

COMMUNION & Calvary



THE HISTORY OF
COMMUNION
AND
HOW IT RELATES
TO TODAY'S
CHURCH

Robert H. Flores

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Introduction

If you were to conduct a survey and ask any number of Christians why they come to a particular church service and you will get many different answers. Some will say, “I come for the worship.” Or, “I like the pastor’s way of preaching” or “It’s such a great group of people to fellowship with”. You would be hard-pressed to find a response like, “I come for Communion”. How sad it is when everything else, but Communion, has taken center stage in our churches today. No Christian can deny that Communion is one of the most important things we do, if not the most important thing. So, why is Communion side-stepped today?

It is an incredulous thing for Christians to throw Communion on the backburner, while they busy themselves with other forms of worship. Think about it: the preaching, music, offering and fellowship, as nice and as needful as they are, are secondary. None of those things are considered as Sacraments by the church. Let it be known that no theology or tradition supersedes Scripture (Mark 7:7). And if it can be established that Communion today is vastly different from 2,000 years ago, there needs to be a renaissance of Communion. And I think it can be established.

There seems to be a deception regarding Communion today—a deception that has not only affected the act of Communion, but also how often it is to be taken. To properly understand this important Sacrament we cannot rely on hundreds of years of tradition, but indeed must go back all the way to first century Jerusalem and beyond to find our answers. The New Testament and early church history and Old Testament types will all be examined in the following pages regarding how often Communion is to be taken and in which way. I will also be using a lot of cross-examination between the Big Four (preaching, music, offering and fellowship), comparing and contrasting between the other Sacrament of Baptism and also throwing in some poignant satirical cartoons. I am convinced that for revival to start in America two things must happen in regards to Communion: (a) do it right and (b) do it frequently. Therefore, this treatise is divided into two main parts: the Manner of Communion and the Frequency of Communion. So without any more delay, let’s begin.

PART ONE: MANNER OF COMMUNION

What is Communion?

Communion is defined as a “ritualistic practice, usually during a worship service, in which Christians partake of bread and wine (or grape juice) with the

purpose of remembering Christ, receiving strength from Him, and rededicating themselves to His cause. It is one of two sacraments or ordinances instituted by Christ to be observed by His church until He returns! ¹ Paul recounts how Communion was initiated that first night:

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

“Communion” (1 Corinthians 10:16) also goes by other names in the New Testament such as the “Lord’s Supper” (1 Corinthians 11:20), the “Lord’s Table” (1 Corinthians 10:21), “giving thanks (Greek: Eucharist)” (Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Corinthians 11:24), “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11) and “Love Feast” (Jude 12). For the purpose of this treatise, I will primarily refer to this Sacrament as “Communion”.

Communion was born in the upper room on the night that Jesus was betrayed (circa A.D. 30). The Last Supper was actually a Passover Seder, celebrating the salvation of Israel from Egyptian slavery, with the blood of a lamb. However, Jesus instituted something new that night:

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

(Matthew 26:26-28)

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery has this to say about that Last Supper:

“It [the Last Supper] is a meal among former strangers who have become friends, forming a new kind of family with Jesus as head of household. The elements of the supper (unleavened bread, cup of wine) are Passover elements (Ex 12; Deuteronomy 16) which Jesus, presiding over this remembrance of ancient deliverance, reinterprets and renames, designating himself as the sacrificial lamb for the coming ultimate deliverance. The Last Supper carries all of the ceremonial significance of the Passover as a familial and faith-community bonding event.”⁹

In summary, Communion is an institution given to us, by Jesus, to help us remember His sacrifice on Calvary. Communion is essential to our faith. It is not “in place of” our faith, but, in fact, a means to nurture our faith. In what other way is God’s physical sacrifice made real to our physical senses? Communion is a weekly sealing of the covenant we have made with Him. God knows that we humans have to be constantly reminded of His grace. This is God’s reminder to us. God acts in a very real and powerful way when we partake in His Communion, and, if we ignore it, it is to our own detriment.

Where is Jesus in Communion?

There are four primary views as to where Jesus is in Communion:

1. **Transubstantiation View:** Developed by Vatican II for Roman Catholics, this view holds that the physical bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus when the instituted words are spoken by the priest. It maintains that although the physical properties of the bread and wine do not change to the physical senses, the inner reality of the bread and wine undergoes a spiritual change.
2. **Consubstantiation View:** Developed by Martin Luther, this doctrine holds that Jesus’ body and blood are really present “in, with and under” the physical bread and wine. The elements, themselves, do not change into Jesus’ body and blood. For example, just like how heat is present in hot iron, so is Jesus present in the elements of bread and wine.
3. **The Symbolic View:** Developed by Ulrich Zwingli, this view maintains that the bread and wine are only symbols of Jesus’ body and blood and that Jesus is not truly present in the elements of bread and wine. He also taught that Communion is primarily a memorial of Jesus’ finished work on the cross and that Christians, in partaking it, renew their pledge to one another and to the resurrected Christ.
4. **The Dynamic View:** Developed by John Calvin and the Reformed denominations, this view stands between the Consubstantiation View of Luther and the Symbolic View of Zwingli. Calvin, too, agreed that the elements of bread and wine are to be understood symbolically. However, he maintains that Christ is still spiritually and dynamically present in the elements, through the Holy Spirit. ¹

For the purpose of this treatise, I will treat all the views, with the exception of the Symbolic view, as valid. Frankly, if the symbolic view is valid, then this entire treatise is a waste of time. Personally, I think the symbolic view turns

Communion into a fiction with no inherent reality—a fiction devoid of Christ. It is akin to saying Baptism is just symbolic (which is erroneous to say the least).

