

Worship in Communion 1 Corinthians 11:18-34

Communion is about so much more than just bread and wine (or juice as the case may be!) It's a gift from God the Father to help us remember His Son's sacrifice in the past and celebrate His return in the future. It's a gift He takes incredibly seriously... life and death seriously. So discover how to celebrate communion in a way that pleases rather than angers God.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 11

I grew up in a Bible church like this one – in church before I could walk

- remember when I was young being confused by one thing we did: communion
- everything else we did made sense: sing... pray... pastor would teach us the Bible
- but then once a month the deacons would pass out stale crackers and little cups of juice
 - o at that point in the morning: starving! just want lunch, not a cracker and a thimble
 - o especially after pastor reads verse about this being Jesus' body and blood! Gross!
 - o but you couldn't say 'no' – ate cracker, drank juice, but never enough to wash cracker down – always wanted more of that juice
 - o I was always left wondering what that was all about
- what I did understand at an early age: all my High-Church friends got wine!
 - o I'm getting cheated! My parents clearly chose the wrong denomination!

Needless to say, as a child I missed the point of communion! I didn't understand it.

And that would be okay... if it weren't for our passage this morning

- **Read 11:27**
 - o "in an unworthy manner..." guilty of the body and blood of Jesus!! Serious!
- But it gets worse... **Read v28-30**
 - o Doing the Lord's supper wrong brings God's judgment: weakness, sickness, "sleep"
 - o God was putting believers to death because they took communion in an unworthy way!
- First time I studied this passage – scared me!
 - o realized that God takes this ritual I didn't really understand VERY SERIOUSLY!
 - o like life and death serious!
- That should be terrifying! Paul wants to put the fear of God into us!
 - o Wants us to see how incredibly important communion is to God

**So this morning we're learn the meaning and significance of the Lord's Supper
And most importantly, we're going to learn how to celebrate it in a WORTHY manner**

- in a way that brings glory to God and not judgment to us!

So let's begin with the most fundamental question... what does communion mean?

What Communion Means

- We tend to get hung up on practical matters: how often; wine or juice
- But what matters most to God is that we understand what communion is

There's 3 main views within Christianity on what communion means...

1. Re-sacrifice view – Roman Catholic view

- Now not all Catholics believe this, but it is the official view of Roman Catholicism
- Communion = Lord's Supper = Eucharist – celebrated at Mass
- In the Mass a miracle occurs: bread & wine actually transformed into body & blood
 - o called "Transubstantiation"
- We don't agree, but that's a relatively minor disagreement
- What we strongly disagree with: the way bread & wine become body & blood is through a re-sacrifice of Jesus.
 - o Jesus is re-sacrificed at every Mass – Pope Pius IV
 - o Jesus re-sacrificed to pay for the sins you've committed since last Mass
- We strongly disagree! Jesus died once to pay for all sin, past, present, and future
 - o **Heb 10:12,14**
 - o No other sacrifice will ever be required

2. A gift of Grace – this is the Reformed view – held by Luther & Calvin

- They disagreed over what exactly the bread and wine become in communion
 - o Luther & Lutherans: Jesus actually present "in, with, under"
 - you are actually partaking of Jesus in a spiritual sense
 - o Calvin & Presbyterians disagree: it's just bread and wine
- But both agreed about the significance of communion
 - o You are actually receiving a gift of more grace in your life
 - o = additional strength from God to make it through another week
 - o very mystical idea – a reason they take it every week
- I like this view – doesn't confuse the gospel like previous view
- But I can't find any strong biblical support for it

Biblically, communion isn't about receiving anything from God

It's about celebrating what you have already received

- Our chance to give back to God – to give thanks, praise for His gift of Jesus

3. Our view – Memorial & Celebration of Jesus

- Read v23-26
- Notice the word Jesus repeats: "remembrance"
- **Communion is about REMEMBERING what Jesus did in the past**
 - o Like Memorial Day
 - We're thankful EVERYDAY for those who died for our country
 - But 1 day a year we stop and as a whole nation remember
 - o That's how communion works
 - Hopefully we're giving thanks for Jesus EVERYDAY
 - But on communion day we stop, gather, and give thanks as a family
- **The bread or cracker represents Jesus' body**
 - o Broken into little pieces to remind us that Jesus' body was broken for us
 - o Isa 53:5
 - Beaten, whipped, crucified, pierced, abused... for us
 - o I've only seen **Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*** once – that was enough!
 - Can't see it again – too horrific; made me nauseous
 - And that's what Gibson got right: the brutality & pain Jesus suffered
 - I could have done with less Satan and more resurrection
 - But at least He got the suffering of Jesus right
 - o **His suffering was intolerable**
 - Tragic for any human to suffer like that

