

Study 16

The Communion JESUS commanded

After one of our morning church services a returning visitor asked me whether we had any rules for who could share in our Communion service. I replied that we didn't have any "rules" but that the Bible taught that Holy Communion is available to all born-again believers who have demonstrated their commitment to Christ (usually through water baptism).

"Oh, I see" they said.

"But why do we have a Communion anyway?" their teenage son asked.

So I asked, *"If you really liked a girl, and were old enough to marry her, what kind of relationship would you have with her?"*

"We'd be boyfriend-girlfriend" he said.

"And if she really liked you and you both realised you loved each other, what would you do?"

"I'd ask her to marry me" he replied.

"What do you call that relationship?" I asked.

"Being engaged".

"Is being engaged the same as being married?" I asked.

"No, of course not!"

I went on to tell him that when we give our lives to Christ it's like becoming engaged. There's commitment, but it's not the highest commitment: *marriage is*. In a marriage there is a ceremony, a declaration, an exchange of vows, witnesses, then a celebration feast. This is like the commitment that Christ asks of His followers (refer to our first study on Water Baptism). Being water baptised is a ceremony with: a *declaration* of commitment to Christ, where the believer *vows* to follow Christ, which is *witnessed*, and then it is *celebrated* with a Communion Meal.

1. Why did Christ say that His followers should celebrate their total commitment to Him? (1Cor. 11:24-25)
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Christianity is not about religious rituals or ceremonies but it does celebrate certain rituals and ceremonies. These ceremonial rituals have historically been referred to as *sacraments*. Webster's defines sacrament as *a religious ceremony or act of the Christian Church that is regarded as an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual divine grace* and goes on to say "from Old French 'sacrement', from Latin 'sacramentum' 'solemn oath' (from *sacrare* 'to hallow,' from *sacer* 'sacred'), used in Christian Latin as a translation of Greek 'mysterion' 'mystery.'" Holy Communion is indeed a mystery.

2. How does 1Corinthians 11:30 show us that Holy Communion is more than just a ritual?
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The origins of Holy Communion trace back to the Old Covenant's Passover.

3. How is Christ described in 1Corinthians 5:7?

Christ transferred the elements of the Passover into what we now refer to as "Communion" (1Cor. 10:16) or the "Table of the Lord" (1Cor. 10:21). The Passover had three basic elements: unleavened bread, red wine, and the Passover ("Pascal") lamb. Each element was typical (that is, *symbolically prophetic*) of Christ. In each of the Gospel accounts of Christ's last supper there is no reference made of the Passover lamb.

4. What do these elements of Communion represent (not symbolise) – (Note Matthew 26:26-28)

The unleavened bread - _____

The cup - _____

Communion does not save us- it is a celebration of what has saved us. Communion does, however, impart God's grace and the Scriptures warn us not to partake of it lightly (1Cor. 11:27).

5. How should we approach the Lord's Table according to 1Corinthians 11:28?

The Table of the Lord is a remembrance, celebration, and a declaration of God's salvation for mankind. It spans the dimensions of time by remembering the past ("do this in remembrance of Me"), celebrating the present ("as often as you drink it") and declaring the future glory of Christ ("until I come").

COMMUNION IS FELLOWSHIP

While Communion is *vertical* in the sense that it is about us and God, it is also *horizontal* because it is about us.

6. What is it that Paul says best celebrates our unity as the Body of Christ according to 1Corinthians 10:17?
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Holy Communion is not a private affair. It is about *us* and God. Communion is a beautiful picture of the unity that Christ has made between us: *Christ, the Bread from Heaven, is eaten by each of us and then becomes the one thing we have in common.* We sometimes fail to understand that our relationship with God is expressed by our relationship with each other. In speaking of Communion, Paul says that we must discern the Lord's Body (the Church) as we eat of the bread (1Cor. 10:16; 11:29).

7. How does 1John 3:10 make this clear? (Note 1John 4:20)
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We also sometimes fail to appreciate that it is in our fellowship with each other that we receive the grace of God (1Peter 4:10). The grace of God through another believer to us might be provision, strength, comfort, acceptance or forgiveness. This grace from God is transferred as we have "heart" fellowship with each other.

8. What did Paul that he did with the Corinthians? (2Cor. 6:11)
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9. What did he want in return from the Corinthians? (2Cor. 7:2)
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May God help us to have open-hearted fellowship and enriching ministry one to another as we partake of Communion.

Amen.