Jesus is indeed present in Communion. It is through Communion that the Holy Spirit reminds us of Jesus' sacrifice for us as Luke testifies to:

“And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their *eyes were opened*, and they *knew him*; and he vanished out of their sight... And they told what things were done in the way, and *how he was known of them* in breaking of bread.” (Luke 24:30-31,35 emphasis mine).

Blessings from Communion

The blessings we receive through Communion are staggering. The concept of past, present and future, perhaps, can be helpful in understanding the ways in which ways God blesses us:

1. Communion is a time of remembrance of Christ's work on the cross. Reflection of his pain and suffering and the sin that was laid on him are all part of taking the bread and the wine. It also creates in us a thankful heart for God leading us out of sin and death.
2. Communion is a time of refreshing of what Christ is doing in our lives in this day and age. Jesus is now risen and lives inside us! Celebration and thankfulness for His enduring grace that covers us every day also, should be our reflection.
3. Communion is a time for recommitment and anticipation. We are to examine our own lives and rededicate our lives to the service of Christ. It is a time of renewal and strength, given to us by the Holy Spirit, as we patiently wait for His Return. ¹

Communion is for God's own people. It is a gift He has given us. He seeks to shower us with the blessings that Communion brings, and, there are always blessings in obedience to God.

Communion and Baptism: Compared and Contrasted

When talking about Communion it is helpful to keep in mind Baptism, the other Sacrament that Jesus instituted. Baptism is a heated topic today and it should be, because woe to anyone who does not get it right. Everyone wants to be right regarding Baptism. You are either baptized right (full immersion only) or you

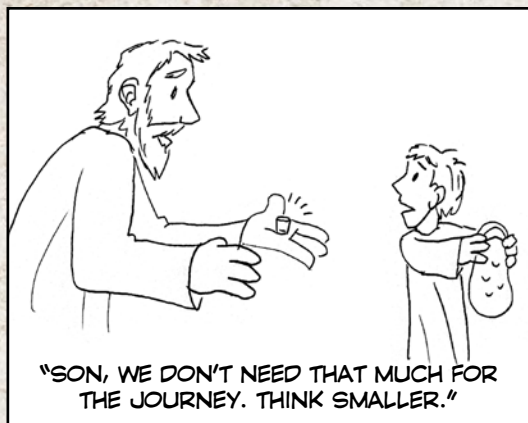
are baptized wrong (every other way). Communion should be no different. Baptism is a highly symbolic and true spiritual experience done in obedience to God once, Communion is a highly symbolic and true spiritual experience done in obedience to God throughout a Christian's life. These fundamental Sacraments have some interesting similarities between them: Baptism is done to the outside of the body; Communion is done to the inside of the body. Baptism is a one-time thing, ushering you into the Kingdom; Communion is a frequent activity, reminding you that you are in the Kingdom. Baptism and Communion set believers apart from unbelievers. Both Baptism and Communion are God-ordained outlets that the Holy Spirit can work through and touch someone's life. Both are meant to draw you closer to God

Jewish Roots

Communion cannot be amputated from its Apostolic Jewish roots. Lest Americans think that they Americanize Communion, they need only to look at the Sacrament of Baptism. The process of Baptism in Jerusalem 2000 years ago is the exact same as it is in Los Angeles in the 21st Century. The Sacrament has not changed. Full immersion back yonder in a lake is the same as full immersion in a swimming pool today. Likewise, Communion is the same. Who is the American Church to think that they can absolve Communion from its Jewish roots? If Christians are going to do Communion right, we need to stay within the context of its Jewish Founder's Jewish way of instituting it. Communion isn't something that has the freedom to change like music or preaching to adapt it to its particular culture. Communion must be retained as it was at that Last Supper, if the Church is to obey God and be blessed.

Passover Seder

What was Jesus' Last Supper (i.e. a Passover Seder) like? Do Christians think that each of the disciples took a little wafer or a little broken cracker and got



