

The Lord's Table

By Duane Troyer 4/4/2021

Greetings in Jesus' name. I too am thankful for the ability to gather out here under the sunshine, amongst the sound of the birds, and the grazing sheep, and the many good things from the Lord. A few weeks ago one of the brothers requested or suggested that we need a teaching on communion and what it is and why we do it the way we do it, and so I've been thinking about that for the last several weeks and I'd like to give a teaching on that today. I have a lot of notes but I'll try to get through them in a timely way.

I'm going to read here in first Corinthians 10 to start with, starting in verse 14. It says ¹⁴ **Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.** ¹⁵ **I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.** ¹⁶ **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?** ¹⁷ **For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.** ¹⁸ **Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?** ¹⁹ **What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?** ²⁰ **Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.** ²¹ **You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.** ²² **Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?** I'll stop right there. That little passage is somewhat of an outline. I would like to talk about the what and the how and the when and the where and the who, and hopefully the why's just kind of come through the whole thing. I learned this saying when I was young that said *I keep six honest, serving men, they taught me all I knew. Their names are 'what' and 'why' and 'when' 'how' and 'where' and 'who'.* But often the biggest question of them all is *why?* sometimes we can answer all the others and if we don't have the *why*, and I don't have a large part of this message designated to why, but I hope it comes through from the beginning to the end. And this little passage outlines it, like, he says there in verse 16, is not the cup of blessing which we share in, the blood of Christ? is not the bread which we break, a sharing (or I think the King James translation uses *communion*, some use *fellowship* for the word *sharing* here) which we break the communion in the body of Christ?

And so let me just start with saying that *communion* is a word that we often use for this thing which might otherwise be called the *eucharist*, or the word *eucharist* means *thanksgiving*, or the *Lord's supper*, or the bread and the wine, or the bread and the cup, or in scriptures the word *communion* is the word *koinonia* which more often gets translated as *fellowship* than *communion*. Sometimes it gets translated as communion and sometimes as fellowship, and so just kind of bear that in mind like communion and fellowship scripturally speaking is the same word, it's the same Greek word, and it means common sharing, or partnership, or participation. I think the word communion is derived from two words that mean common union. But I feel like at least in our circles, the two words communion and fellowship have taken on a slightly different meaning. They're very close, but like if someone says 'I long for fellowship' probably most of us would get the impression that this guy longs for longings for daily, or at least close to daily, or weekly, or whatever interaction with people, like, fleshing out life together, working with each other, eating meals with each other, having activities with each other, ministering, praying, all these things with each other. That's usually the impression I get when somebody says they long for fellowship. When somebody says they long for communion, the impression I get usually is that

they are saying they desire to participate in the ritual or sacrament that is called the Lord's supper, or the eucharist, or we call it communion. I don't think it's wrong that we use that word. I just think when we read scripture, we especially have to keep in mind that what the scriptural writers who wrote in Greek used the word *koinonia*, whenever we read the word communion, which is only in scripture a few times.

But what I want to talk about today is what we would call communion, it's that thing that Jesus instituted when He kept that last Passover with His disciples. The subject of the more broader term of fellowship is another subject in itself and it's not separate from this, but I specifically want to talk about this other thing that the Lord instituted. So let's take a look at what happened there. All four gospels give an account of this. I'm going to read mostly out of the one in Luke, in chapter 22, and I'll try to add some of the things that the other gospels write that Luke doesn't write, and I'm not going to talk about the whole event from the beginning of the last supper till out into the garden, but this little portion between where Jesus told His disciples *I want you to go prepare the Passover*, to the time when they went out and walked out toward the garden. Chapter 22. **Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover. ² And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill Him, for they feared the people.³ Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve.⁴ So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them.⁵ And they were glad and agreed to give him money.⁶ So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.⁷ Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.⁸ And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat."⁹ So they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?"¹⁰ And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters.¹¹ Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'¹² Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready."¹³ So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.¹⁴ When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.¹⁵ Then He said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;¹⁶ for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."¹⁷ Then He took the cup and gave thanks. By the way, if you read the other gospels, I can't quite figure it out...so I'm pretty sure they ate a full Passover meal: they had lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs and whatever else was in this meal. Some of the gospels make it sound like while they were eating this meal, He got up and did this thing with the bread and the cup. Some of them make it sound like after the meal was done, He did this thing here: "take this". And when He had taken the cup and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves;¹⁸ for I say to you, will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."¹⁹ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."²⁰ Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.²¹ But behold, the hand of My betrayer *is* with Me on the table.²² And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"²³ Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.**

