

Chapter Fifteen

“The Sad Reality of So Much Communion Compromise”

“THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST: GUARDIAN OF THE ORDINANCE OF COMMUNION”

The Lord Jesus Christ brought the Church of Jesus Christ into existence during His earthly ministry.¹ He then provided instruction to His Church concerning the restoration of fellowship of those in the Church who sin against another member.² On baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ’s disciples baptized converts, John 4.1-2, and then the Savior formally directed His Church to baptize converts when He commissioned His Church, Matthew 28.18-20. These things were done before the Savior’s ascension to the Father’s right hand on high following His crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.³ Of course, baptism is that ordinance of the Church that is repeatedly practiced by the Church as new disciples of Christ are converted and then brought into fellowship with the Church, with each believer experiencing Scriptural baptism by immersion only once.

The only other ordinance of the Church is the communion of the Lord’s Supper, which is observed from time to time. The Lord’s Supper is our concern in this chapter:

As To THE ESTABLISHING OF THE ORDINANCE

“The Lord’s Supper” is the title given by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 11:20). It bears other names. Luke used the phrase ‘breaking of bread,’ but may have used the phrase to refer to an ordinary meal (Acts 2:42-46; 20:11).

¹ Chapter 3 and Matthew 10.1-4; 1 Corinthians 12.28

² Chapter 8 and Matthew 18.15-20

³ Psalm 16.11; 110.1; Matthew 26.64; Mark 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Luke 20.42; 22.69; John 3.13; 13.1; 14.2-4; Acts 2.33-35; 7.56; Romans 8.34; Ephesians 1.20; 6.9; Colossians 3.1; II Thessalonians 1.7; Hebrews 1.3, 13; 8.1; 9.24; 10.12-13; 12.2; I Peter 3.22; Revelation 19.11

Paul employed the term *communion*, which referred to believers' relationship with the Lord (vertically) and with fellow believers (horizontally). *Eucharist*, another designation of the Lord's Supper, is derived from the Greek word *eucharistia*, 'giving of thanks,' as it implies, the thanksgiving over the bread and wine (1 Cor. 11:24). Paul referred to it as 'the Lord's table' (1 Cor. 10:21)."⁴

The establishing of the communion of the Lord's Supper can be summarized under three headings:

First, where was the communion of the Lord's Supper established? The communion of the Lord's Supper was established in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem, secured for the purpose of celebrating the Passover (Mark 14.12-15):

- 12 And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?
- 13 And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.
- 14 And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?
- 15 And he will shew you a large upper room furnished *and* prepared: there make ready for us.

Next, with whom was the communion of the Lord's Supper established? Astonishing to many who have never considered it, and who ignore the facts when forming their opinions about how the communion of the Lord's Supper ought to be observed, only the twelve apostles were invited to the Upper Room, where the Passover was celebrated and where the Lord's Supper was instituted.⁵ This unusual approach to observing Passover was despite the custom among Jews of celebrating Passover with family members (with the Lord's mother Mary being in Jerusalem and His

⁴ Jim Henry, *In Remembrance Of Me: A Manual on Observing the Lord's Supper*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), pages 3-4.

⁵ Luke 22.14-16

close friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus living very close by but also not invited).⁶

Third, for what reason was the Lord's Supper established? Following are some opinions:

"Jesus used the occasion to identify Himself - by His actions and words - as the sacrificial Lamb, further expanding the messianic and eschatological meaning of the event. Christ's words and actions initiated the celebration of this powerful symbol, the early Church practiced it (Acts 2:42, 20:7), and it continues to be observed as one of the most powerful symbols of the faith."⁷

"The Lord's Supper not only carries historical significance, but also theological significance in that it symbolizes the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus. The bread and the wine symbolize the very body and blood of Christ. The blood, being essential to His earthly life and all other life, was shed redemptively for our lives."⁸

"The meal also carries ecclesiological significance for His body, the Church. Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* has pointed out that the Church reaps the benefits earned for us by His death and that we receive nourishment for our souls (John 6:53-57) through the Lord's Supper. The Table affirms His love to me in that He invites me to come to His supper, and my partaking of the meal affirms my faith in Him. I am redeemed and accepted by Christ's actions, and my actions proclaim it."⁹

