

Communion

1 Corinthians 10:16

Worship culminates at the Lord's Supper when we sit down to commune with Him. We move from confession to consecration to communion, following the order of worship given to us. We're invited by the call, cleansed from our sins, transformed by the word, fed at the table, and then sent out blessed and equipped for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12).

Communal Communion

God is present everywhere, a help in time of need wherever you find yourself (Ps. 46:1). This doesn't change the fact that He establishes certain means of grace to bless you differently than others. We've been considering the power of worship in the world, the way the Lord blesses us and advances His kingdom through our gathering on the Lord's Day. We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:27-28). No doubt the Lord uses this gathering in countless ways we don't understand, but the main effects are plain: we are forgiven for our sins, we believe and apply the gospel, and we commune with God: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). To eat and drink at the Lord's table is to have fellowship with Him, and Paul also says that to eat and drink at another god's table is have fellowship with demons (1 Cor. 10:20). The same word, *koinonia*, is translated "fellowship" and "communion." God is objectively present in the sacrament, and apparently false gods are at their tables as well. This is true regardless of how we feel, and it highlights the communal nature of communion. It's not simply an individual experience between you and the Lord, one that you might have anywhere else. You can only take communion at the Lord's Supper. God calls all who have faith to be baptized and then come to the table to be nourished and strengthened. Paul says we, though many, are one loaf and one body, so we partake of one loaf (1 Cor. 10:17). Therefore, private communion, where people take the Supper purposefully away from the church, is an oxymoron. Jesus tells us to do this together, and it's not less special because we do it weekly. You want to get used to being in close fellowship with the Lord, feeding at His table.

Discerning the Body

The Corinthian church had divisions that became obvious at the Lord's Supper as some went hungry and others were drunk. The apostle asks rhetorically, "Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 10:20-21). Jesus Himself told Paul how to administer the sacrament, and his warning to the church is not to eat and drink in an unworthy manner and thus be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord; a man should therefore examine himself and eat the bread and drink the cup (1 Cor. 10:27-28). We know how the Corinthians were failing to examine themselves and discern the body. They were eating and drinking with no regard to Christ's death nor His presence among His people. Discerning the body requires these two things: knowing that we are doing this in remembrance of Christ and treating people as members of the body with us. Sometimes individual Christians will judge themselves "unworthy" because of some sin in their life and therefore suspend themselves from the Supper, but this isn't what the apostle means and isn't our prerogative as individuals anyway. Of course we aren't worthy to come, but Jesus died for His people and wants you to come hungry and in need of grace and strength. We fence the table not because people can taint the sacrament, but because it can negatively impact them (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30). We discern the body by recognizing and honoring our brothers and sisters, both old and young, those who have confessed their faith by baptism (cf. Mk. 16:16). Communion is not like carnival ride you have to be so tall

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to ride on or so advanced in your thinking to participate. Ironically, many who exclude young believers from the table are failing to discern the body. At Passover, the whole covenant family ate the sacrificial lamb (Ex. 12:26-27). We encourage parents to let the elders know when a baptized child is eating solid food and knows we are taking communion so we can bring him to the table. This really is a concern of the church that has the power of the keys (Matt. 16:19). In excommunication, someone is ex-communed, excluded from communion. The goal is not exclusion, but honest faith in Christ, and communion is the boundary marker.

The Lord's Memorial

The phrase we translate “Do this in remembrance of me” doesn’t have the genitive “of.” It’s really “Do this as my memorial” or “as my remembrance” (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25). In covenant signs, God sees the sign and remembers (cf. Gen. 9:15). He gives His name Yahweh as “My memorial to all generations” (Ex. 3:15). We use His name to remind Him of His covenant promises to be and act as our God. We know that He never forgets, but we forget that He never forgets, and He condescends and delights to love us as His creatures. Just as He saw the blood of the Passover lamb on the lintel and door posts of Israelite homes, so He sees this bread and wine (Ex. 12:13). We are saying, “God, receive and commune and with us through Your Son Jesus who died for us! Nourish and bless us, filling our hearts with joy until we go be with You in heaven or enter into the resurrection first.” He remembers Jesus and what He did for you.

Bread & Wine

Rites matter, and we see Paul doing what Christ told him to (1 Cor. 11:23-26; Lk. 22:19-20). The old covenant sacrifices had different actions for the body and the blood, and we’re told to take bread and wine separately. We cheerfully recognize that we’re under the authority of the Lord and His Scriptures, and want to be diligent to do what He instructed. Communion isn’t a sacrifice but represents the complete and final sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:10). His body was offered on the cross and His blood atoned for our sins. We give thanks for and with the eucharist. God gives bread to strengthen us and wine to gladden our hearts (Ps. 104:15). We ask for daily bread, and the Lord’s Supper demonstrates His provision. We know how dangerous alcohol is for those who abuse it, but the Spirit teaches us self-control (Gal. 5:23). We offer grape juice for those with dietary issues but note that Jesus didn’t. We want to come to His table and have Him to teach us how to drink. The bread and wine don’t their substances, but they do change us. Communion calls those with faith to be baptized and calls the baptized out of sin and into the joy of the Lord.

Blessing

Communion does not automatically, *ex opere operato*, “from the work working”, bless us. The only way to receive God’s grace at any time or place is by faith. But His blessing is truly offered to us in communion (1 Cor. 10:16). At the end of the Last Supper, the disciples sang a hymn (Matt. 26:30). We finish our service singing and receive the benediction, the spoken blessing, as we leave. The last thing Jesus does before ascending is lift up His hands and bless the disciples (Lk. 24:50). The minister stands as His representative and blesses you. Be assured of His gracious covenant and precious promises upon you now and forever.