Somewhere in there, and I also can't determine for sure, according to John's gospel, He washed their feet; kind of sounds like it was after supper, but it could almost sound like it was before He broke the bread. But I don't think that's all that's significant, except I think there is some significance in that there

was something that Jesus did with the bread and the cup that was that was different from the meal and I might get to some of that later. And so there was foot washing and there were other teachings. They had this teaching about who's the greatest in the kingdom. if you read John's gospel between while they were there, before they went out to the mount of olives or the garden of Gethsemane, all the teachings from John 13, verse 21 to the end of John 17, all happened there in the upper room. There's the teaching about the vine and the branches, and the fruit of it, and the abiding in Him, and the promise of the Holy Spirit, and there's the whole the whole prayer of John 17 of how His people should be one like He and the Father: that's all in the upper room. They also sang a hymn according to several of the gospels and then they went out to the mount of olives. And so here was this annual Passover, a Jewish holiday, perhaps the greatest of Jewish holidays. The first Passover which was back there in Egypt when the Jews were delivered from the bondage of slavery to the Egyptians, this is like a pivotal event in the Jewish history and so it stands to reason that the holiday they kept, or the celebration, the commemoration that they kept every year, was like that the pinnacle of feasts, or the greatest of feasts that they kept. I'm pretty sure you're pretty familiar with the Passover, but they had instructions how to do this: they took a lamb, a spotless lamb, no blemishes, of the first year, they slew it, they caught the blood, they put the blood on the doorpost, and around the door jamb. They ate the lamb: its head, its legs, its entrails, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and they were supposed to have their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand. They were supposed to be ready for a sudden departure and all these things that they were supposed to purge their entire dwellings of any kind of leaven. It was not only not supposed to be in the bread they eat, it also wasn't supposed to be in their houses: they were supposed to totally get rid of it, and even in the feast afterwards. Like, it was a seven-day feast and for those seven days no leaven was supposed to be in their houses: they had to get it out. They could bring it back in after the seven days, but they had to get it out for that commemoration.

And so that's a few things about the Passover. So here this Passover feast was coming up and Jesus wanted to keep this feast one last time before He died, and He wanted to do it with these 12 disciples. These were His most intimate companions, they were the ones that for three years, He had been fleshing out life with, there was intense partnering, there was intense discipling, common sharing, and fellowship that they had, day in and day out. And now they're eating this Passover and either while they were eating the meal or right after, He takes this bread and says, 'take and eat this: this is my body which is given for you,' and one of the gospels says he says 'do this in remembrance of me.' and He took the cup and he said 'drink from it all of you: this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' I think the disciples had to make a connection with the words that Jesus used with what Jesus had said earlier, I don't know how much earlier, somewhere in those three years, but I don't know where in the ministry, but the things that are recorded in John 6 where Jesus said, 'unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no part in me' and this was such a hard saying that many people left Him, but these 12 stuck it out, like, 'where else can we go? there's no other place to go' and they stuck it out. Now Jesus used this very similar language, and I think they must have been able to draw some kind of connection to that. I've heard, though I haven't spent a lot of time to research this, but the little bit I've done I haven't found much, but somebody once told me that it would have been a common practice when they kept the Passover, they passed bread to each other to say, 'do this in remembrance of the lamb.' They were together to remember the first Passover and the deliverance out of Egypt slavery/bondage into the land flowing with milk and honey, and so they were remembering this. And they gave this bread around and said, 'do this in remembrance of the lamb' and now Jesus gets up and He passes this bread to His disciples and He says, 'do this in remembrance of me.'

If that's true, I think that's powerful. I think it would have sunk really deep into the disciples. It's a big statement.

Jesus is the Passover lamb; He is the one who liberates us from slavery. For the Jews in Egypt, it was the death of a spotless lamb of the first year that was slain that saved the firstborn from death, and that is what Jesus is through His death we have the hope of eternal life. Death has been swallowed up in victory. For the Jew without this lamb, it would have meant certain death for every firstborn among men and animals, it would have meant certain death but with the lamb it turned into victory. Not only were they saved from death they were delivered from this land of bondage and into a land flowing with milk and honey. The disciples got this for sure. Paul writes in first Corinthians about Jesus being the Passover in first Corinthians five, verses six to eight, he says, **your boasting is not good. do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new leaven, just as you are in fact unleavened, for Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed, therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