"The celebration of Communion also carries eschatological significance. As it commemorates a past event, it also anticipates a future consummation in His coming (1 Cor. 11:26). Thus, a

⁶ John 11.1; 12.1; 19.25-27

⁷ Henry, page 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., pages 4-5.

feast of love, a memorial of faith, becomes a prophecy of hope.”¹⁰

As To THE ABUSE OF THE ORDINANCE

Within a few decades of the Church of Jesus Christ being baptized in the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and the subsequent spread of the Christian faith, the simplicity of the communion of the Lord’s Supper was compromised. History, as well, records the abuse of this precious ordinance by professing Christians:

First, take note of its abuse by the Corinthian congregation. Without going into specifics, First Corinthians 11.17-34 contains the Apostle Paul’s rebuke and then his correction of the Corinthian malpractice of the communion service. They acted like they could celebrate communion any way they wanted. Paul showed them otherwise.

Next, we take note of the abuse of communion by the Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church’s wicked perversion and blasphemous distortion of the simple communion service instituted by the Savior are shown in great detail in Loraine Boettner’s classic *Roman Catholicism*, in which he details its gradual transformation into what is today known as the Mass.¹¹ From a simple and spiritual memorial service, while awaiting the Lord’s return, the Roman church manipulated the meaning of Scripture over time to transform communion into a moneymaking scheme for the Roman church by using it to supposedly release dead people from purgatory and into heaven by paying priests to conduct a Mass for the departed. While ignoring Hebrews 9.22, the Roman church describes the Mass as the unbloody sacrifice of Christ.¹² Thus, Rome

¹⁰ Ibid., page 5.

¹¹ Boettner, pages 168-195.

¹² <https://www.catholic.com/qa/why-is-the-mass-called-the-unbloody-sacrifice-of-our-lord-on-his-cross> 2/7/2018

has taken a wonderful observance and distorted it into a soul-damning practice, while ignoring the obvious meaning of the verse.¹³

Third, its abuse by the Anglicans. In the United States, they call themselves Episcopalians. Whether in the USA, in Africa, or in the United Kingdom, the Church of England has been so tainted by the Roman Catholic Church it split off from when England's King Henry VIII broke with Rome that its observance of communion is more Catholic than Christian.

Fourth, its abuse by the Lutherans. For all the positive that is true of Martin Luther, the negative about him includes his deeply conservative personality that made it extremely difficult for him to relinquish a number of his lifelong Roman Catholic beliefs and practices, clinging in the case of communion to the notion that the simple bread and wine were in some spiritual way Christ's actual body and blood. The error of consubstantiation is embraced by Lutherans to this day.¹⁴

Fifth, its abuse by the Congregationalists. His name was Solomon Stoddard. He was a wonderful New England Congregationalist pastor and grandfather to the stellar Jonathan Edwards. He wrote an excellent book on the subject of pastoral counseling for conversion.¹⁵ Sadly, his legacy is the terrible error he introduced known as the halfway covenant, whereby he allowed non-Church members, specifically, the children of members who were not themselves Church members, to participate in the communion service with their Church member parents. Never before in Christendom had such a thing been allowed, yet it rapidly became the common practice of most Protestant churches to this day.

Finally, it's abused by contemporary Christians. Most Churches these days practice what is called open communion, meaning there is no attempt to guard against nonmembers or even unsaved people eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine when a congregation observes communion. This practice results from Churches failing to see the ordinance of

¹³ See footnote for Hebrews 9.15-28 from the Roman Catholic *The New American Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1971), page 1341.

¹⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki & Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), page 29.

¹⁵ Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide To Christ*, (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, reprinted 1993)

communion as given to congregations, but instead seeing it as given to all Christians without distinction.

