



CONNECT

FIRST STEPS - LESSON 8: COMMUNION



Objectives

- New believers to understand the significance of communion and participate in it with faith.
- New believers to participate in communion with the right attitudes and heart posture.

Introduction

On the Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, 350 Japanese war planes bombed Pearl Harbor. 18 battle ships were sunk or destroyed, 200 airplanes were put out of commission and 3,581 servicemen were either killed or wounded. That incident shook complacency out of the Americans, who until then, insisted that they did not want to participate in a war against the Japanese. Thus America's war cry as she entered World War II was the motto: "Remember Pearl Harbor."

At the Lord's Table, we too have a battle cry and it is: "Remember Jesus Christ!" We remember the high cost of our salvation. It may be free to you and I, but it costs Jesus dearly, His body and His blood. He paid for it all with His very life.

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Hebrews 10:10-14

What Is Communion?

Holy Communion, also known as the Lord's Supper, is one of the only two ceremonies commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ, for His believers to participate. The other is water baptism. We usually take the Lord's Supper during church services and life group gatherings. The bread represents the body of Jesus broken for us and the cup represents his blood shed for our sins.

When we participate in communion, it reminds us that:

1. Jesus died on the cross to pay for the price of our sins

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 26:26-28

We have already been forgiven by God at the point of conversion, when we give our lives to Jesus. In communion, we remember Jesus' sacrifice. This ceremony does not have the power to forgive sins. The bread and the cup represent the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It should remind us of God's new covenant of His eternal love and faithfulness.

2. Jesus will come again

This ceremony is not only a command for Christians to observe, but it also reminds us of His second coming (**1 Corinthians 11:26**). We can have confidence that Jesus will definitely return.

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:26

"Until he comes" shows the continuance for us to participate in this ceremony, which is to last until Christ's second coming. The certainty of Christ's second coming; leads us forward to expect and believe that He will come again.

Reflection Station

1. Can I participate in communion?

Communion is for every believer who has been born again and truly understands the love of Jesus. Every born again Christian should not be denied the opportunity to receive communion. We may have the misunderstanding that we are not good enough to participate in this ceremony. The truth is: none of us are good enough for Christ. We need to come before God with a repentant heart (**1 John 1:9**), desire to walk a new life with Him (**Acts 26:20**), and hate sins (**Hebrews 1:9**). We receive communion with the recognition of God's grace (**Ephesians 2:8**).

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.

Acts 26:20b

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Hebrews 1:9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

Attitudes In Receiving Communion

Communion is an outward ritual; but its significance lies in the attitudes of the hearts of those who partake. When we come to the Lord's Supper, we should first look to ourselves, and then look to Christ.

1. Examine our hearts

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

1 Corinthians 11:28

In **1 Corinthians 11:28**, the apostle Paul tells us that each person should examine himself before he partakes of the elements of the Supper. We should prepare our hearts when we receive the communion so that we will worship God in spirit and not by rituals.

In the evening before Jesus was crucified, Jesus shocked the disciples by announcing that the hand of the one betraying Him was on the table. We have to understand the context. In those days, sharing a meal with someone was an act of friendship and loyalty. To betray one with whom you had eaten was a terrible thing, let alone to betray our Lord Jesus Christ. Not just Judas, but also the rest of the disciples would shortly abandon Jesus in their confusion and fear.

But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Luke 22:21-24

The disciples gave in to pride, which led them into an argument about which of them was the greatest. Like the disciples, we all are prone to selfish and sinful behaviour. The Lord's Supper is a time for us to pause and examine our actions over the past week. Is there any selfish or prideful thing that we have done? Did we dishonour our Saviour through our actions?

If the answer is "yes", Paul instructs us to examine ourselves and then to partake **(1 Corinthians 11:28)**. In other words, if the Spirit convicts us of some sin that we have yet to confess, bring it to Him and ask for His forgiveness and mercy. There is forgiveness available for every sin in the blood of Christ. Come to Him in repentance and He will forgive us.

2. Understand the grace and sacrificial love of Jesus

If we look to ourselves for too long, we would end up in despair. Someone once said, *"For every look at yourself, take two looks at Christ."* In fact, the point of looking to ourselves is to make us despair so that we do not trust in our own righteousness to commend us to God. As we see the sinfulness of our own hearts, we should be driven to cling on to Christ and His death on the cross for us. He alone is our hope and salvation.

During the Last Supper, Judas surprised the eleven, but he did not surprise Jesus.

