

Come to the Table

I. Introduction

- A. Have you ever visited a church where you were a bit confused by communion?
1. Maybe they held bread/cup until after a prayer, then ate/drank together
 - a. Maybe they had one cup? Maybe it was so choreographed it distracted?
 - b. One friend visited church that dipped the bread into cup (*wine or juice*)
 2. John Mark Hicks tells of a visitor who was CONFUSED by communion
 - a. He'd never been to church, so he assumed that communion was a snack.
 - b. He took whole piece of bread; casually drank several cups of juice!
 - c. Guy serving was aghast! So was the guest (*served such a pitiful snack*)
- B. Communion can be confusing; think about what we call it— “**Lord’s Supper**”
1. What would you assume would happen if you hear the word “*supper*?”
 - a. “*Last Supper*” was a meal; the Greek word means “*evening meal*”
 - b. Yet, we have a pinch-n-sip and call it a supper! *That’s confusing*
 2. We also call it “**Communion**” which implies sharing or commonality.
 - a. Yet communion is most often a private meditation without sharing
 - b. Some object to any sharing (songs, readings, devotional thoughts)
 3. Communion can be confusing; we need to make sure it’s not confusing
 - a. There’s a tendency in churches like us that do communion every week
 - 1) Tend to rush thru it; we know what’s coming, so hit cruise control
 - 2) Churches may be tempted to streamline it (*no table talk, short prayer*)
 - b. Hicks suggests that a guest mistaking communion for a snack—problem
That an unchurched person could misinterpret the communion bread and juice for a snack says more about the divorce of the supper from the preached word than it does about the naiveté of the unchurched
 - 1) We can fail to make communion what it is—a proclamation of cross
 - 2) We must connect Supper and the Cross so all will see it’s meaning
- C. We do communion every week; occasionally (*today*) we take a whole service
1. We’re going to look at communion as sacrifice (from 1 **Corinthians 10-11**)
 2. This **brief video** serves as an introduction... it is also a bridge to our giving
 3. Think about Jesus’ sacrifice and what it is worth. (*Worthy is the Lamb*)

II. The Lord's Supper and Christ's Sacrifice

- A. We don't stress sacrifice all that much; we may stress the language, but not idea
1. We may think of getting up early to come to church as a sacrifice
 - a. Many first think of sacrifice in terms of giving (*we like Pharisees or widow*)
 - b. Church asks us to sacrifice time or talent (*have we mentioned small groups*)
 - c. Sometimes we sing about sacrifice ("We bring the sacrifice of praise...")
 2. But in the OT, sacrifice was the central image of worship (**Lev 17:11**)
 - a. The innocent life of a sacrificial animal redeemed or paid for one's sin
 - 1) The worship of Tabernacle/Temple was seeped in blood (**Heb 9:22**)
 - 2) For there to be worship in the Old Covenant, something had to bleed
 - b. The sin-debt that was owed to God was too great for humans to pay
 - c. But in the grace at the center of Law, God accepted the life of a sacrifice
 3. As foreign as it may seem, we must forget this image of sacrifice
 - a. Those OT sacrifices were the shadow of the reality we enjoy (**Heb 10:1**)
 - b. We don't offer the blood of lambs; Jesus is the Lamb (**Heb 9: 14**, NLT)
 - c. At the center of NT worship is the image of the blood of the Lamb
 - 1) At baptism, we are washed in the blood of the Lamb (**Rev 7:14**)
 - 2) In communion, Jesus says, "*This is my body*" and "*this is my blood.*"
 4. What communion is about is a representation of the sacrifice of Jesus.
 - a. There is no power in bread/ juice, but there's power in blood of Lamb
 - b. Each week, we pause together and come to the sacrifice of the cross
- B. Notice 5 ways that Jesus sacrifice is stressed in communion in **1 Cor 10-11**)
1. **First**, in communion we **REMEMBER** His sacrifice (**1 Cor 11:24-25**)
 - a. Paul says we eat-n-drink "*in remembrance.*" Communion is a memorial.
 - 1) We call a funeral "a memorial." We sometimes build memorials.
 - 2) But these are limited by time and space (must go to Washington DC)
 - b. Communion is a memorial; in communion we remember the cross
 - 1) Is there really a danger we'll forget Jesus or His sacrifice? *Surely not*
 - 2) Is a danger we'll forget its centrality & get sidetracked on other things
 - c. So each week we come back to the cross and we remember the sacrifice

