

COMMUNION - THAT CONTROVERSIAL EVENT

Taking communion is the opportunity to participate in probably the most controversial event in Christianity. Wars have been fought over it, people have been tortured, even murdered because of their beliefs concerning communion. Theologian Geoffrey Bromiley states, *Perhaps one of the keenest reminders of our Christian fallibility is that of the Lord's Supper, instituted as a simple act promoting fellowship, has become the subject of complicated debate and blatant division.*

Why has there been so much controversy? Debate has centered primarily on the elements. Some defend transubstantiation, the bread and the wine are changed into the very body and blood of Christ. Others hold to consubstantiation, the bread and the wine become the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ while keeping the appearance of bread and wine. We hold to the memorial position, the bread and wine signify Christ's redemptive work received by faith yet acknowledging the presence of Christ in our midst.

Let me quote some noteworthy comments concerning communion. In the 2nd century, in the *Didache*, it was stated, *On the Lord's own day come together and break bread and give thanks...Whoever is holy, let him come; whoever is not, let him repent.* Ireaneus wrote, *The partakers now engage in a spiritual service and enter by communion into the presence of God while the elements remain as they were...The souls of believers are nourished because God superintends the service and by His grace feeds and blesses His own.* In the 3rd century, Augustine declared, *What is seen is the bread and the cup which the eyes renounce; but what faith demands is that the bread is the body of Christ and the cup is His blood.*

Controversy has not been only between Protestants and Catholics. The first major split in Reformation Protestantism came because of differing views on communion. Martin Luther held to consubstantiation while Zwingli held to the memorial view. He declared that *This is My body*, means *This represents My body*.

When we participate in communion, let's be reminded that communion was instituted by our Lord - it is not an option or a personal opinion. Jesus Christ is the host at His table - we are the guests. It has purpose - it pictures what should be the unity of the Body of Christ, an expression of fellowship with God and each other through Jesus Christ. Therefore, may communion be a time of sweet fellowship with our Lord and with each other. There is no place for controversy at the Lord's Table.

A COMMUNION SERVICE SCHEDULE FOR CONSIDERATION

A. Preparing for Communion

1. Opening comments

- a. Communion was instituted by our Lord - it is not an option or luxury.
- b. Jesus Christ is host at His own table- we are his guests.
- c. It is not a useless ceremony - it has purpose.

2. Purposes for Communion

- a. Fellowship, 1 Corinthians 10:16 - 17, ***The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.***

- 1) It pictures the unity of the Body of Christ - an expression of fellowship, with God and each other through Christ.
- 2) Since Christians are reconciled to God, we can and must be reconciled to each other.

- b. Remembrance, 1 Corinthians 11:24 - 25, ***and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."***

- 1) What He did: He died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay the penalty for our sins and to provide a place in Heaven for us.
- 2) Who He is: the infinite God - Man
- 3) It was instituted in a Passover setting.
 - a) As the Passover reenacts the meal on the eve of redemption out of Egypt, so the Lord's Supper reenacts the meal on the eve of liberation from sin and death.
 - b) The Passover lamb is the Lamb of God.
- 4) It emphasizes our need to receive nourishment from the Lord - He is our means of spiritual growth.

- c. Proclamation, 1 Cor. 11:26, *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*
- 1) It looks to the past.
 - a) It is a declaration of the Gospel.
 - b) Augustine called it a *visible word* of substitutionary atonement, a feast of liberation.
 - 2) It looks to the future.
 - a) It is a reminder of our certain hope.
 - b) Our fellowship will be perfect when Christ returns.
 - 3) Geoffrey Bromiley, *He has given us this table, insignificant and even pointless in the eyes of secular man, but eloquent to believers as a sign of things past and ...things to come.*
- d. Self-examination, 1 Cor. 11:27 - 34, *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.*
- 1) Faith - have I placed my faith in Christ alone for eternal life? If not, do so now.
 - 2) Motivation - am I at this table trying to gain favor with God instead of thanking Him for the full favor I have in Christ? If so, release yourself to His grace.
 - 3) Confession - am I carrying unconfessed sins? If you are, lay them at the cross.
 - 4) Irish theologian D.J. Templeton, *As we ponder the mystery of what Christ did for us on the cross, being silent allows us to realize our finiteness before the Almighty.*
 - 5) Introduce Silent Prayer

B. Participating in Communion

1. Sharing the Bread

- a. Introductory comments
 - 1) In the bread we see Christ as the Bread come down from heaven, the perfect God-Man.
 - 2) Pray and ask congregation to hold element until all partake together.
- b. Distribute trays and elders distribute bread.
 - 1) Read 1 Corinthians 11:24, *and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.*
 - 2) Partake together, *Jesus said, Do this in remembrance of Me.*

2. Sharing the Cup

- a. Introductory comments
 - 1) In the cup we see Christ as the Lamb of God who came as the God-Man to die for our sins.
 - 2) Pray and ask congregation to hold element until all partake together.
- b. Distribute trays and elders distribute cup.
 - 1) Read 1 Corinthians 11:25, *In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.*
 - 2) Partake together, *Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me."*

3. The Dismissal

- a. Hymn
- b. Prayer
- c. Postlude