

HOLY COMMUNION

CALVIN JAMES

Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise notified.

Part One: Communion

Do you know what qualifies someone to be able to partake of the communion?

During one of our family devotions, our seven-year-old son indicated that he was interested in giving his heart to the Lord Jesus and desired to be baptised. I don't have to tell you, but we were very happy to hear this. Our five year old daughter also announced that she would like to be baptised as well. Isn't that wonderful! Let me encourage parents to use the altar of the family devotions to lay the foundation of salvation for our children.

After our jubilation, I asked our daughter, "Why do you want to be baptised?" Her response was, "I want to eat the bread and drink the wine every Sunday with everyone else." In her mind, baptism qualified her or made her eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper on Sundays. God bless our children. I implore parents everywhere to spend time teaching their children the truths of the Bible on their level, and God will bless you and bless them.

So, does being baptized truly qualify us to be partakers of the communion?

Paul the Apostle came up against this very question in his ministry at the church which was at Corinth. *"Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this*

bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:17–30).

What we gather from Scripture is that this ecclesia or *group of believers* who met in Corinth had a problem. Although they were baptized, saved and sanctified, and thus 'qualified' to partake of the communion they were sick and some even died. So, what was their problem? And, can we learn from their mistakes?

The Scriptures point us to the true cause of the problem. Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–21, NIV.

Clearly, what that Scripture is revealing to us is that something was happening before this group of believers gathered to partake of the communion. In fact, what that scripture tells us is that among this group of believers there was a general lack of respect for each other. Paul reports in his letter that among them there were **divisions, selfishness and a lack of appreciation** for one another. Paul continues *"Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not"* (1 Corinthians 11:22, NIV)! The Greek word for divisions cited in this scripture is *schisma* (pronounced: skhis-mah) which gives the English word **schism** or creation of divisions. Please remember this as we will be coming back to this later in this article.

Also notice that the believers got drunk during communion. 1 Corinthians 11:21, NIV) states: *"...another gets drunk."* For some who suggest that real wine was **not** being used for communion, this should serve to put an end to that argument. Wine was used by Jesus at the very first communion service, *"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom"* (Matthew 26:29). This practice continued into the New Testament church, and it is a practice we continue in all of the churches.

From the Scripture we see that baptism (being born again) is not the sole criterion that qualifies us to partake of the communion. We see from Scripture that the group of believers from Corinth were born again believers. Paul was vexed with the believers from Corinth. Their attitude towards one another before partaking of the communion caused them to be **disqualified** from partaking of it. *"Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper: For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you"* (1 Corinthians 11:20-22). Therefore, we can conclude that **communion doesn't start when we bless the bread and the wine that we use and, it doesn't end when we've eaten the sacraments.**

If communion is not just the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine, what is communion?

To paraphrase the message that Paul was teaching the group of believers in Corinth, it would read something like this, "Communion is a way of life that climaxes every Sunday when we partake of the sacraments in celebration of what Jesus did for us on the cross. And, what did he do for us on the cross? Well, it was on the cross that Jesus made a way for ALL of us to become members of the body of Christ. Therefore, if our attitude towards the members of the body of Christ is divisive, antagonistic, disrespectful and uncaring, we cannot truly celebrate the work that Jesus did on the cross by partaking of the communion."

What you'll soon come to realize when you've completed the reading of this article is this, **"one needs to participate in communion in order to partake of the communion."**

Discerning the Lord's body opens the door for us as believers to be true partakers of the Holy Communion. Read 1 Corinthians 10:15–17, NIV.

Paul, in verse 17 states that as members we are "one bread and one body." As such, if we lose respect for the true body of Christ we lose respect for Him. And if we have lost respect for Jesus and his body (because they are one), when we partake of the communion on the first day of the week, we end up partaking of a curse rather than basking in the blessings that come from partaking of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

How do we discern the body of Christ at all times?

To answer this question the Holy Spirit must first reveal to us, 'What is the body of Christ?' Therefore, let us turn to the Scriptures for the answer:

1. *"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." Point 1: Beyond any shadow of a doubt, the body to which we refer is the body of Jesus Himself* (1 Corinthians 12:12).
2. *"For in fact the body is not one member but many." Point 2: The body of Christ is made up of many members* (1 Corinthians 12:14).
3. *"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually"* (1 Corinthians 12:27). Point 3: The individual members of the body of Christ are us, the believers. Just as individual cells when joined together make up the human body so too do the individual believers, when joined together, make up the body of Christ.

So, we see from Scripture that the body of Christ is you and it is me...Amen?

Now, if that be true then, when we are accused of not discerning the body of Christ we are really being accused of not discerning **one another**. When I don't discern, or love, or respect the Christ in you and; when you don't discern, nor appreciate nor respect the Christ in me, I hope you can see by the Spirit of God that we disrespect Jesus Himself. To drive home the point, *"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey,*

suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' He replied" (Acts 9:1-5, NIV).

Sons of God, we are the body of Christ.

Part Two: Priest and Kings

Who are we?

To answer this question we will explore the Scripture to determine who our Father says we are.

To tell the story of who we are we must first go back to the beginning. I want us to remember this parable: **"The Old Testament conceals the new, while the New Testament reveals the old."**

Let's go straight to the Old Testament to find out who God says we are, *"'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites" (Exodus 19:4-6, NIV).*

The Old Testament told us that God's intention was to make the children of Israel a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Now, we have been taught by the apostolic elders, and the Scriptures reveal, that Israel was a type of the church and if we apply the parable above to this Scripture we see that God reveals to us the work he wanted to do in Exodus 19:4-6 when we read the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:5-10, NIV.