The question, of course, is why God's Word never says that all Christians should observe communion, and why all comments about this ordinance are directed to Churches or Church members. Another question remains: why did the Savior invite only the Twelve to the Upper Room, not His mother (in Jerusalem for Passover and a witness to His crucifixion), not His siblings, and not nearby residents Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? A third question is what Churches do when a member is excommunicated, given the clear instruction in Scripture that one and all are welcome to a Church's worship.

Yes, the communion of the Lord's Supper has been misused and distorted from its original practice and intent, yet so few today express any real concern to celebrate the Lord's Supper the Lord's way.

As To THE PROPER USE OF THE ORDINANCE

First, as an ordinance and not a sacrament. Many Christians use the terms ordinance and sacrament interchangeably to refer to the communion of the Lord's Supper and baptism. However, since many professing Christians believe both communion and baptism are a means by which God communicates saving grace to people, Baptists typically avoid the term sacrament in favor of the word ordinance. The word ordinance is less likely to be misunderstood as a saving memorial. Is the communion of the Lord's Supper a meaningful and important gift the Savior provided as a means to remember Him until He comes again? Yes, it is, and for that reason, it is to be cherished.

However, the communion of the Lord's Supper should be seen primarily as a memorial, not as a saving ritual. We know that baptism is not a saving ordinance. After all, the thief on the cross was saved when he died, yet he was not baptized. John the Baptist also demanded repentance before he would baptize, not after. Therefore, a correct understanding of Ephesians 2:8-9 leaves us with a confident understanding that salvation is by faith alone, apart from works of any kind, including the work of baptism:

- 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves:
it is the gift of God:
- 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

What about the communion of the Lord's Supper?

Is that observation a saving ordinance? Consider two things in addition to the passage just read: *First*, it could hardly be that the communion of the Lord's Supper was necessary for salvation if the Savior Himself did not invite His mother, His siblings, and His best friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, to attend. Also, it could hardly be that the communion of the Lord's Supper was necessary for salvation if the Apostle Paul's criticism of some celebrating communion before others arrived was about its effect on Church unity rather than the salvation of Church members (1 Corinthians 11.18-19).

Finally, and this is where many Baptist congregations differ from others, we see the communion of the Lord's Supper as a privilege of membership and not a right of the Christian profession. A variety of reasons and interpretations of different Scriptural passages lead many Baptist congregations to several convictions related to the communion service: *First*, the communion service, as with baptism, is not an ordinance given to Christianity at large, but is a Church ordinance that, along with baptism, was given to be conducted by and for a Church congregation.

Second, the communion service plays a vital role in Church discipline. When a member is excommunicated for refusal to repent of serious sin, what is the outcome? Such a person is to be treated as a heathen and as a publican. However, heathens and publicans are always most welcome in our Church services, are they not? Therefore, we understand that the consequence of excommunication is not shunning and is not denying access to public worship, but denying access to the communion table, something that seems to be possible only when a Church practices closed communion.¹⁶

Finally, we observe in the New Testament that all comments about and instructions for observing the communion of the Lord's Supper are

¹⁶ Many Baptist Churches practice what they describe as close communion, granting the privilege of participating in the communion observance to visiting members of other Churches of like faith and practice.

comments made to Church congregations. Thus, the New Testament shows no observable practice of communion by Christians at large or outside a congregational context.

Many Churches observe the communion of the Lord's Supper regularly. Many Churches also practice closed communion. However, they observe communion in a way that greatly minimizes the likelihood of offending anyone with different views about that Church ordinance. The congregation where I served conscientiously reminded members of the upcoming communion service, scheduled one hour before the Sunday evening service, to minimize offense to nonmembers.

It is the practice of many conscientious Baptists, when visiting other congregations when traveling to quietly abstain from participating in their communion service even when invited to do so. When possible, strict Baptists¹⁷ sometimes quietly leave the Church auditorium to avoid confusion and hurt feelings. Such are practices born of an attempt to be both faithful to God's Word and to be consistent in practice wherever Baptists happen to gather with other believers for worship.

¹⁷ Strict Baptists: I use the term "strict" to refer to the *strict* or *closed* position held with regard to Baptist Church membership and/or communion.