

The Centrality of Communion in the Body of Christ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Life gets interesting about the time you turn three. In addition to speaking phrases that are 75% intelligible, and knowing your name, age, and gender, the average three-year-old also begins to ask the question “why?”. This cognitive milestone marks the transition out from the terrible twos.

Unfortunately, for most people the magic fades by the time we enter school, a system that rewards right answers over good questions. By adulthood, “why?” has been replaced with “what?”. We do what we’re told, or what we’ve always done, or whatever it takes to get paid.

In the church, lack of inquiry promotes institutional religion. Beautiful practices intended to draw us together, and to Christ, becoming hollow, individual routines. Take, for example, the sacred ordinance of Communion. The word comes from the Latin for sharing, and is the root for communication (sharing ideas) and community (sharing experience).

Regrettably, communion has become a victim of the casual and quick service culture in some churches. This beautiful celebration has been stripped of its value the way Solomon’s Temple was stripped of its gold. It’s become a plaster shell of what it used to be. Where it’s still practiced faithfully, the event is often a brief and shallow appendage to the main event.

So in a direct effort to draw the church back to the deadly serious nature of this memorial (1 Corinthians 11:30), healthy churches need to make it a deliberate and sacred occasion. We remember the cross, renew our covenant hope, and proclaim the gospel to both believers and all who might be looking on. We would all be well served to restore Communion to its central place within the church. Paul’s tries to make this case 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, and it can serve as a starting point for us too.

First, we must **remember** what Jesus Christ has done for us *on the cross* and *in the gospel* (1 Corinthians 11:23-24). Paul was given special revelation from God about what happened that night in the upper room. We learn that Jesus took the bread and made a startling claim. Instead of representing the provision of God for the Jews in the wilderness, this bread now symbolized his human body given as a sacrifice for fallen mankind. Jesus tells them he is the provision of God for them.

They are to remember him every time they eat it. Though Jesus would never be forgotten by the disciples, this would force them to deliberately consider what he did for every believer. It’s an exercise in remembering the gospel, and directing your thoughts away from anything else.

It’s helpful to focus your memory on at least four truths. The first is your sin (Romans 6:23), and the fact that crimes against God will not go unpunished. The second is your Savior (John 3:16), sent by God to be punished in your place. The third is your responsibility to be a fruitful and loyal follower of Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:33). The fourth, and often most neglected, is your impending resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:13), the very hope to which your faith is fixed. So essentially we must remember the gospel. Communion is about the gospel.

Secondly, we must remember that we are in a **covenant** relationship with God, and are responsible to remember his sacrifice (1 Corinthians 11:25). In the Bible, covenants were signified with blood. Several examples appear in the Bible, including agreements between God and Adam, Noah,

Abraham, Moses, and David. It's safe to say that covenants are, and will remain, the load bearing structure that holds up redemptive history.

The most important covenant is the New Covenant. It's the apogee of all of God's covenants. It represents the culmination of God's saving work when he ransoms believers through Christ, regenerates his people by his Spirit, and preserves them for his pleasure until the day of resurrection. The New Covenant, previewed in the body of Christ, is a people of God with the power to live lives of obedience and faith. This is a better covenant than any of it's predecessors (Hebrews 8:6-13).

The cup of wine in front of Jesus was the one connected to the promise of deliverance during the Passover celebration. Each year the Jews would drink that cup as a way of remembering the coming deliverance. Now Jesus tells them, and every believer after them, to drink the cup in remembrance of him.

As a practice, Passover quickly faded away from the church because it's no longer necessary. In fact, by the time Paul writes 1 Corinthians a few decades after Christ, a common meal had replaced it. There was a church dinner called a love feast where everyone was supposed to share from their abundance, and care for those in need. Today most churches simply use bite sized symbols during a short memorial ceremony. It may be shorter, but it's no less significant. The symbols are like pulling the contract out of the drawer and reading it again to remember the terms.

The third purpose, and the most important when it comes to edification and evangelism, is the fact that during communion we **proclaim** the gospel to each other, and the world (1 Corinthians 11:26). It believers and informs the world about what Jesus on the cross in fulfillment of prophesy.

Jesus tells us that whenever we set aside time to focus on his death through the celebration of communion, we are making a statement. We are proclaiming a truth that everyone needs to hear. This part is universal. Every person in the room needs to hear about the gospel represented in the symbols we share. However, it's also restricted. This is a memorial for what Jesus Christ has done for those who have put their faith in him. Therefore, part of the gospel presentation each time we gather is to call the outsider to the table in faith and repentance. Only then can we all eat the bread and drink the cup *in remembrance of him*.