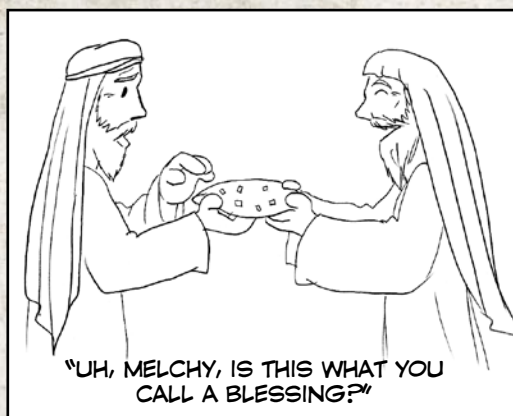
filled up? How can we believe that Jesus will "fill us up" when we have no reminder or symbol remotely resembling that promise? It's called the Lord's Supper, not the Lord's Nibble. Jesus fully intended for Communion to fill up His sheep. Jesus is our Matzoh! Nothing else could ever come close to filling us up. Christians need to be fed both spiritually and physically. Communion,

along with Baptism, as opposed to any of the Big Four, is the only thing that does both. Preaching of the Word is pure spiritual. Worshiping God is pure spiritual. Giving your offering is pure physical. Fellowshiping with other believers can waver between the two. Isn't it only fair that if Christians give physically (tithes), that they should also receive physically (Communion)? Pastors are doing their congregations a disservice by not offering it at all, or, when they do, not Jewishly!

Melchizedek as Type

Most scholars agree that Melchizedek was the Pre-incarnate Christ (a theophany). This Melchizedek offered bread and wine to Abraham:

“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.” (Genesis 14:18-20)



It is absurd to think that Melchizedek blessed Abraham with a small meal of bread and wine. He, most assuredly, brought enough for a celebration—a celebration typifying Christ's sacrifice 2,000 years later.

Meals as Covenants

Communion is indeed a covenant—a covenant made by God to His people. There are quite a few examples of meals that have occurred for the purpose of making a covenant:

1. (Isaac and Abimelech) “And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.” (Genesis 26:30)
2. (Jacob and Laban) “Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and

returned unto his place. (Genesis 31:54,55)

3. (70 elders, Moses, Aaron and God). And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink. (Exodus 24:11)

Other examples of meal covenants include: Nehemiah 8:9-12, 18; Exodus 24:11; Deuteronomy 12:6-7, 14:26; John 6:53-58; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, 11:25-26; Rev 3:20, 19:9. God is no stranger to making covenants with men: with Adam it was the animal skins, with Noah it was the rainbow, with Abraham it was circumcision, with Moses it was the blood of the covenant, with Joshua it was circumcision of the second generation, and with the disciples and the Church it is Communion. From the Tree of Life to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, fellowship and covenants between God and his people have been instituted by meals.

Real Meal

If Communion was done the way Jesus instituted it to be, there would be no need to sell hot dogs, hamburgers or tamales on Sunday morning. That's right: Communion was meant to fill you up, symbolizing Christ filling you up! In the Jewish New Testament Commentary, Daniel Stern states:

“Even though a bread-and-wine ceremonial meal antedates Yeshua, it seems unreasonable to me to suppose that this could have been anything like the morsel of bread and the sip of wine offered at Communion Services in churches today. Bread was the staff of life, especially when served with oil or spices or both (as in the Middle East today); and surely enough was served to satisfy hunger. Even if it wasn't a full meal, one should think of it as at least a snack! The wine too was nourishing as well as refreshing.” (page 934) ²

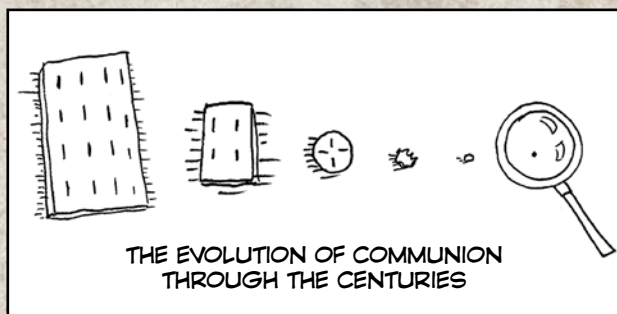
Communion was indeed a real meal. In fact, due to it being a real meal, there was such a danger of gluttony and people getting drunk that Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians:

“For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?” (1 Corinthians 11:21,22a).

Lest an opponent of Communion say, “Ahah! If we turned Communion into a real meal, people would get drunk and turn to gluttony! That's why we don't

serve Communion!” That excuse is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Just because there is a danger of gluttony and of disrespect, it doesn’t mean the rest of the Church should throw God’s institution away.

The benefits of Communion should not be subverted by the sin of a few. The Church is to obey God and the others He will judge.



Other Food Offerings

People come to church to be fed spiritually and physically. It has always been that way. But somewhere along the way it seems the Church has lost sight of that. Everyone knows the fact that when Christians get together, they want to eat, but rather than going back to the Biblical way of doing things, Church organizers bring Krispy Kremes and breakfast burritos to sell to their hungry congregations Sunday morning. They have missed the connection between hunger and Communion. Could it be that if church leaders fed their congregations physically during the service (i.e. Communion), that there would be no need to buy any of the world’s food offerings? If Cappuccinos and pastries are the Communion of the day, then what is stopping the Church from really showing irreverence to God and start serving those things inside the building FOR Communion? The world’s food is what is filling churches up physically! So why not? Jesus didn’t say “Take this doughnut and take this Cappuccino.” He said “Take this bread and take this cup (of real wine)”. It is as if church leaders know that there is a problem, but they are looking to the world for its solution, not the New Testament. Is it any wonder why the American church is in its stagnant, mediocre state? If Jesus came to your church on Sunday morning, would He cast out the coffee and doughnut vendors?

Justin Martyr testifies that Communion is of the utmost importance and is totally different from any other meal we partake of:

“For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.” (Chapter LXVI, Apology I) ⁴

Whatever happened to Nehemiah's way of thinking? “. . .if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt.” (Nehemiah 10:31)

Early Church Communion

The early church celebrated Communion with much respect and thankfulness—much different than how Christians celebrate it today. Justin Martyr described a typical Lord's day among the early church:

“There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. This word Amen answers in the Hebrew language to *genoito* [so be it]. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.” (Chapter LXV, Apology I) ⁴

Oh, if only we could have that respect for Communion that the early church had! If only the church would do Communion Jesus' way!

Unworthiness

Paul's sober warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32:

“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

Christians point to this verse for not wanting to take Communion in an “unworthy manner”. Well, I'm sorry to break the news to you, but none of us are “worthy” enough to partake of Jesus. Are any of us really “worthy” to listen

to His Word or give to His missions or to fellowship or sing praises to Him? If we are unworthy of Communion, pray tell, what ARE we worthy of? We will NEVER be good enough to take Communion and yet Jesus commanded us to do so! If we obey Him, He will cast out all our fear (1 John 4:18). The whole “I’m not worthy” excuse is another deception of Satan. He is trying to keep Christians from: (a) obeying God and (b) being blessed by God. If dissolving a church service from Communion is the “solution” to unworthy partakers, then can the Church please stop teaching the Word of God and passing the plate and singing praises to God, too? What differentiates one’s worthiness for those things from that of Communion?

Tables and Pews

Communion is also meant to bring fellowship among believers. However, part of the lack of communion, DURING Communion has to do with the introduction of pews in the Middle Ages. Frankly, it’s kind of hard to fellowship and share Communion with the back of someone’s head. The early church, if not gathered around a table, certainly ate “together”—more together than we do today:

“Christ and His Disciples reclined around a table at the Last Supper. They were face-to face with each other. The Reformers also partook of Communion seated about a

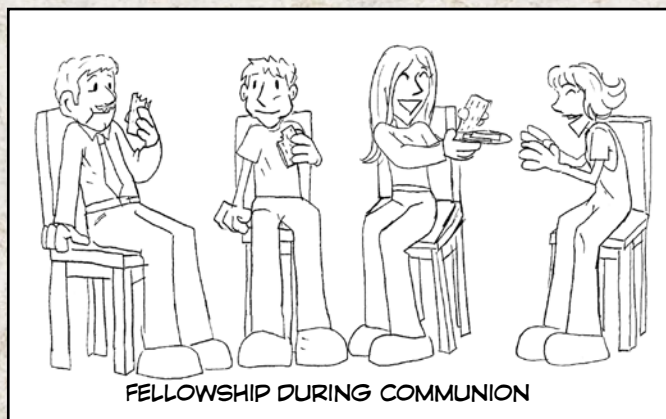


table or tables. In most circumstances, moderns look at the backs of heads of the other communicants seated ahead of them. This contributes little or nothing to the communal or oneness element of the sacrament. Such congregations do indeed depart from their meeting hall to their banquet hall in order to eat a fellowship dinner seated about tables, face-to-face with their brethren. Why they do so on this occasion but not for the Lord’s Supper is a mystery.”³

David Stern also notes that:

“Many Christians . . . have an image of the early believers meeting in homes

to eat a tiny wafer of bread and drink a symbolic amount of wine or grape juice, just as Christians do today in their churches. However, the context is not twentieth-century Christianity but first-century Judaism; and for Jews then as now, fellowship was mediated by meals. To say that the early Messianic Jews broke bread is to say neither more nor less than that they ate together.” (page 227) ²

Worldwide Unity

Can you name one activity that unites Christians worldwide? Baptism is currently the only thing. However, all of Christendom doesn't get baptized every Sunday. Shouldn't there be an activity that unites Christians EVERY Sunday? Shouldn't there be something common through every denomination, through every church, in every city, that, when the world sees Christians getting together, it is to do that ONE thing? Is there any of the Big Four that rivals Communion in that statement to the world.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the *communion of the blood of Christ*? The bread which we break, is it not the *communion of the body of Christ*? For we being many are *one bread*, and *one body*: for we are all partakers of that *one bread*.” (1 Corinthians 10:16,17; emphasis mine)

Exclusivity and Discipline

The same God who gave His Son to the world is the God who instituted Communion—a divine-exclusive rite. It is not a man-made exclusivity. Exclusivity never hurt anyone. God knows whose are His, but during Communion, unbelievers and believers alike should know, too, lest one unwittingly brings the blood of Christ upon an unbeliever's head. It can be the means by which unbelievers repent and accept Christ to be “one of the brethren”. How sad it is when churches don't exercise this great opportunity to be a witness for Jesus to the world. How sad it is not to commemorate His

sacrifice His way. Too often Christians adhere to a “Don't” list: the list of all the things that we are not to do; and that is all the world sees. There are very few fun things that Christians CAN do in the eyes of the world. So, it is ironic, that one of the fun things that the Church is allowed to do—indeed, *commanded* to



do—does not do.