- But Jesus isn't like the rest of us – perfect; never lied, cheated, stole
 - And unlike us – **at any moment He could have said, "ENOUGH!"**
 - He's the Almighty Creator – He could have stopped it
 - ...when they began to whip Him... beat Him... nail Him
 - But He didn't – allowed the suffering to continue to His last breath
 - And He did it for us... so that by His agony, we can be healed
 - The bread reminds us that His body was broken so ours can be healed
- **The cup represents His blood**
 - Throughout Old Testament: **God taught His people about the stain of sin**
 - Not only Creator – also Law-Giver
 - defined right and wrong
 - warned that failure to obey will bring death
 - But also created a way to find forgiveness – animal sacrifices
 - take sheep – slit throat – watch till all the blood ran out
 - **Jews learned that only blood can wash away stain of sin**
 - **But there was a problem: animal blood can't take away human sin**
 - **Heb 10:4**
 - Lamb not equivalent to human – not made in image of God
 - Not a sufficient sacrifice
 - Human sin requires human blood – equivalent sacrifice
 - **So all the bulls, goats, lambs sacrificed in Old Testament: just a preview of Jesus**
 - A perfect human of infinite worth who chose to shed His own blood to wash away our sins once and for all
 - **Eph 1:7**
 - **Redemption** = to set free from bondage
 - We were slaves to sin under the wrath of God
 - Jesus freed us from sin and wrath with His own blood
 - **Jesus gave His life for our life – He died so we could live forever**
 - **That's the good news of the Gospel**
 - Forgiveness isn't something you earn from God
 - It's something Jesus already earned for you
 - He offers it as a free gift to all who will believe
 - Communion is our memorial to Jesus' death for us in the past
 - But it's also about the future...
- **Communion is about CELEBRATING what Jesus will do for us in the future**
 - v26 – communion is also a proclamation that Jesus is coming back!
 - **As a child I loved to watch Christmas movies**
 - Charlie Brown, Miracle on 34th Street, Claymation Rudolph
 - Some were good: Charlie Brown; some were awful: Rudolph. So bad!
 - Matt Morton and I got into quite a disagreement over it this week
 - He loves the movie - bought the anniversary DVD
 - I just don't get it – I'm like all the other reindeer who used to laugh and call him names... because he's awful!
 - But I still loved watching it... not for the movie but for what it meant was coming... Christmas presents!
 - **That's what Jesus wants communion to be for us**
 - Cracker and juice aren't that good – not exciting to eat!
 - But it is exciting to think about what communion looks forward to...

- Isaiah 25:6-8
 - a feast with Jesus & one another that never ends!
 - not crackers & juice – best meat and wine on earth!
 - and best of all: a final end to death and sadness
- Cracker & juice of communion: reminder that something better is coming!
- Communion: a memorial and a celebration God has given us to help us remember
 - what Jesus did for us in the past
 - what Jesus will do for us in the future

God takes this memorial and celebration of His Son VERY SERIOUSLY!

- That's why he put to death believers in Corinth who took it in an unworthy manner
 - They didn't lose their salvation, but they did lose their life
- So let's find out what they were doing wrong so we can avoid their mistake & judgment

How to do Communion Wrong

- read 11:18-22
- **Corinth was a highly stratified society**
 - Wealthy at the top; poor and slaves at the bottom
 - Never the two should mix – wealthy held poor at arm's length
- **So when a wealthy person had a party at his house in Corinth**
 - Invited wealthy guests into dining room; sit on cushions; eat best food and wine
 - But their servants had to sit in the courtyard
 - sat on the ground, fed stale bread & cheap wine
 - Incredibly unfair, but the rich didn't care
 - that's just how life worked in Corinth
 - rich assumed they were entitled to gorge themselves while poor starved
- **Sadly, that same ruthless selfishness had invaded the church during communion**
 - No church building – met in home of wealthy member
 - Had a meal together between the bread and the cup
 - Not a potluck – you ate what you brought
 - Home owner did what all wealthy people did in Corinth:
 - invited wealthy church members into dining room where they feasted
 - left poor in courtyard to eat whatever crumbs they could afford
- **The rich divided up their church like Airlines divides up a plane!**
 - 1st and business class sit first – best seats, served drinks immediately
 - Then economy class has to walk through them like cattle through a shoot!
 - we see those big seats... glasses of champagne...!
 - Then for the whole flight we looking forward... towards first class
 - we can see through the gap in the bulkhead... better food, service
 - whole time reminded that they're rich & privileged... and we're not!
- **Airlines do that because it's business – and that's what we should expect in the world**
- **But not in here – there is no place for selfishness in the church**
 - especially in communion – where we celebrate most selfless act ever!!!
- That's why rich believers in Corinth had fallen under God's judgment and discipline

