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1 Corinthians 11

“Communion”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

It’s been noted throughout this series in 1 Corinthians that the church had many problems as well as many unanswered questions. The meaning and practice of Communion can also be added to the list of dysfunctional life and practice. They were completely mishandling the way Communion (the Lord’s Supper) should be practiced; and to say that they *mishandled* things would be charitable, because it was so bad that Paul opens this section of his letter by saying: “...*I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.*” (1 Corinthians 11:17)

In order for us to understand what they were doing wrong requires an understanding of the purpose and practice of Communion. For some people today, the subject of Communion is more or less a complete mystery, so they need to be informed. For others, they may be familiar with Communion but they aren’t quite sure what to make of the cracker and juice! These people need to be equipped. Others might take the stance that they’ve been receiving Communion since they were ten years old, so what’s the big deal? It’s these folks who need to be exhorted.¹ And finally, there are some who know what Communion is and how it works but they’ve lost its real meaning, so the whole thing is nothing more than a routine religious practice.

Jesus committed only two ordinances² to the church: Water Baptism and Communion. To understand Communion you need to go back about 3,400 years to the time of Moses in 1400 BC. God had demonstrated his power through a series of ten plagues against the Egyptians because Pharaoh was too

¹ <http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/word,exhorted> – Incited by words to good deeds; animated to a laudable course of conduct; advised.

² An ordinance is something prescribed by Jesus and practiced by the Church.

<http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/word,ordinance> 1. A rule established by authority; a permanent rule of action. An ordinance may be a law or statute of sovereign power. In this sense it is often used in the Scriptures. (Exodus 15, Numbers 10 and Ezra 3) It may also signify a decree, edict or rescript, and the word has sometimes been applied to the statutes of Parliament, but these are usually called acts or laws. In the United States, it is never applied to the acts of Congress, or of a state legislature. 4. Established rite or ceremony. (Hebrews 9) In this sense, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are denominated ordinances.

stubborn to let the Israelite slaves go free. Finally, fatigued from wrestling against God, Pharaoh and the Egyptians agree to let the Israelites go. In fact, they were so eager to get rid of the Israelites that we're told in Exodus 12 that God had made the Egyptians "*favorably disposed*" to the Jews, with the result being the Egyptians gladly gave them articles of gold and silver, in addition to clothing for the journey. (Exodus 12:36) It also says in Exodus 12 that because the Jews were leaving so quickly, they didn't have time to add yeast to the day's supply of dough.³ Thus, the Jews celebrate the exodus from Egypt as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is an annual reminder of the time when God miraculously delivered them from 400 years of slavery in Egypt.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread includes the Passover Meal, and it was the Passover Meal that Jesus shared with his disciples when he took the unleavened bread and the cup of grape juice and said: "*This is my body given for you,*" and "*[t]his cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*" (Luke 22:19–20) Within 24-hours of that *Last Supper*, Jesus would be crucified on a cross for the sins of the world. And, having taken the elements of the Unleavened Bread and the juice during the Passover Meal, Jesus essentially said: "Let these elements be a perpetual reminder of my sacrifice for your sins on the cross, for I offer a greater deliverance than the deliverance from slavery in Egypt; I offer deliverance from the slavery to sin!" The bread was a symbol of his body and his life without sin that would be broken/crucified for the world. The juice was a symbol of his blood that was shed on the cross.

In this study we'll learn that it's not that Jesus changed the meaning of Passover; he just expanded it. Both the Passover and the cross demonstrate the love of God, deliverance, a lamb was slain, and freedom from bondage. The Passover angel of death passed over those marked by the blood, which is what the cross means to Christians who've been marked by his blood – they've passed from death to life! Jesus said, "*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.*" (John 5:24–25)

It's Not A "Rite Of Passage" – It's A "Rite Of Participation"

1. Many people are familiar with Confirmation, which is a part of the tradition of a lot of denominations, and the "rite of passage" attitude toward Communion.
2. Communion is really a rite of participation for all who would acknowledge the crucifixion, resurrection and the Second Coming of Christ.
3. Children in the older elementary grades learn about Communion at their level at Cornerstone Chapel.
4. Teachings like this one are given to equip parents so they'll be prepared to instruct their children, which will help them make a decision about when their children should participate.

³ "*So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing.*" (Exodus 12:34)

What About Unbelievers?

5. There is no mention of unbelievers in Paul's letter; the only prohibition is for believers taking Communion in an "*unworthy manner*." (**1 Corinthians 11:27**)
6. An unbeliever participating in Communion in ignorance is better than a believer receiving it with indifference.
7. The Scripture supports the idea that it's okay for both sinner and saint partake as they feel led.
8. And, if God's power is present to heal (implied in **1 Corinthians 11:30**), then it must also be present to save; and maybe participating will be what opens the heart of an unbeliever when they receive the elements.