2. **Second**, at Supper we **PARTICIPATE** in His sacrifice (**1 Cor 10:16b**)
 - a. We call the Supper “*Holy Communion*” because we share in Christ
 - b. Paul saw communion as communion or participation with Christ here
 - 1) The word is *κοινωνία*. Something we share together (*more later*)
 - 2) There’s some sense in which we come to share in Christ’s experience
 - c. Explaining exactly how God works in communion is bone of contention
 - 1) Catholic theology is transubstantiation, the body/blood changes
 - 2) Luther/Calvin/Zwilingli got wrapped-around-axle in how to disagree
 - d. But there is some sense in which God acts in communion (as in baptism)
 - e. So as we eat, we in some way participate in the sacrifice of the cross.
3. **Third**, we **PROCLAIM** His sacrifice until He comes again (**1 Cor 11:26**).
 - a. This is the point that we made earlier—communion as participation
 - 1) Jesus’ death took place in the past, but we proclaim it in the present
 - 2) As we eat it in the present, we proclaim Christ’s coming in future
 - b. Sometimes we treat communion as a reenactment of the Last Supper
 - 1) Like Civil War reenactments, the point is to be historically accurate
 - 2) You can reenact battle & miss the point of War (*Gettysburg Address*)
We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.
 - 3) We can reenact Last Supper and not proclaim the message of cross!
 - c. Part of the point of communion is to point people to the cross!
4. **Fourth**, the Supper **UNIFIES** us under the sacrifice of cross (**1 Cor 10:17**)
 - a. There was symbolism in a common table and a common broken loaf
 - b. Church in Zhitomir uses one cup to theologically stress this unity
 - 1) Doesn’t work historically; Passover had many cups (*extra for Elijah*)
 - 2) Theologically, the one cup does work; Paul points to common loaf
 - c. Communion is never like Sonic where we eat in privacy of our car
 - 1) You can buy portable communion—take Supper on vacation
 - 2) That misses the whole point; communion proclaims solidarity
 - d. Paul saw in Lord’s Supper a time to “*come together*” (**1 Cor. 11:20**)

5. **Fifth**, in Supper we **GIVE THANKS** for His sacrifice (**1 Cor 10:16a**)
 - a. The cup we bless is a cup of thanksgiving or “*blessing*” (ESV)
 - 1) The word here is εὐλογία, from which we get the word “*eulogy*”
 - 2) It is “*praise*” in “*Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks*” (**Rev 7:14**)
 - b. Through this cup, this communion, that we bless, praise, thank God
 - c. R.T. France suggests that it is God who Jesus blesses through the cup
 - 1) By the way, when Jesus blessed bread, he uses “εὐλογέω” (*eulogy*)
 - 2) When he gives thanks for the cup, he uses “εὐχαριστέω” (*Eucharist*)
 - d. Communion or Lord’s Supper is also Eucharist, we give thanks to God
- C. So now we come to that time to chare in the Supper, Communion, Eucharist
 1. Let’s keep these five points in mind as we eat this communion together

a. We are to remember cross	d. We show unity as family under cross
b. We participate in the cross	e. We give thanks for grace of cross
c. We proclaim truth of cross	
 2. I’ll leave these 5 points up—reflect on them as you commune (**prayer**)

III. Conclusion

- A. Few doctrines have caused more controversy or division than communion
 1. Luther, Calvin and Zwingli would have united except view of communion
 - a. Frontier churches requires chips to prove membership before communion
 - b. Churches have split over its frequency and the number of cups used
 - c. Welch’s Grape Juice began over it (*Welch wanted unfermented wine!*)
 2. The irony of division over communion should strike us... and humble us
 - a. The point of communion is not about us, but Him—Jesus paid it all
 - b. Communion points to the central fact that without cross, we are LOST
 - c. Without the cross we still remain lost sinners. Michael Green says—
We never outgrow the fact that we are sinners still, totally dependent each day on the grace of God to the underserving. We do not come to offer; in the first place we come to receive. The very nature of a supper declares this. We are the hungry, coming to be fed. We are the undeserving, welcomed freely at the Lord’s Table
- B. The song we sing should be more jarring to us... Can he still feel the nails?
- C. Are you living under the cross? Will you begin doing so today?