page 3** "therefore, the mixed cup and the made bread receive the Word of God, and the Eucharist of the blood and body of Christ is formed, from which the substance of… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Against Heresies: Book IV* **Quote 2, page 2** "change their opinion or stop offering the things just mentioned. But our opinion agrees with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn supports our opinion. For we offer to Him… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English; on point 7) "in this respect it is pure. For we make an oblation to God of the bread and the cup of blessing, giving Him thanks in that He has commanded the… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) **Quote 11, page 6** "Again, giving directions to His disciples to offer to God the first-fruits of His own, created things—not as if He stood in need of them, but that they… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English; on point 3) "how can they be consistent with themselves, [when they say] that the bread over which thanks have been given is the body of their Lord, and the cup His blood… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Against Heresies: Book V* **Quote 4, page 3** salvation, then the Lord did not redeem us with His blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist a communion of His blood, nor the bread we break a communion… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 19–20*

19 *Instructor* 1.6 (1885 English; on point 1) "6:53-54 Such is the suitable food which the Lord ministers, and He offers His flesh and pours forth His blood, and nothing is wanting for the children's… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Stromata* 1.19 "there are those who celebrate the Eucharist with mere water… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 21–25*

21 *Against Marcion* 40 "food, like a melon, which Marcion must have had instead of a heart? He did not understand how ancient this figure of the body of Christ was, He who said… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *Against Marcion* 8 (1885 English; on point 1) "like manner, when treating of the gospel, we have proved from the sacrament of the bread and the cup the verity of the Lord's body and blood in opposition… [continues online] **read ›**

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23 *Against Marcion* 19 (1885 English) “that, for the time to come, you may understand that He has given to His body the figure of bread, whose body the prophet of old figuratively turned into bread… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *De Corona* 3 (1885 English) “take also, in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *On Prayer* 19 (1885 English; on point 7) “the Lord's Body has been received and reserved each point is secured, both the participation of the sacrifice and the discharge of duty… [continues online] **read ›**

Early Liturgies, *c. 200–400 AD · sources 26–27*

26 *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 (1885 English; on point 4) “do in remembrance of me; for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show forth my death and acknowledge my resurrection and ascension until… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 (1885 English; on point 4) “down upon us also and upon this bread and upon these chalices Your Holy Spirit, that by His all-powerful and divine influence He may sanctify and consecrate them, and… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 28–29*

28 *Against Celsus* 33 (on point 2) “this bread becomes by prayer a sacred body, which sanctifies those who sincerely partake of it… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Against Celsus* 57 (on point 5) “we have a symbol of gratitude to God in the bread… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 30*

30 *Epistles and Epistolary Fragments* “had stood at the holy table and had stretched forth his hands to receive the blessed food, and had received it, and for a very long time had been a… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 31–35*

31 *Treatises* **Quote 12, page 6** forever, it is clear that those who partake of His body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion are living. So, on the other hand, we must fear… [continues online] **read ›**

32 *Epistles* (on point 7) “in the priest Melchizedek we see the sacrament of the Lord’s sacrifice prefigured, just as divine Scripture testifies and says: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and… [continues online] **read ›**

33 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 2) “pretend that with an invocation not to be contemned she sanctified bread and celebrated the Eucharist, and to offer sacrifice to the Lord, not without the sacrament of the accustomed… [continues online] **read ›**

34 *Epistles* (on point 8) “the Lord's cup that the mixture can no longer be separated. Therefore, nothing can separate the Church—that is, the people established in the Church, faithfully and firmly continuing… [continues online] **read ›**

35 *Epistles* with this idea: although in the morning only water is clearly offered, yet when we come to supper we offer the mixed cup? But when we eat supper, we cannot… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 36–38*

36 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 6, page 4** “Your reconciliation to them, O Lord Almighty. We further pray to You, O Lord, for Your holy Church spread from one end of the world to the other, which You… [continues online] **read ›**

37 *Apostolic Constitutions* out. As for the deacons, after the prayer is over, let some of them attend to the oblation of the Eucharist, ministering to the Lord's body with fear. Let… [continues online] **read ›**

38 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 5) Always be thankful, as faithful and honest servants. And concerning the Eucharistic thanksgiving, say this: “We thank You, our Father, for the life that You have made known to us… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *19 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

39 **Bel and the Dragon 1:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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40 **Matthew 26:26** As they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. He gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” **read ›**

41 **Mark 2:12** He rose immediately, took up the mat, and went out in front of them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!” **read ›**

42 **Mark 14:22** As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had blessed it, he broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take, eat. This is my body.” **read ›**

43 **Mark 14:23** He took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them. They all drank of it. **read ›**

44 **Luke 22:19** He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **read ›**

45 **John 6:51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever. And the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” **read ›**

46 **John 6:53** Jesus therefore said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. **read ›**

47 **John 6:54** He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. **read ›**

48 **John 6:55** For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. **read ›**

49 **Acts 2:42** They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. **read ›**

50 **Acts 2:46** Day by day they continued steadfastly with one accord in the temple, breaking bread at home and sharing food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **read ›**

51 **Acts 20:7** On the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and continued his speech until midnight. **read ›**

52 **1 Corinthians 10:16** The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? **read ›**

53 **1 Corinthians 11:23** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, **read ›**

54 **1 Corinthians 11:24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “Take, eat. This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **read ›**

55 **1 Corinthians 11:25** In the same way he also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink, in remembrance of me.” **read ›**

56 **1 Corinthians 11:26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. **read ›**

57 **1 Corinthians 11:27** Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the Lord’s cup in a way unworthy of the Lord will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *90 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Leviticus 14:10

Psalms 23:1 · 96:10

Isaiah 9:6 · 40:11 · 53:11 · 55:1 · 63:1

Ezekiel 34:13

Amos 2:6

Malachi 1:10

Matthew 1:1 · 1:18 · 5:45 · 7:6 · 11:27 · 12:31 · 18:12 · 26:24 · 26:29 · 26:39 · 27:3

Mark 14:25

Luke 7:43 · 10:22 · 10:27 · 16:9 · 16:16 · 22:15 · 22:20 · 24:39

John 1:18 · 4:1 · 10:34 · 12:34 · 14:2 · 14:16 · 15:1 · 15:25 · 20:22

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Acts 2:17 · 8:20 · 20:28

Romans 2:14 · 6:23 · 11:16 · 11:32

1 Corinthians 2:6 · 2:15 · 4:15 · 7:29 · 11:3 · 11:5 · 11:7 · 11:9 · 11:10 · 11:18 · 12:1 · 12:4 · 12:8 · 12:12 · 12:31 · 13:1 · 13:12 · 14:21 · 14:25 · 14:26 · 14:34 · 15:8 · 15:36 · 15:53

2 Corinthians 2:17 · 4:4 · 12:3 · 12:9

Galatians 1:1 · 4:4 · 4:19

Ephesians 1:10 · 4:8 · 4:16 · 5:30

Philippians 4:17

Colossians 1:14

1 Timothy 2:2

2 Timothy 2:1

1 Peter 1:19 · 2:5 · 2:9

1 John 4:1

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What did the early church believe about the Eucharist?” on May 20, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

Library only. This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY