

# "THE LORD'S SUPPER"

## OPEN COMMUNION

By Mike Burnham

I. "Prerequisites to participation in the Lord's Supper." first, **"Regeneration"**. Being a church ordinance implies the salvation of all partakers. The Lord's Supper is the outward expression of a life in the believer, nourished and sustained by the life of Christ, John 6:53. It cannot therefore be partaken of by one who is **"dead through trespasses and sins."** in 1 Cor. 11:28, the injunction that each communicant "examine himself" implies that faith which will enable the person to "discern the Lord's body" as a prerequisite to participation.

Secondly, **"baptism"**. The ordinance of baptism was instituted and administered long before the supper, Mat. 21:25. (b). The disciples who first celebrated it had **all been previously baptized, Acts 1:22.** (c). The command of Christ fixes the place of baptism as first in order after discipleship, Mat. 28:19,20. (d). All the recorded cases show this to have been the order observed by the first church, Acts 2:41. (e). The symbolism of the ordinances requires that baptism should precede the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26; Rom. 6:4-6). They are pictures in action. First the person is born again by being buried with Christ in baptism and raised to a new life, he then partakes of the body and blood of the New Testament, remembering what Christ has done for him which is symbolized in baptism, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for his salvation. (f). Jesus said, "do not give that which is holy unto the dogs (lost people)." (Mat. 7:6)

Dr. W. A. Criswell called attention to the analogy of the Old Testament Passover that placed restrictions upon those desiring to participate in the regular program of divine worship. He noted, "in the Old Testament, circumcision served as the sign of the Old Covenant, and Exodus 12:48 specifically states that in ancient Israel a man was to bear in his body the sign of the covenant (circumcision) before

he ate the Passover meal." (the doctrine of the church, page 105). Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant. It is not the desire of true churches to restrict or limit the Lord's Supper beyond the limitations placed upon it by the scriptures. By meeting the biblical prerequisites, any one may partake of the Lord's Supper.

Thirdly, "**Church Membership**". The Lord's Supper is a church ordinance, observed by churches of Christ (1 Cor. 11:20,33; Luke 22:14,19,20). For this reason, membership in the church naturally precedes the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a symbol of church fellowship, a church in fellowship with each other together fellowshiping with Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 11:33. It was not given to individual persons but to an organized body of baptized believers. Not all believers in Christ were present at the first celebration of the supper, but only those organized into a body--the apostles. I know that some don't believe that the church was in existence before Pentecost, this is one of errors that grew out of the universal invisible church theory. There had to be a church before Pentecost, otherwise there would have been nothing to which those converted upon that day could have been "added" (Acts 2:47). The apostles, regenerate as they were, united to Christ by faith and in that faith baptized (Acts 19:4), under Christ's instruction, engaged in common work for him. They were called out and organized (Matt. 10:1-5). They had a treasurer (John 13:29). As a body they were given authority and a set of rules to function by (Matt. 18:15-18). As a body they celebrated for the first time the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29). They were given a commission (Matt. 28:16-20). They had a meeting electing Matthias to take the place of Judas (Acts 1:15-26). All these things happened before Pentecost. On Pentecost the church was "equipped" (given power, Acts 1:8) for its work by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, not born. Nowhere does it even hint that the church was "born" on Pentecost. The Lord's Supper should then be observed only by those who are accountable to the discipline of the church, or body. If the supper is simply communion of the individual with Christ then the individual could give it to himself anytime, anywhere. But this is not what is taught, 1 Cor. 11:33. There is not one instance recorded in scripture where only one person

took the Lord's Supper.

Fourthly, **"An Orderly Walk"**. A disorderly walk is a broken fellowship with Christ and therefore with the church. It may be classified under three headings, immoral conduct (1 Cor. 5:9,10,11,13), disobedience to the commands of Christ (2 Thess. 3:6,11,15), causing strife and or divisions (Tomans 16:17; Titus 3:10,11). In 1 Cor. 11:17-20 Paul told the Corinthian church that they could not eat the Lord's Supper while there were heresies, divisions, selfishness, drunkenness, etc.

**The local church is to judge whether these prerequisites are fulfilled in the case of persons desiring to partake of the Lord's Supper. Only of the local churches own membership can the church make a knowledgeable judgment.**

Some say that closed communion is a hindrance to union among Christians. Christ desires union in the truth. Truth and untruth will necessarily cause a division if Christians are living the word of God. Baptists are not responsible for the separation, God and his word are. I would love to have church fellowship with other churches, but as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 5:6,7, a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, I am afraid of untruth creeping into the Lords' church and spreading throughout its members, (2 Corinthians 11:2-4). Untruth "always" leads to more untruth. He tells his churches to be a separated and peculiar people based on the truth of his word. The church has an uncompromising commitment to truth, (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Cor. 4:2; Prov. 23:23). To disregard truth is both morally wrong and spiritually dangerous.

I don't think anyone would argue that it is much easier to go along with the crowd than to stand firm on God's word. I believe in closed communion not because it's easier or because of a lack of love for my brothers and sisters in Christ. I believe it because that's what God's word teaches and I have no desire, nor would I if I could, to change it, because I am persuaded that God knows much better than I the way things should be. Besides, Paul said to keep the ordinances as they were delivered (1 Cor. 11:2). Whether a person believes he is talking about doctrines or

the two ordinances of the church doesn't matter because the same holds true whichever is believed and the two ordinances are doctrine.

**II.** Open communion lets the unbaptized, the excluded, the heretic, the troublemaker, the lost, the cult-members, etc., take part in that which the Lord commanded his church because the church has no control, no way of knowing those outside the church that may want to take part. What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

Does the church have the right to exclude Christians from the Lord's Supper? Isn't that bigotry and narrow mindedness? No! It is only loyalty to truth. Visible churches were founded to be **"the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15)**. The church cannot compromise truth for the sake of fellowship because fellowship has to be based on truth, and to compromise truth is to make it an untruth, a lie. To compromise is to partake of the lie (2 John 9-11). Someone may say that "love" is more important than the "ordinances". But the mark of love is, "to keep Christ's commandments," (John 14:15). Love for our brethren requires reproof against their errors, which at times requires being separate from them. We don't show love towards them by fellowshiping with them in their error.

Open communion tends to do away with all church discipline. It leads to open church membership, without reference to the qualifications required in scripture, which tends to do away with the visible church altogether. If all saved people are members of the church, then there are no requirements except salvation, no examination on the part of the church as to the existence of any scriptural qualifications in those who would unite with it, there are none. If they are saved, they are already united by virtue of their salvation. No discipline, no way to keep the church pure and doctrinally sound. Baptism (immersion or otherwise, since in open communion they cannot be distinguished) is unimportant. If all the different denominations make up the true body of Christ then we have division and confusion in the body which violates the principles of the church as the "pillar and ground of

the truth," and the principles of unity in 1 Cor. 12. Christ becomes the head of a body that teaches and practices many diverse doctrines.

**III.** 1 Cor. 11:27-29...Paul is not talking about individual worthiness or unworthiness, for none of us are worthy except in Christ Jesus. But eating and drinking in an unworthy manner, not discerning the blood and body of our Lord. Our minds are to be upon the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for our redemption and the forgiveness of our sins and his broken body torn asunder by the wrath of God in our place that we might have life everlasting. To take this supper for worldly reasons or pleasures is to bring the judgment of God upon our heads. We endeavor to make sure things are right between us and our brothers and sisters so we can have joy in our fellowship together in our fellowship with Christ, and that nothing will hinder our pure thoughts of what Christ has done.

Open communion came mainly with the belief in the universal invisible church during the reformation. It was natural that if all believers are in the universal invisible church then all believers are able to partake of the Lord's Supper in any visible church they feel like. We are all part of the same body aren't we? No, we are not! There is only the visible church that has been in existence since the apostles unto today. Jesus said, "the gates of hell would not prevail against it." he also said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age." he didn't tell these things to an invisible universal church, he told these things to his visible local church and it is in existence today. The visible church involves several functioning bodies, (1 Cor. 12:27, the church at Corinth was one body), each complete in itself (Eph. 4:11-14; Christ didn't give these gifts to the universal invisible church because it is non-functioning and non-existent, so they must have been given to each individual church, with many members and diversity of gifts (1 cor. 12:12-26). All of these visible churches, these several bodies, will during the judgment seat of Christ become one "**visible**" body when Christ picks out his bride from among "his" churches, not someone elses churches, (2 cor. 11:2-4; eph. 5:25-27,32; rev. 19:7-

9). There never has been and never will be an **"invisible"** universal church. 1 corinthians 12 is not talking about an invisible universal church, see v-27. **"ye"** means **"ye corinthians"**, are the **"body"**, also in verse 12. For the Holy Spirit to give all those gifts and officers to a non-functioning, universal, invisible body would be meaningless.

#### **IV. "The Lord's Supper and its meaning"**

According to the gospels the Lord's Supper was instituted within the context of the Jewish Passover which Jesus observed with his disciples (his church), Matt. 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-23. The Jewish Passover was regarded as the most important of the many Jewish Old Testament observances.

The Exodus of the Israelites from the bondage of Egyptian slavery was the most significant redemptive act of the Old Testament (they were saved from judgment by the blood of the lamb) (Exodus 12). To commemorate that miraculous deliverance, God instituted the Passover, which was to be observed by the faithful Israelites on the evening of the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year (Ex. 12:2,3), which would correspond to late march or early April on our calendar. The Passover feast was meant to be an annual memorial to god's deliverance of Israel. Each year the families of Israel were to reenact the first Passover, by which the redemption from Egypt was retold as part of the observance. By that means they were reminded, and their children were instructed about the history of the deliverance and God's redemption. It was a feast or remembrance to the Israelites just as the Lord's Supper is to the local church. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at the end of the Passover meal with his apostles, as representative of his church. Just as the Passover was instituted the night before God provided deliverance from the bondage of slavery, the Lord's Supper was instituted the night before God provided deliverance from the bondage of sin.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:18,20,24-26, 28, set forth the Lord's Supper as a memorial, a thanksgiving, a fellowship, a covenant, a testimonial, a hope, and an examination.

A. **"a memorial"**...Paul said in 1 Cor. 11:24, that Jesus said, **"this do in remembrance of me."** the word **"for"** in **"for you"** carries the sense of **"on behalf of"**. Jesus did something **"on behalf of us"** that we could never do for ourselves. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is to be a perpetual reminder that Jesus secured redemption through the sacrifice on the cross. When the believers in church relationship come to the Lord's table, they should remember that by the sacrifice of Christ, pictured by the broken bread and fruit of the vine, atonement was made for sin, they were set free from the bondage of sin.

B. **"a thanksgiving"**...v-24 "and when he had given **thanks**". The word eucharist comes from this Greek word **"given thanks."** it means to be thankful or grateful for an undeserved gift, a gift by grace. The word "for" tells us the reason for thanksgiving. We thankfully praise God for the free gift of his son, and Christ Jesus for what he has done, is doing and is going to do on our behalf.

C. **"a fellowship"**...in verses 18-20 Paul was attempting to deal with the problem of divisions in the church at Corinth and at the same time stressing the importance of unity, and the necessity for genuine fellowship as prerequisite for observing the Lord's Supper.

The concept of fellowship is also expressed in 1 cor. 10:16 where the word communion (koinonia) is commonly used to express Christian fellowship. The church fellowships in the sacrifice of Christ and the benefits from his sacrifice (v-18). In verse 17 unity is stressed. A single loaf is used at the Lord's Supper symbolizing and bringing about unity. Though the local church has many members they are one loaf, that is, one body: "for" they all are partakers (or all fellowship) of that one bread (loaf) which is Christ. Fellowship with Christ brings about unity and fellowship within the church.

D. **"a covenant"**...in verse 25 the word "testament" is from the Greek word

"diatheekee" which is also the word for "covenant". It was common in Old Testament rituals for a covenant to be ratified by blood, (Exodus 24:8). The book of Hebrews has many references to the blood of the New Testament covenant, Heb. 9:22-28; 10:16-29. Each time we partake of the Lord's Supper we recount the shed blood of Jesus Christ on our behalf for the forgiveness of sin and that blood that binds the New Covenant that God made to man of salvation by grace through faith.

E. **"a testimonial"**... In 11:26 the word **"shew"** (katagellete) has the meaning of "to announce clearly" and is sometimes translated "preached (Acts 4:2); preach (Acts 17:3); shew (Acts 16:17); declare (Acts 17:23); declaring (1 Cor. 2:1); teach (Acts 16:21); is spoken of (Rom. 1:8)." Dr. Criswell wrote, "when the local church comes together to observe the Lord's Supper, it literally is preaching a sermon on the Lord's death and his return. Each time you observe the Lord's Supper, you preach the atoning death of our Lord and his future return. You proclaim it; declare it; you act it out as a testimony to all who are present." (*The Doctrine of the Church*, page 102).

F. **"a hope"** ...in verse 26 we are told that we are to observe the Lord's Supper, as often as the local church chooses, **until the lord Jesus Christ come for us**. As he was concluding the original Lord's Supper, Jesus said in Matt. 26:29, "But I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom." this could be the supper referred to by John in Rev. 19:9, as the Marriage Supper of the lamb. The bride (the local church) is to keep the Lord's Supper in anticipation of the bridegroom's (Jesus Christ) coming for her. The coming of Jesus Christ is the Christians hope, (Titus 2:15). Hope in the New Testament is a certainty not a maybe.

G. **"an examination"**...many have been confused about 1 Cor. 11:27-29. If the Lord's Supper were based on personal worthiness, none would qualify to take it. But in this passage Paul was using the word as an adverb to describe the manner or way of observing the supper, rather than as an adjective in describing the participants. The important statement is the last part of verse 29..."not discerning



the lord's body." Paul was saying that the intent and purpose of the Lord's Supper was important. Verse 30 tells us that some of the Corinthians were "weak and sickly" and others had "died" as a result of perverting the Lord's Supper. How had they perverted it? Verse 21, by making it an ordinary meal to satisfy physical hunger, and others used it as an occasion to get drunk. Verse 18, they observed it as a divided congregation. 1 cor. 5, they observed it with known sin of a public nature in the church. Paul mentioned a list of sins in 1 Cor. 5:11, and then concluded the verse with..."with such an one no not to eat." the occasion of the Lord's Supper is a time of personal examination, keeping in mind that the adverb "worthy" is used to describe the manner or action of the observance. It is also a time for the church as a whole to examine the unity of the body, and the godliness of the membership prior to partaking the Lord's Supper.

One last thing is mentioned in verse 33. We are to **"tarry one for another."** we are to prefer one another, in love. This is to show the unity and love in the local church as they fellowship together in their fellowship with Christ Jesus.

H. **"who should administer the Lord's Supper?"**... The authority for administering the Lord's Supper lies within the responsibility of the Lord's New Testament Church, to whom he personally gave it. The rather lengthy statement that Paul made about the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11 was clearly addressed "unto the church of God which is at Corinth, (1 Cor. 1:2). We have no scripture or examples that would even suggest that the Lord's Supper be included as part of inter-church activities, could be administered to individuals in the hospital or rest home, or in any other capacity than within the local church under the administration of that local church. There are no "but, what if's". We are to do exactly what God has laid down in his word. No more and no less.

I. **"what are the elements to be used"**...it was shown above that the Lord's Supper was instituted on the Passover toward the end of the Passover meal. The only bread available at that time was **"unleavened bread"**, Exodus 12:3,6,7. Paul had in 1 Cor. 5:7,8 told us that leaven was a symbol or type of sin.

Unleavened bread is symbolic of the perfect and sinless body of Christ.

**"Broken"** is to be taken symbolically since none of Christ's bones were broken, (John 19:31-37). It is symbolic of his suffering, and as the bread had to be broken to become food for all in the local church who were there to receive it, so Christ had to suffer to become food for all who would receive him.

B. As to **"the fruit of the vine"**...this is an ambiguous statement that has caused a lot of controversy among Baptists. The arguments range from the ridiculous to the improbable. After studying the Greek words "genneema" (used in the Lord's Supper) meaning "to be created or produced; "oinos", the ordinary Greek word for wine; "karpos", the ordinary Greek word for fruit; "gleukous" termed "new wine" in Acts 2:13; and the different places they are used I am of the **opinion** that wine was used. But since the lord used an ambiguous term for the symbol of his blood and not the ordinary word for either wine or fruit, I believe that he left it open to either grape juice or grape wine. I say **"grape"** because that was the vine common to Israel and the scriptures, Rev. 14:18; Luke 6:44; Exodus 13:23,24,27.

Regardless of which one we choose to use, it is important that we regard it as symbolic of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. As we partake of the Lord's Supper, symbolically we are declaring our belief of the sinless and perfect body of Christ (unleavened bread) which was broken for us, (1 Pet. 3:18) and in the shed blood (wine or grape juice) of Jesus Christ, that redeemed us, (1 Pet. 1:18,19). 1 Cor. 10:31.