

**The Ordinance of Communion**

**Lesson Scope:** [1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#)

**Lesson Focus**

The ordinance of Communion derives its meaning from the suffering and death of Jesus. It commemorates God's greatest act of love for all mankind. Apart from Jesus' death on the cross, there would be no Christian faith. No man could have fellowship with God.

The church at Corinth was practicing this ordinance as a carnal feast similar to the heathen feasts they had celebrated in their preconversion life. In their competitiveness and disunity, the wealthy believers indulged, and the poor went hungry. This not only demonstrated their misunderstanding of the ordinance of Communion but also dishonored God.

Paul exposed the inconsistency of their practice and then retold the story of the first Communion. He explained its meaning and gave directives for its proper observance, focusing on the preparation of each participant prior to the observance of this sacred ordinance. Partaking of Communion does not make one holy. Rather it signifies that Jesus' shed blood has cleansed one from all sin and is enabling him to lead a holy life, making him worthy to participate.

The ordinance of Communion is kept in remembrance of Christ's suffering and death "till he come." Members of Christ's body are privileged to share the bread and the cup as they are found worthy through examination.

Be prepared to consider the significant features of your church's practice of having counsel meeting and a preparatory service prior to Communion. Examine how these services help the congregation prepare to observe Communion in a God-honoring way. We must be open and honest about those things that can and do arise to threaten unity in the church and to spoil good brotherly relationships. Always endeavor to have positive solutions to strained relations and wrong attitudes that cause divisions and consider the importance of resolving these matters before coming to the Communion service.

**Lesson Aim:** To present principles related to the proper observance of Communion.

**Theme Verse:** [1 Corinthians 11:26](#). For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

## Lesson Text

### Inconsistencies Exposed

[1 Corinthians 11:17-22](#) <sup>17</sup> Now in this that I declare *unto you* I praise *you* not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. <sup>18</sup> For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. <sup>19</sup> For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. <sup>20</sup> When ye come together therefore into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's supper. <sup>21</sup> For in eating every one taketh before *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. <sup>22</sup> What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not.

### Fellowship Enjoined

[1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#) <sup>23</sup> For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: <sup>24</sup> And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. <sup>25</sup> After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. <sup>26</sup> For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

### Self Examination

[1 Corinthians 11:27-34](#) <sup>27</sup> Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. <sup>29</sup> For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning

the Lord's body. <sup>30</sup> For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. <sup>31</sup> For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. <sup>33</sup> Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. <sup>34</sup> And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

## **Questions for Study**

### **Inconsistencies Exposed**

1. What flaws were evident in the way the Corinthians practiced Communion?
2. How can those with diverse thinking be brought to unity in the church?

### **Fellowship Enjoined**

3. Why are the bread and the cup fitting symbols of Jesus' sacrificial death?
4. How do the emblems symbolize the believers' unity in the church?
5. In what way is preparedness for Communion similar to preparedness for Jesus' Second Coming?

### **Self Examination**

6. Why does partaking unworthily make one guilty of the body and blood of the Lord?
7. What questions should we consider as we examine ourselves before Communion?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

Communion expresses a common union of the members of the church, with each other and with Christ. Paul stated that the Corinthians' observance of Communion, however, was "for the worse," due to divisions among them. Their pride and individualism ran counter to the character of true brotherhood.

Heresies (1 Corinthians 11:19), or diverse thinking, had resulted in division and competing factions in the Corinthian church. Paul stated that the true and the false naturally must separate so that the true can be recognized for what it is (1 Corinthians 11:19). The Corinthian practice of each bringing and eating his own food rather than sharing it violated the

principle and design of the Communion ordinance.

The physical bread that sustains physical life symbolizes Jesus Christ, the true Bread. He is the Giver and Sustainer of spiritual life. "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:33).

The cup symbolizes Jesus' shed blood, which cleanses from all sin. Drinking of the cup does not bring cleansing. It reminds the blood-bought saint of the means by which he has been cleansed. Jesus' shed blood paid the price of our redemption. Its worth exceeds that of silver or gold.

Paul told them that, to keep clear the meaning of Communion, eating and drinking to sustain the physical body should be done at home. When the focus of Communion is on eating, spiritual weakness, sickness, and sleep will be the result.

Paul exhorted the Corinthians that, when they came together for Communion, they should tarry one for another. The Communion service is intended to be a group experience (1 Corinthians 11:33). We commune with each other and with God, who brought us together into one body through the work of Jesus.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Inconsistencies Exposed**

1. Unity of faith and practice is necessary for proper Communion observance (11:17-19). Oneness with Christ produces oneness among the members in the church. Any problem that mars unity in the congregation must be addressed to restore oneness with Christ and oneness in the church before she observes this ordinance. To proceed with the ordinance when unity of faith and practice is absent is "not for the better, but for the worse." We deceive ourselves when we ignore this principle.

2. Communion is a ceremony, not a feast (11:20-22). Believers partake of the emblems, not to satisfy their physical hunger, but to be reminded of the means of their redemption. The nutritional needs of the body should be met at home so that the chief emphasis in the Communion service can be remembering Christ's suffering. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17).

## **Fellowship Enjoined**

3. Jesus instituted the Communion service (11:23). He intended for us to keep it in remembrance of His suffering and death to accomplish our redemption. Remembering this event together inspires a love for Christ and for fellow believers who are likewise redeemed by Jesus' blood. Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). He knew that human beings tend to forget and need periodic reminders.