Communion should also be used as a means of discipline, forbidding it to those who are out of fellowship or committing gross lawlessness. By not serving it to rebellious individuals, discipline and order are put into effect. And, even more so, in favor of weekly communion: Would a once a year disciplinary action of Communion really be effective disciplinary action?

The early Christian document, the Didache (circa A.D.105-110), also has something to say about Communion and exclusivity: “But let no one eat or drink of this eucharistic thanksgiving, but those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said: Don’t give what is holy to the dogs. (Didache 9)

Justin Martyr also described exclusivity among the early church:

“And this food is called among us Eukaristia [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined.” (Chapter LXVI, Apology I) ⁴

Interactive Worship

Another benefit of Communion has to do with interactivity. To state the obvious: Communion cannot be transmitted through technology. I’m confident that a lot of Christians would rather stay home and watch a sermon on TV or on radio because essentially the same can be found at church. The eye gate and ear gate would be fulfilled the same way as if the recipient was in a church service. So why bother going to church? The answer lies in Communion. It is the only “live worship” that cannot be transmitted through radio waves or phone lines. People would come to church to get that which they could not get anywhere else.

Worshipping God

While the Church busies itself with other forms of worship, Communion is given a secondary status—a status that no one bothers to question. Communion is thought of something that is not as beneficial as other forms of worship; not as primary. But the irony of that thinking is this: fellowship, worship, receiving the Word and giving tithes are all accomplished in Communion. I quote from Jim Rogers:

“... whatever it is that the Church is supposed to do in worship, this worship

occurs par excellence in celebrating the Lord's Supper. The Supper seems to be the logical completion of every theme proper to Christian worship. To be sure, it does not exhaust worship, not by a long shot. But when Christians intend to worship God, it seems that everything they intend to do also occurs in celebrating the Lord's Supper".⁶

Luke gives an account of how the early church operated:

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

Communion, obedience, blessings and revival were all connected in the early church. Luke uses the specific terms "doctrine", "fellowship" and "prayers" in a list that also includes "breaking of bread" (verse 42). And again, in verse 46, Luke uses the same phrase "breaking of bread" alongside other phrases such as "continuing daily with one accord", "eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart", "praising God" and "having favor with all the people". So was breaking bread all that important to the early Church? What was the result of all this "breaking of bread"? Luke tells us in verse 47: "and the Lord added to the church daily". Indeed the Church is blessed with growth and fellowship when it obeys God's Word!

Personal Thoughts

When I take that bread in my hand, I give thanks for Jesus' incredible sacrifice. I ponder God's marvelous mercy. When I take that crimson wine and taste of God's sweet but pungent sacrifice my spirit is renewed. This Communion is physical evidence that Jesus died for me. This Communion promotes unity among my brethren and myself. This Communion is a reminder to me that I am, in fact, in Christ.

Christians may think that I am being a bit legalistic when it comes to a restructuring of the act of Communion. They claim to have "freedom in Christ". All I can say to that erroneous thinking is: take a look at the Christendom today! This is the result of Christians' so-called freedom in Christ: disorder, irreverence and disobedience. This is not the freedom God has given us—freedom to sin.

Freedom in Christ never equalled the dissolution of Communion. Without Communion, the church will keep spinning its wheels trying to figure out what is wrong. I point to Communion as the place to start.

PART TWO: FREQUENCY OF COMMUNION

Brief History of Frequent Communion

Congregations every Sunday across America come to worship God. They worship Him by:

1. Listening to His Word
2. Giving of their resources
3. Singing praises to Him
4. Fellowshiping with other believers.

Has the church forgotten something? Let me ask you a very poignant question: can you imagine having music only once a month or taking an offering once a month? The point is, is that church leaders would never even consider limiting any one of those important things to only once a month (or twice a year, for that matter). So why is it done to Communion?

Most church historians acknowledge that the 1st century church celebrated weekly communion. It was not until the Middle Ages that the fear of taking communion “unworthily” began to take hold in people’s hearts and the tradition of having it less frequently began. The Roman Catholic Church began to celebrate Communion-less Mass called “prone” (Latin, *pronaus*), which was comprised of only preaching. By the time of the Reformation, the frequency of Communion was either annually or quarterly. The Reformers, particularly Calvin and Knox, desperately wanted to bring Communion back to its Apostolic roots by partaking of it weekly, but were unable to reform people’s superstitions. The tradition for monthly, quarterly, and annual Communion was going to be difficult to reform.

It was in 1968, at Vatican II, that Communion was formerly brought back to the Roman Catholic Church as not only a weekly part of Mass, but every time Mass is served. Protestant America has yet to reform this most important part of their worship and bring it back to its first century Apostolic, Jewish roots.⁷

Coming Together and Sharing Communion

Luke testifies, “And upon the *first day of the week*, when the disciples *came together to break bread*, Paul preached unto them . . .”(Acts 20:7, emphasis mine)

This verse explains the reason for “coming together”: it was for the reason to “break bread”. That was the primary purpose of coming together. This verse also gives us the all-important detail that when the disciples “came together to break bread” it was on “the first day of the week”.

