

Holy Food: The Attitude That Communion Deserves

Read **1 Corinthians 11:17–34**.

What is the difference between the following two sets of food?



Food Set 1



Food Set 2

The food set on the left is an American breakfast; this is ordinary food that requires no special treatment. The food set on the right is Communion bread and cup (wine); this is sacred food that deserves a reverential attitude.

The Corinthian Church had confused the difference between ordinary food and Holy Communion. They had begun treating Communion as nothing different than eating a regular meal. The Apostle Paul wrote to strong remind the Corinthians to duly respect the sacred ordinance.

As church that practices Open Communion, we may be vulnerable to treating Communion with a casual attitude. Like the Corinthians we need to be nudged back to reverence towards Communion, so we can treat Holy Communion with the attitude it deserves.

I. Communion is holy food, because it is prepared for the people of Christ.

A. Communion is intended to make believers better, not worse (**verse 17**). The Corinthians were actually getting worse in their conduct every time they took Communion. This is contrary to what this meal should do in Christians. It should have a purifying effect on our behavior. It should bring us closer to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

B. It is intended to unify us, not keep us divided (**verses 18-19**). The very word "communion" (koinonia) speaks volumes. The root word for our English term "communion" is the word "common", to have things in common. From this word we get "community", which means 'common unity'. Communion is the ultimate fellowship (koinonia) meal of our

faith, and every time we take Communion, we should bring an end to whatever divisions, factions and tensions exist within the church. It seems the Lord Jesus knew that in His physical absence, His followers would succumb to divisions from time to time.

If during His physical presence with the apostles, they argued and fought among themselves, how much more those divisions would magnify in the Lord's bodily absence from His followers?

Thus the Lord gave us Communion as a built-in relationship repair method for His church. Between Communion, the Brown family and the Jones family may be at odds for whatever reason, but when it is time for Communion, the Browns and Joneses should reconcile their differences in order to keep the body of Christ unified. Promoting unity within the church is a goal of Communion.

C. It is intended to renew our concern for one another (**verses 21-22,33**). Paul tells the Corinthians to wait for one another, instead of one family going ahead and eating their potluck meal at the Agape Feast without regard to the others. The well-to-do church members were supposed to share with the poor church members who could not afford to bring a meal to the Love Feast.

It was probably a rare thing in the first century for a Christian to be absent from worship during Communion, which was every Lord's Day (Sunday). Because every member was expected to be in church at Communion, when one was not there, it should have been a matter of concern to the other members: "I wonder Brother James is well..."

Liberian Christians have a similar tradition to be in their home churches on Communion Sunday, which they treat as big deal. Unfortunately, American Christians in Protestant churches don't seem to care much about missing church on Communion Sunday. Even deacons, elders and other church officers may stay away from worship or slip out of church on Communion Sunday. As such, it is hard for us to show special concern when one is absent from church during Communion.

We need to revive the habit of making church attendance on Communion Sunday the expected thing. That way, if anyone is absent, it is likely for us to show concern by asking about that person, by praying for the absentee for whatever trouble he may be going through that kept him from the Lord's family on Communion Sunday.

II. Communion is holy food, because it is eaten in the presence of Christ.

A. Christ is the host of the supper (**verse 20**). Communion is called The Lord's Supper, because it still belongs to Him. Just like personally served the bread and wine at the Last Supper, which was the first Lord's Supper, we should still expect Christ to be mystically present in a special way every time we serve Communion.

This should be our expectation, even if we believe that Communion is a symbolic memorial, in contrast to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and wine become the literal flesh and blood of Christ), or the Lutheran teaching of consubstantiation (the belief that Christ is present in and with the bread and wine). Yes, we believe the bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of the Christ whom we remember, but we still believe that our Lord's especially present at His Supper in a unique sense that surpasses that of other worship services.

If we do believe that we do eat the Lord's Supper in the Lord's presence, then our attitude should be different. Why? Because where we eat a meal and whom we eat with usually affect how we eat that meal.

Examples: Imagine you received an invitation to eat supper with the **city mayor** and his family. Let's up it a nudge: say you were invited to dinner with the **governor** and his family. Why not raise it to another level: you receive an invitation to attend a banquet with the **president**, the first lady and the rest of the first family.

The higher the official title of the host the better our table manner. While supper with the city mayor will warrant our **good** table manner, dinner with the governor will bring out our **better** eating habit, but banquet with the president will have us on our **best** dinner etiquette. Why? Because the importance of your host or meal participant affects how you behave yourself during the meal.

If that's true, then a supper hosted by Jesus Christ the Son of God should call forth our most dignified table manner. And that's what Communion should be every time, a supper with the One we will crown KING of Kings and LORD of Lords. Both ourselves and our children must approach the Lord's Supper with utmost respect, because the Lord Himself is present with us, if it is indeed still The Lord's Supper.

B. Christ instituted the supper. On that inglorious night, when He would pray and sweat blood in Gethsemane before being arrested by the hands of cruel men, Jesus Christ Himself established The Lord's Supper.

1. By His command, we take the bread and remember Christ whose body it represents (**verses 23-24**). By the bread we remember the One whose body was bruised for our health, the One by whose stripes we are healed.

2. By His command, we take the cup and remember Christ whose blood it represents (**verse 25**). When we drink the wine or grape juice, we remember the One whose blood was shed as the sacrifice to forgive us and cleanse us from sin.

III. Communion is holy food, because it proclaims Christ (**verse 26**).

A. Communion proclaims that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Christ was not just another victim of Roman capital punishment by crucifixion. His death was God's approved atonement for your sins and mine. Communion proclaims the cross as Heaven's only remedy for man's sin of breaking God's moral and spiritual laws. Every time you take Communion, you become a preacher, whether you are an "ordained minister" or not. As a Communion taker, you declared the Gospel that on the cross Jesus died in your place, and because Jesus died, God the Father has forgiven your sins, and accepted you into His holy family.

B. Communion proclaims that Jesus will return from Heaven for His saints. As a Communion taker, you declare that you believe Jesus will come again, you declare that you are not all focused on the things of this earth, which are passing away. By Communion you preach that your hope is Heaven, that you will live in such a way as to give a report of your life, faith and stewardship to the Lord of soul when you leave this life.

Communion may be an earthly meal, but is for the Heaven-bound and Heavenly minded. If your vision has become a little blur, then Communion is the time to refocus, to realign your priorities, so that the soon-coming King become the desire of your heart once again. Communion motivates us to dream again of spending eternity with our Savior in Heaven.

IV. Communion is holy food, because it is served with the power of Christ.

A. It is served with the power of Christ to forgive our sins and free us from guilt (**verses 27-28,31-32,34**). You have not take Communion in the fullest sense until you have experienced total forgiveness and freedom from guilt.

B. It is served with the power of Christ to strengthen your spirit, heal your body, and sustain your life (**verses 29-30**). Paul told the Christians

of Corinth what he tells us today: If you abuse Communion, you are asking for trouble... You may experience divine judgment in the form of spiritual weakness, physical illness, or physical death.

The flip side of this threat or warning is also true: If we take Communion with the right mindset and attitude, instead of weakness we become spiritual strong; instead of sickness we receive healing in our bodies ("By His stripes we are healed"); instead of death we are poised to live our days. These benefits of taking Communion in a worthy manner are designed to keep us serving our Lord with vigor and vitality until He calls us home.

It is my prayer that this message will affect the attitude with which you approach Holy Communion. Remember it is holy food, as holy as the Holy One whose Supper it must remain.