That's how to do communion wrong!

So how do you do it right – in a way that makes God pleased instead of angry?

How to do Communion Right

- **Begin by examining yourself**
 - read v28

- We must examine ourselves before taking communion
- Ask yourself questions... That's what we'll do now...
- **1) Am I taking this seriously, or am I just going through the motions?**
 - read v29
 - "judge the body rightly" = recognize that this is the body of Jesus we're celebrating
 - recognize the holiness and significance of the bread and cup
 - To the Corinthian church communion was just another dinner... eat, get drunk
 - That made God angry!
 - Because communion is about His Son whom He loves more than anything
 - Take communion lightly, flippantly... and God gets angry
 - That's why we don't do communion every week
 - Some churches do and that's great
 - We don't because we fear that it would become an empty ritual
 - We may make it more often in the future IF we can keep it holy
- **2) Do I appreciate Jesus' sacrifice, or do I take it for granted?**
 - It's so easy to take the gospel for granted!
 - "Jesus died on the cross for my sins"... like "The sun is bright"
 - Known it my whole life – tend to take it for granted
 - But I can't celebrate communion rightly if I take what it's about for granted
 - **So how do I grow my appreciation for Jesus' sacrifice?**
 - **Spend time thinking about what life would be like if Jesus had said "no"**
 - He could have – it was His choice – He didn't have to die
 - If He would have said "no"...
 - still stained by sin and under the wrath of God
 - trying desperately to try to earn God's favor somehow
 - I would have no basis for peace, joy, or hope
 - Get ready for communion by remembering: we are the luckiest people on earth!
 - because we know a God who loves us so much that He willingly died for our sins
- **3) Do I long for His return, or do I hope in worldly things?**
 - Communion: not just remembering the past; also celebrating the future!
 - So to celebrate communion right, we need to put our hope in what Jesus will do
 - **But it's so easy to put our hopes in worldly things!**
 - A new job, car, house, vacation – a new relationship – a new stage of life
 - Those things are more tangible – easier to see – so easier to fixate on
 - **So we must remind ourselves that none of them will truly satisfy us**
 - We live in a broken, sin-cursed world
 - So nothing in this world can ultimately satisfy our hopes for a better life
 - We always think the grass is greener on the others side... NO! Just different
 - **The grass isn't greener till Jesus comes back – that's what we long for**
 - Get ready for communion by thinking about how satisfying life will be

Finally, as the men go back to prepare communion, one last question...

- **4) Do I treat others as He's treated me, or am I selfish?**
 - I'm grateful: there's nothing like the outrageous selfishness of Corinth here
 - But we do still all struggle at times with selfishness
 - If left unchecked it will sabotage our celebration of Jesus' selfless sacrifice
 - So to prepare for communion, look for opportunities to selflessly serve others
 - Your spouse, kids, roommates, a neighbor... or even a stranger

- **Could be as simple as praying for the people around you during worship**
 - for those that don't know Jesus to hear and believe the gospel
 - for those who are hurting to find comfort and strength
- **Park farther from the building if it's easy for you to walk**
 - Students... you're young, healthy, probably don't have young kids...
 - Park farther away to leave spaces for elderly and with kids
- **Serve in the nursery or Sunday School once a month**
 - If everyone serves once a month, then everyone gets to be in here 3x!
 - Help our volunteers get a chance to worship by becoming a volunteer
- **Give to those in need**
 - If you know someone struggling financially – give directly
 - If you don't know someone struggling financially – **Mattil fund**

I don't know where you are this morning

But I'm guessing that at least one of these questions convicted you

Take this time to get ready for communion by praying, meditating, remembering