Paul writes about the essential connection between “coming together” and partaking in Communion:

“Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s supper. . . Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come. (1 Corinthians 11: 17-20, 33-34)

In addition to at least “weekly Communion”, there are other hints that the early Church may have met for Communion at other times during the week. For example, Paul uses a lot of synonymous phrases for Communion in the above quotation: verse 17: “you come together” verse 18: “when you come together in church” verse 33: “when you come together to eat” verse 20: “when you meet together it is not to eat the Lord’s supper.” verse 34: “eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment.” Each description of the purpose for which the Corinthians “come together” refers to the same object -- the gathering together of the church for worship. So close is the identification between coming together for church and celebrating the Lord’s Supper, that Paul calls the coming together for worship the coming together “to eat.” And he chastises the church at Corinth, rebuking them because when they do come together, so corrupt is their practice, that “it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper.” The implication being, of course, that one of the main points of meeting together is, in fact, to eat the Lord’s supper: to say one is to mean the other.⁶

Calvin also testifies, “For there is not the least doubt that the Sacred Supper was in that era set before the believers every time they met together.”⁵

There is no doubt that when the early church “came together”, that they did so AT LEAST weekly (if not more often). And there is also no doubt that when they “came together”, the purpose for doing so revolved around the act of Communion. So, for the early Church, “coming together” was synonymous with “sharing Communion”. That’s what the New Testament tells us.

Time Issues

Now to examine the excuses for not having weekly Communion. One of the excuses has to do with not having enough time during the church service. If there is “no time” to give Communion during the service, then time has to be cut from somewhere else! If the preacher has to shorten his sermon ten minutes or if two songs have to be cut from worship—so be it. Worship is far more than just singing praises to our God and listening to the Word of God does not take precedence over obeying that Word (1 Samuel 15:22c). A church service should be Communion-centric.

Familiarity

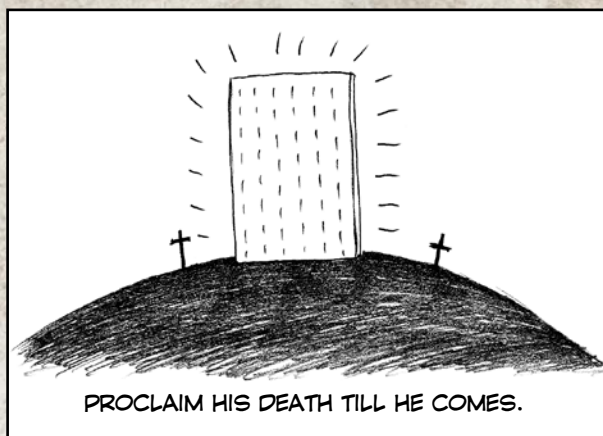
Another excuse for not having weekly Communion goes something like, “Well, we don’t want people to become so familiar with Communion that it loses meaning for them”. That is as if the government decide to pass a driving law that states: “Due to the danger of people not appreciating the privilege of being able to drive 30 days a month, there will only be one day a month in which driving is permitted. This is so people may appreciate driving more.” Ridiculous! If Communion becomes too familiar to a person, then that is between him and God. The Church’s responsibility isn’t to throw out Communion for the sake of one person’s erroneous feelings towards it. The Church is to continue to offer Communion weekly, regardless of what public opinion is or what individuals may think. The church isn’t a democracy, it’s a theocracy.

There is also a misunderstanding when it comes to “respecting” Communion. Many Christians seem to think that the less Communion is taken the more respect that is shown to it when it is taken. I want to follow this logic to its conclusion: if a Christian observed Communion once a month then that Christian would be considered respectful. If a Christian observed Communion once a year then he would be considered super-respectful. If a Christian observed it only once in his lifetime then he would be super-duper-holy-respectful. And if a Christian never did partake in Communion he might outrank Paul as one of the holiest saints ever! Honestly, does not having Communion frequently make a Christian holier? If one really wanted to respect Communion, he would be partaking in it as often as possible. (As a side note, the Jehovah’s Witnesses pass the plate of Communion at Easter, but none dare take of it, lest they announce audaciously that they are “one of the 144,000 saved believers”).

Proclaiming His Death

Another reason in favor of weekly Communion has to do with proclaiming and remembering Jesus’ sacrifice. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:26: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he

come.” Does a Christian only proclaim His death once a month? No, Jesus’ sacrifice should be at the forefront of our everyday lives. Communion is the main way in which we make that proclamation to the world.



“As often as you do this” suggests that Communion was to be taken weekly (or

sooner). A regular observance of the Lord’s Supper, was essential in renewing the early Christians lives, in the midst of continually rising persecution. There is no doubt that Communion was a major part of the early church and it was done regularly. It was around the Lord’s Table that they were safe, even for a few hours to share in that glorious Sacrament of Communion.