The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!
Luke 22:22

In fact, as early as the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus announced that one of the twelve would betray Him.

Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)
John 6:70-71

Scripture shows that Judas' betrayal and the plots of the Jewish leaders could not stop Christ's work in setting up His Kingdom. They were responsible for their horrible sin, and yet they fulfilled God's predetermined plan. Jesus sovereignly laid down His life of His own accord.

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.

John 10:17-18

His death on the cross was no accident; instead it was a part of God's decree even before the foundation of the world, because of His love for us.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:11

Times of communion should cause us to marvel at God's sovereign grace!

3. Receive communion with thanksgiving

Jesus began the Supper by giving thanks.

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Luke 22:17-19

The Greek word is transliterated as {*eucharisteō*} (i.e., from which we get the term "Eucharist"). Jesus gave thanks for the cup and then passed it among the disciples. The Jewish Passover was a time to give thanks to God for His great deliverance in the Exodus. Similarly, the Communion is a time for us to thank God for His great salvation given to us through His death, and to hope and rejoice in His grace.

4. Affirm our loyalty to Christ and renew our commitment

God has pledged His affection and loyalty to us; that He willingly laid down His life for us. Similarly, when we partake communion, we should affirm our loyalty to Christ.

During the Last Supper, our Lord Jesus proclaimed that one of His disciples would betray Him. The disciples, including Judas, began asking Jesus, "Surely not I Lord?" (In the case of the eleven, it was a sincere question that reflected their lack of confidence in their own spiritual strength. In Judas' case, it was a hypocritical attempt to cover his deceit.)

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"
Matthew 26:20-22

Before we participate in communion, we should ask ourselves whether we are committing our lives to Him and loving Him. Let communion be a time for us to renew our commitment to follow Him and to live for Him.

Reflection Station

1. Do I have any differences (disagreement, misunderstanding, dispute or argument) with anyone before participating in communion?

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
Matthew 5:23-24

Jesus showed His humility by washing His disciples' feet (cf. John 13:1-17). We must be humble towards each other before we come into God's presence in communion. If we have done wrong to someone or there is someone we have not forgiven, we need to exercise or receive forgiveness before taking Communion. These groups of people include our brothers and sisters in church, family members, friends and colleagues.

Communion And The Church

A Reader's Digest article, "What Good Is a Tree?", explains that when the roots of trees grow and meet, a substance that reduces root competition is released. In fact, this unknown fungus helps link roots of different trees - even of dissimilar species, so much so that an entire forest may be linked together. One tree with access to water, another to nutrients, and another to sunlight, have the means to "feed" one another in very beneficial ways.

Like these trees in a forest ecosystem, Christians need to support one another by coming together for regular Communion. Communion is the highlight of corporate worship and Christian fellowship. This is what Jesus did with his twelve disciples at the Last Supper. He took a loaf of bread, broke it, and ate together with His disciples.

And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

Luke 22:15

When we do this today, it signifies that we are members of the same body of Christ, i.e.: the church. The church family comprises of many parts, but form one body. We need to be united, supportive and love each other.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12

In the early church, Christians broke bread in their homes and in the temple courts every day. We can participate in this ceremony at any convenient place as long as we realise its spiritual meaning, such as in our homes, in life group, in the church, at annual retreats or in any special meetings.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47

Conclusion

Just like the photos with our love ones (family and friends) which often remind us of good times spent together, our Lord Jesus Christ has left us a snapshot of Himself for us to remember Him by – the Lord’s Supper. We should pause and look at it often. When we do, it should remind us of His great love for us as shown supremely on the cross. It should fill our hearts with the desire to see Him when He comes again. It should make us look at ourselves and ask, *“Am I ready to meet Him? Is there anything in my life that needs to be dealt with before I meet my Bridegroom face to face?”* It should touch our hearts and make us say, *“Thank you God for what You have given us in Christ!”*

Communion should not be taken as a religious ritual. Believers will continue to partake of communion as often as possible, meaningfully, until Christ’s second coming.

Communion reminds us of His fulfilled promise: The finished work on the cross; and His assurance: Christ’s second coming.

Memory Verse

FOR WHENEVER YOU EAT THIS BREAD AND DRINK THIS CUP, YOU PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH UNTIL HE COMES.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:26



HOPE
CHURCH

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, sorted in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the church. Requests for permissions or further information should be addressed to the office@hope-church.com.au.

Scripture quotations (unless otherwise indicated) are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.