So now let's look at a little bit about the how and the when and the where. They're all kind of tied together a little bit, we start getting these glimpses throughout the new testament about how the disciples observe this. I think it's pretty clear that the Passover that the Jews kept, they kept annually, that celebration they kept annually. But this thing we call communion is not just like an exact carry over from the Jewish Passover and now the christians do this thing. Let's read first Corinthians 11, in verse 23, This is Paul writing. Paul was not one of the 12, right? he was not there at the Passover, but this is what he says, ²³ **For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread;** ²⁴ **and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."** ²⁵ **In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."** ²⁶ **For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.** ²⁷ **Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.** ²⁸ **But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.** ²⁹ **For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.** ³⁰ **For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.** ³¹ **For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.** ³² **But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.** ³³ **Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.** ³⁴ **But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.**

We would have to read a large portion of Corinthians to get all this, but there were a lot of disorderly things going on in the Corinthian church and Paul was trying to set things straight. It seems like they were having a meal together, but there was some kind of disorderliness. The people were coming there to fill themselves up and by doing that, it appears like maybe some people got their bellies full and there was not enough left for the others, and he says this is not okay: if you guys are hungry, eat at home. I have received from the Lord that this is what you should do when you come together, that you take this bread and this cup, and you prefer one another, and you wait on one another. The reason I think it's significant, some of these hints and clues that we have is of this cup and this wine being something separate from a meal, because down through the ages there have been people who have concluded

that the communal meal is simply eating with each other, like when we eat with each other, we're communing with each other. There is some sense in which it is true, when we're eating with other people that we're fellowshiping with, there is some kind of sharing there, we're sharing a meal together, but there is something separate here, I think there's something other than an ordinary meal. He says here that as often as we do this, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. We're not necessarily proclaiming the Lord's death every time we eat a meal: breakfast, lunch, and supper whenever we eat that with other people, that's not necessarily what we're doing. This here is something separate, this is something different from that. I think the people that have come to the conclusion that's what communion is: just eating meals with each other. I think they're off. I think they err. I don't think that's what it means.

How often? Like I said, this Passover lamb was an annual thing, once a year, and I think for that reason down through the ages some groups have come to the conclusion that it should be once a year. Some people have stepped it up a notch to have it twice a year, just to make it more often, or some people do it monthly, and we here do it weekly. We take it every first day of the week, if there's nothing amongst us that is not peaceful. We take this every week and I'll try to explain why I think we have that preference, though I will admit that from scripture alone I can't make a clear-cut case for this. I think the local church, the local congregation at least has some liberty to decide those things, but I think we have clues, and I think we ought to try to follow the patterns that we do have, good examples from the early church and the apostles. There are clues that we have that that they got together the first day of the week to do this. One of them is in Acts 20. verse 7, it says, **on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread Paul began speaking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.** Now I know that could be read in different ways, though I think there's a clue there that says *on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread*. I think that's a clue of a practice that they had. I know you could read this to say *on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread Paul began talking*, like, as if it was, *we were together that day and once we were all together to break bread Paul began this talking*. But even the breaking bread, I may be wrong about this, but I don't think it always means this Lord's supper thing. I think that term sometimes got used for just common meals, again, I'm not sure, like in Acts 2 where they had this intense fellowshiping with each other, the church was young, the disciples were preaching, the people were coming to Jerusalem, they were sharing all things common, they were going from house to house it says, breaking bread daily: either it was saying they were just sharing their meals with each other, which is what I think it's saying, or then they were taking the Lord's supper on a daily basis. So anyway, I think there's a clue there in that verse in Acts 20 verse 7, but it's kind of hard to make a case for, as a stand-alone verse.

We get into the early church writers and the very early church writers, and we start seeing this: they had this common practice when possible, when severe persecution didn't prevent this, when they were able, they'd get together the first day of the week. It's when they came together to break bread, to commemorate the Lord's death, to lay in alms whatever the Lord had provided for the week, we start seeing that in the early church really early on, I'll read a few things out of the Didache. This is the 14th article, *on the Lord's own day, assemble in common to break bread and offer thanks, but confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. However, no one quarreling with his brother may join your meeting until they are reconciled your sacrifice must not be defiled. For here we have the saying of the Lord in every place and time, offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a mighty king, says the Lord and my*

name spreads terror among nations. In article nine it says, regarding the eucharist, give thanks as follows: first concerning the cup we give thanks our father for the holy vine, of David thy servant which thou has made known to us through thy servant, to thee be the glory forever. Next concerning the broken bread, we give thanks to thee, o father, for the life and knowledge which thou has made known to us through Jesus thy servant: to thee be glory forever. As this broken bread was scattered over the hills and then when gathered became one mass, so may the church be gathered from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom, for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forevermore. Let no one eat and drink of your eucharist but those baptized in the name of the Lord, to this too the saying of the Lord is applicable: do not give the dogs what is sacred. So, because of these clues, because the pattern that we see early on in the church, I personally, though I have to call it a strong preference and not a clear command from the Lord, we desire to take it often, weekly, the first day of the week.