Sacred Day? – Certain Frequency?

9. There is no Scriptural instruction about the day or the frequency.
10. Communion was originally a part of Agape Feasts when they would break bread together, not a typical Sunday morning "worship service."
11. Some traditions practice Communion every week, but Jesus never prescribed how often to practice it; and Paul simply said, "*whenever*" you do this in **1 Corinthians 11:26**.

"I Am Too Unworthy To Partake"

12. Some people mistakenly read the part about partaking in an "*unworthy manner*" and think that this has to do with their personal condition, so they don't participate because they feel unworthy, but the verse is really addressing a corporate problem, not an individual problem.
13. The great Scottish preacher of the 19th century, Robert Murray McCheyne, when he was serving Communion to a young lady, who, with tear-filled eyes and bowed head, refused the elements, said with a voice of compassion: "Take it, lassie. It's for sinners."

The Catholic Doctrine Of Transubstantiation

14. Catholic doctrine teaches that the elements are not symbolic, but that they actually become the body and blood of Jesus!⁴

⁴ <http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/word/transubstantiation> – Change of substance. In the Romish theology, the supposed conversion of the bread and wine in the Eucharist, into the body and blood of Christ.

15. They believe that during the Mass, a molecular change occurs with the wafer and the wine, so that when you ingest the elements you're actually ingesting the body and the blood of Jesus.
16. The Catholic misinterpretation is taken from [John 6:53–55](#).
 - a. *“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.’”*
 - b. In [John 6:63](#) we read the confirmation that Jesus was speaking in spiritual terms, and what he was referring to was an all-consuming relationship with him.
 - c. Jesus often used metaphorical language such as: *“I am the gate for the sheep”* ([John 10:7](#)); *“I am the living bread”* ([John 6:51](#)); and *“I am the true vine.”* ([John 15:1](#))

What Is Communion Really About?

17. Communion is really about our relationship with each other and our relationship with Christ, both of which are what the Corinthian church was guilty of ignoring. ([1 Corinthians 11:18–22](#))
18. There is a spiritual connection and unity of the Spirit that ties us all together through Communion. ([1 Corinthians 11:16–17](#))
19. The Corinthian Christians were selfish, inconsiderate, eating without consideration for others, not to mention the fact that they were getting drunk, all of which run counter to a proper appreciation and consideration of those included in the body of Christ. ([1 Corinthians 11:29](#))
20. Communion is about proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes, and includes being: A reflection of Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice; a celebration of his victory over sin and death; and the anticipation of Jesus’ return.
21. Communion is about examining ourselves so we’ll confess sin and get our hearts right with God.
 - a. [Revelation 1:5–6](#) – *“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [1 Corinthians 11:17–34](#) and [Luke 22:14–20](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Is there an event in the life of the church today that resembles the love feasts in the Corinthian church?

4. Allow the people in your group to briefly share their Communion “rite of passage” stories.
5. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s statement regarding who should participate in Communion: An unbeliever participating in Communion in ignorance is better than a believer receiving it with indifference.
6. Allow the people in your group to talk about their experiences regarding the frequency of Communion, as well as the importance that may have been placed on observing a *Sacred Day*. ([1 Corinthians 11:26](#))
7. Spend time talking about the feeling many have about being unworthy to participate in Communion.
 - a. Remind the people in the group that the account of Robert Murray McCheyne and the young woman who refused the elements is important for them to remember: “Take it, lassie. It’s for sinners.”
8. Read and discuss [John 6:53–55](#) concerning the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.
 - a. Emphasize the fact that Jesus was speaking metaphorically in spiritual terms. ([John 6:63](#))
9. Read and discuss [1 Corinthians 11:18–22](#).
 - a. Communion is really about our relationship with each other.
 - b. Communion is really about our relationship with the Lord.
10. Spend time talking about Communion being about the proclamation of the Lord’s death until he comes, in addition to being a reflection of Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice, a celebration of his victory over sin and death, and the anticipation of Jesus’ return.
11. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: thank the Lord for the instruction the Bible gives us concerning this ordinance of the church; ask the Holy Spirit to help them affirm the truth about Communion in their hearts and minds; rejoice that Communion is a regular part of the life of the church that everyone would remember the wonderful plan of salvation and the finished work of Jesus; praise the Lord that all who believe have passed from death to life! (select someone to read this Scripture) [Revelation 1:5–6](#) – *“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”*