So, whereas the scripture tells us that you are a member of the body of Christ...we saw this in 1 Corinthians 12:27: *"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually"*...we now see, from Scripture, that we are no ordinary persons who happen to be members of the body. The Scripture clearly shows us that **we are royal priests** and as such we are members of the body of Christ. Hallelujah!

Again, who does God say we are? Read Galatians 3:21-29, NIV and Galatians 4:1-7, NIV.

In summary, the Scripture is telling us that the justified believer is a full adult heir in God's family, with all the attendant rights and privileges. And what Paul is telling the church at Galatia is to the degree you wish to enjoy those rights and privileges is to the degree you acquire them by faith. Saints, you are a son. We are sons. How much *sonship* is revealed in us depends on how full our faith is and the degree of maturity in Christ that we have reached.

When we gather around the Lord's table to partake of the communion we gather to celebrate the honour given to us through Jesus to be counted as one of God's special and chosen people. Partaking of the communion is really the outcome of a genuine love and deep respect and appreciation for one another. It is a celebration of being a member of God's royal priesthood; a celebration of maturing into full sonship.

Part Three: Communion In The Home

Children and Parents

Our children are special to us in many ways. First, they represent the heritage of the church and a sign that the work God has begun in our midst is destined to continue to the end. Psalm 127:3 tells us, *"Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward."* Taking into consideration all that came before in this article, I believe that one of the responsibilities we have is to teach our children from a very young age to discern the body of Christ so that when they have come of age to be partakers of the holy communion they will have already been actively participating in the communion of discerning the Lord's body.

The first commandment with a promise is located in Exodus 20:12, NIV: *"Honour your father and your mother; so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."* Do you know why this commandment has the distinction of being the first commandment with a promise? Well, Paul reveals the secrets contained in this Old Testament scripture in Ephesians 6:1-3, NIV: *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother' - which is the first commandment with promise - 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'"*

What Paul reveals is this: **"Parents in the Lord..."** are members of the body of Christ; they are royal priests; they are sons of God. Therefore, any child with godly parents must be taught to recognize their godly parents for who God sees them as.

When our children are called on by their parents to obey, their response must be, **"I will obey as if it were God Himself commanding me; I will obey as unto the Lord."**

I have three wonderful children, so I know it can sometimes feel like an impossible task to get them to walk in obedience. However, let me encourage you to never give up, for if we train our children to practice obedience in this manner, then it becomes easy for them to discern and honour the body of Christ when they come of age, and then one day they will join us in the glorious celebration of partaking of the Lord's supper as true participants in the communion.

Husbands and Wives

Continuing with our discussion of communion in the home, we now look at communion between husband and wife. *"Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church - for we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5: 22-32, NIV).*

These ten verses are profound in that they look at marriage from the standpoint of the relationship Jesus has with his wife, the church.

As such, what lessons can we learn?

1. If a man truly discerns the body of Christ he will treat his wife the same way Christ treats the church; with **agape**.

You see, your wife is not just some woman. She is a member of the body of Christ; she is a royal priest; she is a son of God. And to treat her any other way would be to **not** discern the body of Christ. As such, how can such a man truly celebrate the body of Christ by partaking of the communion when he is not participating in the communion at home with his wife?

2. Conversely, if a woman truly discerns the body of Christ she would respect her husband the same way the church respects Jesus; with **submission**.

You see, your husband is not just some man. He is a member of the body of Christ; he is a royal priest; he is a son of God. And to treat him any other way would be to **not** discern the body of Christ. As such, how can such a woman truly celebrate the body of Christ by partaking of the communion when she is not participating in the communion at home with her husband?

Communion in the Local Church

First, to truly discern the Lord's body we must accept who God says we are so that we can be true participants of the Holy Communion. The reason for this is revealed in 1 John 1:5-7.

The meaning we get when we look at the phrase "...walk in the light..." from the Greek is this: *To cause that which is inside of you to constantly shine for all to see.* What this means is that God wants us to believe and accept the fact that as members of the body of Christ we are royal priests and we are sons of God, and if we receive this by faith, He wants us to live as His royal priests and live as His sons all the time, by the grace of God.

How do we fulfil this command to live as royal priests and sons of God at all times? The answer is in Romans 8:14: *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."*

Second, we need to recognize that we are all different and that we must embrace the differences in one another as a gift from God. Read 1 Corinthians 12:22-25.

Each royal priest, each son in the Lord's body is different and, will exercise her/his giftings differently. If we despise one member in favour of the other because of the differences God has fashioned in them, then we do NOT discern the body of Christ.

Third, if we do not exercise our gifting and our ministry we do NOT discern the body of Christ. Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-31.

You see, our giftings and our ministries are not ours to keep for ourselves but for:

1. Edifying
2. Offering guidance
3. Providing comfort

If we do not exercise our gifting and ministry, we withhold from our brothers and sisters the opportunity to benefit from what God has given to us for the church. Clearly, we do **not** discern the body of Christ.

By the Holy Spirit, we should appreciate the reality of the holy communion and be reminded that we ought not to view the partaking of the holy communion as a rite of passage or some Christian tradition.

Instead, let us see the communion as central to our walk as Christians and, as such, let us always remember that **"we cannot be partakers of the holy communion on Sundays if we are not participators in the holy communion everyday."** ✚

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