

Why Communion?

A Welcome Invitation to Share the Lord's Supper with Us.

*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying,
"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."
In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."
Luke 22:19-20 NIV*

A. WHAT IS COMMUNION?

Communion is a memorial act of worship which Jesus gave His followers. It involves the sharing of bread (body) and wine (blood) which remind us of His redeeming sacrifice for us on the cross. It is one of two ordinances or sacraments instituted by Christ to be observed by His church until He returns, baptism being the other. As ordinance, we obey Christ when He said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19), and as sacrament, we receive and enjoy gracious spiritual blessing in union with Christ and each other (John 6:35; 1 Corinthians 10:15-22). It is the Lord's table, and He invites us for a close encounter with Him.

B. WHAT DOES COMMUNION SIGNIFY?

Since the Bible is our source of instruction on communion, here are the central New Testament texts: **Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; John 6:35; Acts 2:41-47; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:15-17; 21-22; and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.** Our understanding and practice comes from these passages.

The simplest view is that Jesus intended the communion elements of the bread and cup to be symbolic reminders representing His body and blood. In sharing communion, our hearts are led back to His redeeming sacrifice for us on the cross. We renew our faith with thanksgiving. Our hearts are led forward to the blessed hope of His return. And in the communing moment in the presence of our resurrected Savior, our hearts enjoy the personal, intimate embrace of His purifying love and empowering grace.

C. WHO MAY SHARE COMMUNION?

We practice open communion in our church. Christ gave communion to His disciples as a perpetual reminder of His saving death, life and return. It involves both intimate personal worship and proclamation of the truth of the gospel. It was designed by the Lord to unify, not divide, His church. Any Christian who desires to draw near to Jesus with us, whether a member or not and regardless of denominational background, is welcome to participate with us in communing with Jesus.

However, we are all held accountable in the holy presence of Jesus, to share the elements humbly, properly discerning and reverently embracing the eternal truths symbolized in the elements of the bread and cup (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Those still seeking the truth of Christ's gospel are welcome to understand that saving faith is pictured in the Lord's supper, involving the personal reception of the provision which God has made in Christ for the forgiveness of sin (John 3:16).

D. HOW SHOULD COMMUNION BE SHARED?

Matthew, Mark and Luke all describe Christ's institution of communion (see Luke's words at the top of this monograph, and the primary references under "B" above). Paul, having received instruction on communion from the Lord, gives the fullest commentary on how we are to observe it (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). He

stresses the content, rather than the form, rebuking a divided church for missing the essential spiritual preparation. It is about Jesus, not ritual or selfishness. Remember Jesus with a discerning heart.

While churches and denominations have often divided on the form and ritualistic practice of communion, our church is a wonderful blend of God's people from many traditions and practices. We stress as primary the substance of authentic encounter with Jesus Christ through communion as declared in the Word of God. However, we are open and flexible in drawing from the broad range of traditional forms to enrich our experience of communion with Christ. Christ's will is that communion unifies us (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). This can happen when we put our eyes on Jesus, rather than on any particular form.

E. WHEN SHOULD A CHRISTIAN TAKE COMMUNION?

Jesus simply stated, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). Paul's instructions from the Lord is this: "For whenever (KJV "as often as") you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually—the practice of different churches varies. Here, we see biblical support for the early church practice of "breaking bread" on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), although we are not legalistic on this matter. We share communion as a foundational element of our worship, a point of personal and corporate accountability to the heart of Jesus. And we encourage communion to be shared "as often as" it can be done meaningfully and reverently (at home, on retreats, during Holy Week, etc.)

F. WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN SHARE THE LORD'S SUPPER?

The value of sharing communion together as Christians are many.

1. For **OBEDIENCE**. Jesus ordained our observance of the bread and cup—"Do this . . ." (Luke 22:19). Just as we submit to Christ's will in baptism, so we gladly accept His invitation to dine with Him.
2. For **REMEMBERING**. Jesus tells us to ". . . do this . . . in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24, 25). We remember the incarnation, the redemptive sacrifice, and triumphant resurrection of God's Son.
3. For **GIVING THANKS**. The term "eucharist" comes from the Greek word for "giving thanks" (Luke 22:17, 19; Luke 24:30-32; 1 Cor. 11:24). We share thanksgiving for His love and forgiveness.
4. For **ACCOUNTABILITY**. Paul says, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:27-32). A heart that discerns the body and blood of Christ is essential.
5. For **TESTIMONY**. Paul says, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). We proclaim our faith to one another and the world.
6. For **HOPE**. As we look back to Calvary with gratitude, we look forward to Christ's second coming, when we will join with Him in eternal communion (Matthew 26:29; 1 Cor. 11:26).
7. For **UNITY** and **PURITY**. Paul notes that ". . . we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:15-22). Communion unifies Christians, and purifies our relationships.

To approach the Lord's table at His invitation is to engage and encounter the resurrected Lord Jesus. It is His open door, through the torn veil, into the Holy of Holies for intimate, personal, sustained encounter with the Lover of your soul. Come eagerly, often and stay a while.