

## Purpose of Worship and Communion 01-29-17

Scriptures reveal a very particular purpose of the church. That list includes equipping saints for service, organizing itself according to the pattern, membership discipline, doctrinal purity and a sense of familial affection. But when the church was first opened in Acts 2, the very first action undertaken by the church was the act of worship:

*Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

The largest part of scripture dedicated to teach on worship is I Corinthians 11-16. We might break down that passages in this manner:

- 11:1-16 – question on head covering
- 11:17-34 – problems on communion
- 12:1-31 – the variety of gifts
- 13:1-13 – what remains when gifts cease
- 14:1-40 – behavior in the assembly
- 16:1-4 – the collection

There is a statement that establishes that one part in particular is the heart of worship: *Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper (11:20)*. Paul is making a negative point; the purpose of coming together (as a church, vs. 18) **IS** to eat the Lord's Supper. While it is not the ONLY reason, it might be accurate to say that communion is at the heart of the worship of the church.

There are three important characteristics about communion: The WHO, the WHAT and the WHEN. These three things cannot be altered.

### **The WHAT of Communion: The "Emblems" Which Point to the Day of Jesus Death**

The word emblem is used to describe something that embodies something else. A military unit has an emblem (maybe a badge or a banner) that embodies that unit. More than a representation, it is something that specifically and entirely represents that thing. In Matthew 26:26-28, Jesus gave us two emblems that represent His place in communion: the Passover unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. Consider how well these things (taken from the Passover meal) represent Jesus. We are told several times that leaven is a metaphor for sin (1 Cor. 5:6, etc). We are told that Jesus was without sin while on earth (Heb. 4:15, etc). What better symbol of the body which died to take our sins that bread that is unleavened? We might consider too that the cup Jesus gave us was the fruit of the vine; no translation ever says it was wine. Wine is fermented juice (fruit of the vine), and fermentation is the same process as leavening; fruit of the vine is unleavened juice.

There is a specific order in which we take these things. The bread and then the fruit of the vine. This also represents how we are brought before God to become his own; we first die to sin, and then in baptism we are born again into the new covenant. The bread is His body, which died for us and through which we died to the world, and the cup is the new covenant into which we enter when we arise from the water of baptism.

*Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into*

*death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

### **The WHEN of Communion: The First Day Which Points to the Day of Jesus Resurrection**

Jesus said when He gave us the Lord's Supper that it would be a regular occurrence ("*as often as you eat of it*"). At first, one might think we are left to create our own determination as to when that ought to be. However, we are given a very clear indication of the day and regularity of the observation in Acts 20:7:

*Acts 20:7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.*

In context, Paul was returning to Jerusalem. According to Acts 20:16, he was rushing to get back before the feast of Pentecost. Acts 20:7 takes place AFTER the feast of unleavened bread, indicating that Paul only had 40 days to get back to Jerusalem when he arrived in Troas in Acts 20:6.

If communion can occur on ANY OTHER DAY other than Sunday, why did Paul wait until Sunday to meet with the brethren and to take communion? He was an apostle; why did he not call the brethren in Troas together to fit his extremely tight schedule? He waited a full week, and there is only one conclusion that could be made: the first day of the week is the ONLY day we can take communion.

Of course, it makes sense that the first day of the week would be the day we partake of communion. If it was only once a year, then could we really esteem properly the brethren and the body of Christ? Saturday does not point to Christ, but the Sabbath of the Old Testament. Yet Sunday is the first day of creation, the day light was created (Genesis 1:3). In the spiritual parallel of John 1, we are reminded that Jesus is the light of the world (John 1:5-9). Thus, in the days of creation, the first day is the day of the Light; this is why John calls it "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10.

### **The WHO of Communion: The Brethren, Which Points to the Day of Jesus' Return**

In Paul's teaching on communion in 1 Corinthians 11:27-33, he places particular importance on the idea of discerning the body. He states that if we fail to discern the Lord's body, we are bringing judgment on ourselves. The body here is not Jesus' physical body, but revealed both before and after this to refer to the church. In other words, communion is mainly about the church.

We are told that in communion we are reminding each other of the great hope we all possess.

*Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Communion is a way that we remind each other that we all believe we are going to heaven. It is important to understand that this is the heart of communion; the common union of believers, which is our inheritance. This makes us understand some important things about communion:

1. We CANNOT partake of communion alone
2. We CANNOT partake of communion with those we believe are NOT going to heaven

Forsaking the assembly, at the heart of which is the communion with the Saints, is forsaking our very inheritance. This is why the Hebrew writer goes on to remind us how terrible it is to fail this obligation in Hebrews 10:26-29.

### **CONCLUSION:**

There are three aspects of communion that are absolute. We might change our times of observance on Sunday, or have two offerings of communion to the same body, or place the communion at the beginning or the end of services. But we are not allowed to change the emblems, the day or the people with whom we partake of it.

Communion points to three important days: the day of His death, when He took away our sin; the day of His resurrection, where He became our Lord and King, and the day of His return, when we receive our eternal reward.

*Hebrews 9:28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.*