

The Lord's Supper

Closed Communion – Why?

Communion – a participating fellowship, from the Greek word, “koinonia” which is translated as “communion” (KJV), “sharing” (NASB), “participation” (ESV) in **1 Cor 10:16**.

We also refer to Communion as the “Lord’s Supper” because it was initiated by Him (see **Matt 26:26-28**, **Mark 14:22-24**, **Luke 22:19-20**, **1 Cor 11:23**).

What is “Closed Communion”? There are three categories of the manner in which Communion is observed by most churches:

1. Open Communion – all who are present are invited to partake in the Lord’s Supper together
2. Close Communion – participation is limited to some degree (e.g. all professing believers, all baptized believers, all baptized believers of the same denomination, all baptized believers of the same denomination whom a church specifically allows to participate).
3. Closed Communion – participation is limited to members in good standing of a single, local congregation.

The Anchor observes Closed Communion and I have consistently taught my conviction that Closed Communion is the most defensible scriptural stance, although I have not personally made this a test of fellowship, especially with those who practice a form of Close Communion.

Why do I believe Closed Communion is the most scriptural practice?

1. The Lord’s Supper should be at least limited to baptized believers.
 - When we look at the Great Commission in **Matt 28:19-20**, it is interesting to note that participation in Communion must be included in the “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”, which is preceded by both salvation and the first ordinance, baptism. Baptism is also a symbol of identifying with the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism was emphasized in the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost (see **Acts 2:38**), which was then followed by the observance of the Lord’s Supper by those who obeyed (see **Acts 2:41-42**).
 - As previously discussed, “Communion” means a participating fellowship. At its root it signifies identifying with Jesus Christ, partaking in the fruits of His death. Those who are not saved and do not know Christ have no business at the Lord’s Table. Neither do those who would not publicly identify with Him in baptism.
 - Communion is a symbol of our ongoing fellowship with Christ and also those we share the table with, others who have been born again and identified themselves with Christ by baptism.
 - It can also be fairly confidently inferred from studying the gospel accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper in Matthew, Mark and Luke, along with John’s description of Jesus’ observance of the Passover meal that Judas Iscariot left to betray Jesus BEFORE the Lord’s Supper was instituted. Judas left after he was given the sop (bread dipped in oil or hummus – see **John 13:30**), which was before the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord's Supper

2. In **1 Cor 11:33** we are told to “tarry” or wait for one another when we partake.
 - This commandment only makes sense if we know who we are waiting for. This excludes the concept of taking Communion alone. It implies that the Lord's Supper is observed by a distinct and identifiable body of people so that the spirit of this commandment can be observed. The most logical group of people would be a local church with a defined membership.
 - We should be careful not to go to seed on this command. It is usually impossible for every member to be present due to sickness, travel, relocation, etc... To obey the spirit of this command, we should try to be reasonably accommodating to when we schedule Communion, trying to maximize participation for the health of the whole body.
3. In **1 Cor 5:11-13** we are told not to eat with a brother who has fallen into unrepentant sin.
 - This passage is clearly written to a church, in regard to their responsibility to exercise loving discipline.
 - This important command is most faithfully observed by only sharing Communion in the context of a local church with a defined membership that scripturally exercises loving discipline.
 - Again, remember the meaning of Communion, it identifies the partaker as part of a participating fellowship with Christ AND with the others with whom Communion is observed. When everyone present does not want to walk with Christ, it stains our observance (see **1 Cor 5:8**) and endangers the one who eats or drinks in an unworthy manner (see **1 Cor 11:27**).
4. In **1 Cor 10:16-17** the pieces of bread received come from one loaf, which is related to many members being part of one body.
 - **1 Cor 12:27** declares to the church of Corinth that they are Christ's body and individually members of it. The concept is that each local church is a distinct body of Christ.
 - Paul's description of the Communion bread being taken from one loaf and the members of one body partaking of the one loaf implies that Communion was observed in the context of the local church and limited to those who were of the same body.
5. In accordance with **1 Cor 11:29**, the individual needs to partake in a manner that “discerns the body”, which appears to be a reference to the local church.
 - “the body” could be either a reference to the bread which represents the Lord's body, or to the local church itself (see **1 Cor 12:27**). Both may be right, but the context leans toward the latter interpretation.
 - Bread and cup, and eat and drink are both mentioned multiple times in **verses 27-29**, but body is mentioned singularly here. Therefore it appears to refer to the church, otherwise blood would be mentioned as well.
 - The concept is that judgment was occurring for not properly recognizing the body. Notice verses 20-22 which defines their bad behavior, and Paul's summary in **verses 33-34** about the changed behavior that would protect them from judgment. The issue appears to be how they treated one another as they came together. This supports interpreting “discerning the body” as a reference to the local church.

The Lord's Supper

How Should I Prepare for the Lord's Supper?

- Spend some time meditating on the death of Christ and its benefits toward you
- Come in a serious mindset to observe this ordinance
- Seek to reconcile outstanding personal issues within the body
- Seek to confess and repent of known and unresolved sin in your life. Recall that the disciples were invited to the table by Christ right before they forsook Him. He knew it would happen, yet He invited the faithful 11 to partake. They weren't aware of the sin that lurked in them, they had just humbly examined themselves (see **Matt 26:22**).