4. The broken bread symbolizes the broken body of Christ (11:23, 24). Jesus took on a human body and lived on earth as the sinless Christ. He was the perfect Lamb of God. His broken body accomplished what the slain animals of the Old Testament offerings could never accomplish. "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). Jesus died so that we might live. His body was broken so that we might be made whole.

5. The Communion cup symbolizes the shed blood of Christ (11:25). Jesus' blood sealed the covenant of the New Testament. It took away the sins of the world, not merely covering them as the Old Testament sacrifices did. Redemption requires the blood of a sinless sacrifice. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). For this reason both the Old and New Testaments were sealed with blood.

6. Observing this ordinance helps us to remember the death and suffering of our Lord (11:25, 26). We are commanded to keep this ordinance "till he come." The Communion service helps to keep us in a state of readiness for Christ's Second Coming. Jesus saves us not only initially at our conversion but also continuously as we follow Him in obedience and holiness. This ordinance keeps us aware of our continuing dependence on Christ for salvation.

## **Self Examination**

7. To participate in the Communion ordinance requires a personal examination of our standing with God (1 Corinthians 11:27-28). If sin is allowed in believers' lives while they participate in Communion, "they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:6). It is hypocritical to claim that one is redeemed from sin while still living in sin. Personal examination is needed to determine our relationship with God and with each other.

8. Partaking of Communion unworthily brings judgment (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). While the sacrificial death of Jesus justifies the believer, it condemns the willful sinner. The difference lies in the fact that "some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after" (1 Timothy 5:24). Though none of us feels worthy of salvation, we are made worthy when we meet God's conditions.
9. Properly dealing with sin in our own lives keeps us from condemnation (1 Corinthians 11:31-34). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). God's judgment presently rests on those who reject the merits of Jesus' shed blood. But by applying the blood of Christ to the doorposts and the lintels of our hearts, we can stand justified in His sight. Proper preparation for Communion prepares us for the final Judgment.

### **Important Teachings**

1. Unity of faith and practice is necessary for proper Communion observance (1 Corinthians 11:17-19).
2. Communion is a ceremony, not a feast (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).
3. Jesus instituted the Communion service (1 Corinthians 11:23).
4. The broken bread symbolizes the broken body of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23-24).
5. The Communion cup symbolizes the shed blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:25).
6. Observing this ordinance helps us to remember the death and suffering of our Lord (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).
7. To participate in the Communion ordinance requires a personal examination of our standing with God (1 Corinthians 11:27-28).
8. Partaking of Communion unworthily brings judgment (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).
9. Properly dealing with sin in our own lives keeps us from condemnation (1 Corinthians 11:31-34).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. What flaws were evident in the way the Corinthians practiced Communion?

Disunity was present in the church. Each brought and ate his own supper, not considering the oneness and sharing that the ordinance represents. The wealthy ate well, but the poor went hungry. The poor brethren were despised. The believers did not prepare themselves by examining their lives to determine their readiness for Communion.

2. How can those with diverse thinking be brought to unity in the church?

Each one should consider how his own attitudes and actions will affect the spiritual well-being of his fellow brethren. Anything that places a stumbling block before a brother should be discontinued. Those on the fringes of church standards and practice should consider the seriousness of not being unified. Diversity of thought on matters not relevant to spiritual life should not create barriers within the brotherhood. Those whose ways of doing things are a bit different from the average should not be ridiculed. We should not reflect negatively against the families who are unable to afford what some others can.

3. Why are the bread and the cup fitting symbols of Jesus' sacrificial death?

The grains are broken and ground into flour for making bread to nourish the eater. The grapes are crushed to produce a beverage for the thirsty. Thus they are apt symbols depicting the way in which Christ's broken body and shed blood bring everlasting life to the believer.

4. How do the emblems symbolize the believers' unity in the church?

The production of bread and grape juice illustrates how unity is brought about in the church. Each grain is blended into one batch of flour. Each grape becomes part of one drink. The unity of the church is enhanced by the blending of individuals with their varied personalities and gifts. All work together for the same cause.

5. In what way is preparedness for Communion similar to preparedness for Jesus' Second Coming?

To be prepared for Communion, each must have the blood of Jesus applied to his own heart, for cleansing from sin. Having done that, each blood-washed saint becomes part of the church that Jesus will come again to claim for His bride. Being properly prepared for Communion, each believer is prepared for Jesus' Second Coming.

6. Why does partaking unworthily make one guilty of the body and blood of the Lord?

The sacrifice of Jesus justifies and cleanses the repentant sinner. But it condemns those who sin willfully and knowingly. Such persons clearly show their refusal to allow God's power to keep them from sin. Jesus died to save man from his sin, not in his sin.

7. What questions should we consider as we examine ourselves before Communion?

Does my life conform to the teachings of Christ? Have I kept the vows I made at baptism? Have I asked God to reveal any spiritual lack in my life? Am I submitting cheerfully and willingly to the standards of the church? Are my relationships with my brothers and sisters peaceful and loving?

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

Jesus died and shed His blood to purify the church so that it would be spotless and holy. The Communion service helps us to remember that. The personal self-examination of our standing with Christ and His church is important so that our observance of the ordinance is for the better and not for the worse. The proper observance of Communion helps to keep our focus on the imminent return of Jesus for all His blood-washed saints.

### **Research Guide**

1. In the Gospels read the accounts of the first Communion: Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; and Luke 22:17-20.
2. Meditate on the crucifixion of Christ, and consider how partaking of Communion is an aid to remembering Christ's suffering for us.
3. Read the chapter titled "The Communion" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.