

December 1, 2019

- I Corinthians 11:17-34 -

"Why Communion is Essential?"

## Introduction

The first Sunday of most months we gather together and we receive communion. Why is Communion so essential to the church that we do this so often? If you aren't sure, don't feel bad, you are not alone. A recent survey showed that most Christians aren't quite sure about this practice handed down from the Lord Jesus to His Church. The Lord's Supper became the normal celebration of the early church. Remember it began with Jesus at the Passover but by the time the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth they too had departed from the principles and truths of Communion. They were far removed from its substance and they needed to undergo spiritual examination. Let me give you a practical illustration... my brothers' phone was not working correctly this week... he had to reset the computer or phone back to its factory settings or re-calibrate back to the proper setting kind of like the default setting on your computer. Just as we go to the doctor for a physical examination; we need to go to the Word of God for a spiritual examination.

## I The Origin of the Lord's Supper

1. Jesus took the ancient feast of Passover and transformed it into a meal with new meaning when He instructed His disciples to drink of the cup and eat of the bread in remembrance of His death on their behalf. The Lord's Supper is a memorial that Christ Himself instituted. He became the ultimate fulfillment of deliverance from sin and death when He died on the cross and shed His blood. **For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. I Corinthians 6:20 & I Peter 1:18-19**

2. During the Jewish celebrations of Passover and Pentecost, many pilgrims would come to Jerusalem and live with other Jewish families. Many of those pilgrims were saved through Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost and chose to remain in the city. The Christian residents of the city therefore had to take care of the converted pilgrims who had no livelihood. For that reason it was necessary for the early church to share and sell their possessions for the benefit of those pilgrims ([Acts 2:44-45](#)). The sharing of possessions and meals became a unique expression of community in the early church.

The breaking of bread became synonymous with a fellowship meal. The early church incorporated the Communion established by Jesus onto the end of their fellowship meals. Eventually that combination of a fellowship meal and Communion became known as a "love feast." The early church attached Communion to a common meal not only because the Lord Jesus had done so, but because the Jewish people had always associated the Passover with a meal.

The Gentiles likewise included a potluck meal (Gk. eranos) with their religious festivals. So the early church followed that Jewish and Gentile cultural patterns in combining a meal with the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians in fact contributed to the death of the love feast. They had obliterated its meaning. They had selfishly turned it into a drunken and gluttonous

exercise that resembled the idolatrous feasts they once participated in. Their practice was so offensive to God that He disciplined some with illness and death (1 Cor. 11:29-30).

Selfish and divisive actions were irreconcilable with the grace and unity made available through the cross (Eph. 2:4-16) and the impartiality of God's love (Acts 10:34).

## II Corinth's Improper Attitude for the Communion Vv. 17-22

A) First, they were dividing up into very destructive divisions and cliques within the church. When Paul speaks of the church "coming together," or "assembling as a church," he is not primarily talking about a morning service such as we have here.

1) The cliques and divisions that Paul mentions earlier in this letter had ruined the gathering of the church together, so that he could say, as he does here, "It is not for the better that you come together, but for the worse. You are actually injuring one another and destroying the character of the church by the way you are conducting yourselves at these love feasts which concluded in the celebration of the Lord's Table together. This is a covenant relationship with Christ and each other " - Hebrews 10:9-18

a) When you get together for your love feasts you cannot call that the Lord's Supper even though it terminates in the familiar ritual that we now call the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is an expression of the unity of the church, and what you are doing is a far cry from that. You are acting selfishly with one another. We are to share and help one another...

b) Paul explains, "When you come together you ought to be concerned about the needs and the hungers of all." Thus, fragmented, selfish, uncaring, indifferent to human needs, the church was hurting the cause of Christ rather than helping it.

c) By sharp contrast, the apostle now goes on to draw the picture what he had taught them about the Lord's Table and the principle elements in Verse 23 –26. We will participate in this communion at the close of this message and refer to this section of scripture

## III Communion requires Proper Examination. 27-32

1) Many years ago in southern Russia, 14 new believers and some missionaries gathered in a small apartment to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The room was charged with spiritual energy and joy as the people shared in testimonies, songs, and prayers. Then, being aware of the symbolic meaning of the bread and the cup, they looked at each other and whispered, "With this we are cleansed. With this we are one!" Being reminded again of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross for them and the forgiveness they had received, they felt a new sense of their oneness in Christ. Nothing unites believers more than this understanding of oneness and forgiveness.

2. The apostle Paul said that the Corinthian believers were not experiencing this unifying power. They were partaking in an unworthy manner because they were careless, selfish, and indifferent, and apathetic to the needs of others. They were coming to the Lord's Table in a kind of an empty ritual, just going through it in a mechanical, ceremonial way. Paul says this is a dangerous practice, because it is acting as though the death and the life of Jesus meant nothing to us, and he warns against that. We need to safeguard ourselves too from empty ritual. Therefore, according to the apostle, a proper participation involves a careful self-examination.

a) That is why he says let someone examine himself or herself earnestly and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. The word examine means "to prove," or literally, "to qualify" oneself in verse 31. Is it time to hit the spiritual reset of your heart today? God searches the hearts. -I Samuel 16:7.

b) Paul says to the Ephesians, "let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you," {Eph 4:31 KJV}. Attitudes of selfishness, jealousy, dishonesty, anger need to be resolved when we come to the Table of the Lord. We acknowledge them and thank God for his cleansing grace and then partake, forgiven by the grace of God. What about you?

3. The apostle clearly implies by this; a professing Christian should not go on week after week and month after month living in a wrong relationship, holding grudges or an attitude of unforgiveness that you know is wrong. The purpose of the Communion is to safeguard such unity in the Church. Today is the time to hit the reset button of your heart.

4. All offense should be dealt with before communion or you should not participate in communion. Once you decide to place that offense under the blood and come to the altar for communion you are saying in essences the matter is settled. I will forgive ... Jesus taught us to seek forgiveness without delay. This is especially true when dealing with an offense. God's forgiveness should lead us to fear Him, worship and adore God, for his grace and forgiveness.

**Matthew 18: 15-17**

5. The true church is the combine body of all born again believers. It is made up of all who genuinely confess Jesus to be "the Messiah and the Son of the Living God." These are the members of the Church. These people are family. The purpose of the Communion is to safeguard unity. It is design to protect this sacred unity. The apostle Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for their poor behavior and their disgrace at the Lord's Supper. They thought they were real spiritual but the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians they needed to undergo spiritual examination. So do we!

Today's message was one of warning. It is a cautionary lesson from the Bible that I pray you will listen to very carefully with a heart and mind that is open to God's Holy Spirit. This passage shows us that we have an obligation to come to the Lord's Table.

How do you respond to this? ---gospel