Testimonials to Weekly Communion

If the preceding historical and biblical evidence for weekly Communion is not enough, following are some quotes from scholars around the world, from different denominations, emphasizing weekly communion:

“The celebration of the Lord’s Supper was held to constitute an essential part of divine worship EVERY Sunday . . .” (History of the Christian Religion and Church, Vol. 1, p. 332) —Mr. Augustus Neander, Lutheran ⁸

“This . . . is an important example of WEEKLY communion as the practice of the first Christians (Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 18, p. 143) —Mr. A. C. Hervey, Episcopalian ⁸

“And truly this (non-scriptural) custom which enjoins communing once a year, is most wicked contrivance of the devil, by whose instrumentality so ever it may have been determined.” Again, “It ought to have been far otherwise. EVERY WEEK, at least the table of the Lord should have been spread for the Christian assemblies.” (Calvin’s Institutes IV, Chapter. 18, section 45; VI, Chapter. 18, section 56). —Mr. John Calvin, Reformed ⁸

“I also advise the elders to administer the Supper of Our Lord on every Lord’s Day.” (Selected Letters of J. Wesley, Edited by F. C. Gill, Philosophical Library,

1956). —Mr. John Wesley, Methodist church ⁸

“The first day of the week . . . had replaced the Sabbath (Saturday) as the day of worship . . . breaking of bread, the Holy Eucharist was celebrated.” (New Testament, Confraternity Translation, 1941, p. 372) —Roman Catholic Scholars ⁸

“That every church ought, according to the example of Christ’s disciples, primitive churches, upon every first day of the week, being the Lord’s day, to assembly together to pray, prophesy, praise God, and break bread, and perform all other parts of Scriptural communion for the worship of God, and their own mutual edification and the preservation of true religion and piety in the Church.” (Crosby’s History, Baptists, vol. ii.) —Baptist Confession of Faith (A.D. 1611) ⁸

Is the 21st century church somehow exempt from that precedent? I doubt it. Communion is to be celebrated by every body of believers regardless of size or location. The apostolic church set forth the precedent of communion being a unified sacrament shared by every believer in every body of believers, world wide, every Sunday. The early church emphasized Bible reading (1 Thessalonians 5:27, 1 Timothy 4:13), preaching (2 Timothy 4:2), prayer (1 Timothy 2:1,8), singing (Ephesians 5:19) and offering (Acts 4:36-37) are all done weekly.

Weekly Memorial

Why do we need the Lord’s Supper weekly? Because it is the clearest way the promises of God are given to us. Following is a quote from Daniel Hyde:

“As the Confession says, ‘He has added these to the Word of the gospel to represent better to our external senses both what He declares to us in His Word and what He does inwardly in our hearts.’ As Calvin says, ‘the sacraments bring the clearest promises; and they have this characteristic over and above the word because they represent them for us as painted in a picture from life’ (Institutes, 4.14.5); and ‘It is indeed true that this same grace is offered us by the gospel, yet as in the Supper we have more ample certainty, and fuller enjoyment of it’ (Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, paragraph 10). ⁵

The Didache also testifies to regular Communion in the early church:

“On the Lord’s own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, so that your sacrifice may be pure. Let no man who has a dispute with his fellow join your assembly

until they have been reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled; for it was this sacrifice that was spoken of by the Lord; "In every place and at every time offer Me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great king, says the Lord, and My name is wonderful among the nations." (Didache 14)

Conclusion

So, in light of the overwhelming evidence of weekly Communion, why is Communion still not being offered weekly in churches across America? Do we not want to get blessed every week? Do we not want to obey God every week? Do we not feel obligated to be reminded of Christ's tremendous sacrifice for us? Unfortunately, congregations will continue to receive Communion monthly, annually or never if Christians do not voice their biblically-grounded opinion.

When lined up against the Old Testament, New Testament, Ante-Nicene fathers, Calvin, Luther and hundreds of other Christian leaders, is there any question that Americanized Communion needs to be revived? Communion today is so far removed from what Jesus intended for it to be. Don't complain that there is no revival in this country if you are not willing to revive communion in your own congregation. I'm convinced that if churches across America did Communion right and did Communion weekly, that God would bless us tremendously. Revival starts with Communion!

"O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."
—Psalm 34:8



Footnotes

1. Nelson's Electronic Bible Reference Library, Running Logos Library System, Version 2.1g. Nelson's Electronic Bible Reference Library, Copyright © 1998 Thomas Nelson, Inc. Logos Library System, Copyright © 1995-1998 Logos Research Systems, Inc.
2. Jewish New Testament Commentary. David H. Stern. Jewish New Testament Publications: Clarksville, Maryland. 1992.
3. The Lord's Supper: A Smorgy for Wayfarers or A Communion of Like-minded Christians. Vic Lockman. Grants Pass, OR, 1999, page 15
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6. On Weekly Communion by Jim Rogers
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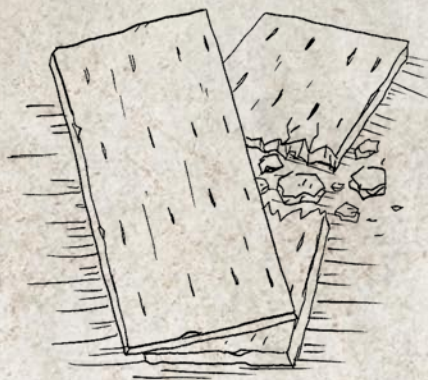
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Resource on historical Christian writings

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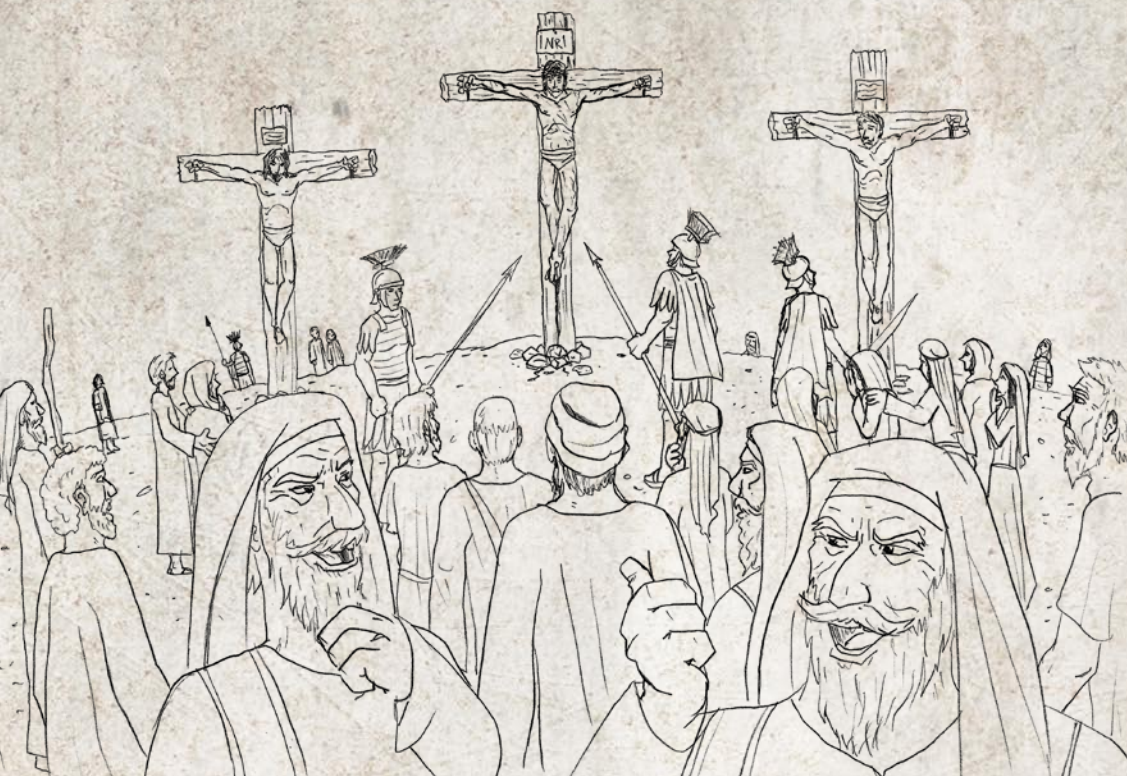


Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will

raise him up at the last day. The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven? Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.”

—John 6:27-58

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST



What is the Gospel?

The gospel is the undeserved salvation of all mankind from sin and eternal death, accomplished only by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ of which is made real to an individual's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the gospel is God's plan to rescue us, sustain us and grow us up in Him for all eternity. The famous passage John 3:16 explains the gospel:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

The gospel's foundation is only based upon what Jesus has done; not what we have done. It is God's free gift to us. Heaven is for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior. People think that getting to heaven is some long, drawn-out process in which you have to try and follow the Ten Commandments or be a do-gooder or go to church or something. But it's really not complicated at all. See, salvation isn't about getting to God on our own terms or pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, it's about God reaching down to us and offering us salvation free of charge.

Paul says in Ephesians, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"* —Ephesians 2:4-5

Our sins won't allow us to get to heaven on our own terms; it is only God's rich mercy that He has made a way for us. God demands no less than perfection, and only perfect people get to go to heaven. Based on works, none of us would make it; only Jesus would. But, God has provided a way to give perfection to us through Jesus. Jesus is the exclusive, one-way to the Father. He says this in John 14:6:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Either that statement is true or it is not. Every Christian knows that it is absolutely and irrevocably true. Ask Christ to reveal himself to you today. It's your choice.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



Robert H. Flores has been creating art since early childhood. A graduate of Riverside Community College, he has worked as a graphic designer for almost 20 years. He enjoys writing and illustrating God's Word and sharing it with the world in creative ways. He is the author and illustrator of several books including, *The Graphical Epistles* and *Broken*, an autobiography of his life. He lives in Southern California with his wife, Jennifer, and three children.



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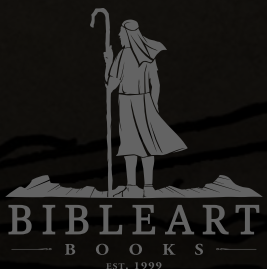
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