By the way, when I say I want to talk about what communion is, I have no desire to talk about whether it's transubstantiation, consubstantiation, receptionism, memorialism, all the terms that get used, I just think these words aren't in scripture and like all the things that are at least to some extent a mystery from the Lord, I would just so much rather prefer to just take the words as they're recorded and believe them with a childlike faith. One of my favorite quotes is from Conrad Grebel. He said, *I believe the word without a complicated interpretation, and from that belief I speak.* If Jesus said, "take, eat this is my body", and "take this and drink, this is my blood" I have no problem believing that. Where else should I go? If one of them says *you're doing this in remembrance of me*, I have no problem with that. I'm not saying there's no importance in any of this, I'm just saying that I want to stay away from what Paul says is the endless words and arguments that cause strife. I think people are prone to be either very super mystical or very super logical, and that's why some of this bickering kind of thing happens, like, for some it's approached by such a mystical approach that it airs on the side of superstition, and from some such a hard logical approach that it airs on the side of just cold, logical, mathematical exactness. I think the truth is somewhere in between there.

You know in the 1500s when the anabaptists rose up and the whole catholic church was a superstitious bunch, and they believed and taught as doctrine that when bread is blessed that it is the body and the flesh of Christ. They taught it to such an extent that the individual couldn't touch it: the priest had to put it in the person's mouth. It was too holy, too sacred, for a man to touch it. Or they did this weird practice where they would take this bread and they would bless it, and now that it's blessed and it's become it's the actual flesh of Christ, people would bow to it and they would put it on a thing and they'd walk down the streets and people would bow to it, and this was one of the ways they hunted heretics. They had guys watching and whoever didn't bow to this was likely a heretic, and they'd catch them, and question them, and examine them because of how far out superstitious people can get. Like, there's no wonder that the anabaptists, in refuting and countering that, wrote some things that I would sometimes think err on the other side of like just making it sound like it merely symbolic. I totally believe it's symbolic. I look at the words of Jesus and I just don't want to stand here and say it is merely symbolic. I'd rather just receive these words the way the disciples said, when He said this thing that turned others away, and they said, *we have we have nothing to say against, you there's no other place to go.*

All right, now I want to get into the *who* and this is the difficult one. This particular aspect of communion is deeply intertwined with what we believe about so many other things: it is intertwined with what we think communion is, which we're discussing today, it is deeply intertwined with what we think the church is, which is a subject in itself, with what we think it means to be a christian, which could be

another sermon, which it is totally and very much affected by our view of denominationalism within the church. What we believe about secondary church membership and a whole host of things. Should we decide and judge who can eat at the Lord's table? Think about that for a little bit. This is the Lord's table! Can we judge that? can we decide and have a say in who eats there? That's a huge thing! It's a hard thing. It causes much fear and trembling, and I feel like people look for an easy way out of this because it is such a hard thing, and so you have a thing called open communion and you have a thing called closed communion. And open communion is that thing where it is open to whoever wants to come and partake of it, whoever says they are right with God and feels right about it, can come and partake of this Lord's table. that would be the one easy way out of making any judgments. the closed communion is another easy way out, and we decide that our communion is only for those, if we have a denomination, if we have a local congregation, it's those in our local congregation, possibly some exceptions, to maybe a visiting preacher from another denomination: there's various degrees to how those things work out, but like the idea that it is only for those who we are in intense fellowship with all the time, so by saying that people are usually not saying, at least with their mouth they are usually not saying that 'oh we're not saying there's no other christians, these are just the ones that we'll take communion with.' some very cultic groups might say like, these are the only ones, it's found here and nowhere else, but that couldn't be said of a lot of people who practice what I would describe as closed communion.

We've rejected those conclusions. We've rejected the ideas of denominational lines. We've rejected the idea of secondary church membership. We believe that the Lord's table should be open to all those who are the Lord's and closed to all those who aren't. That principle ought to guide us through the decisions that we have to make. Jesus taught like in John 10, things like: my sheep hear my voice and I have other sheep, and I'll bring them in and there'll be one fold, and one shepherd. He doesn't intend there to just be a whole bunch of different folds who can do things, who can decide these things for themselves, but He want His people to be one fold under one shepherd. Jesus taught things like: if we reject one of these little ones, we've rejected Him. That's very serious! He says whatever we've done to the least of these my brethren we've done it to Him. The Didache says anyone coming in the name of the Lord must be welcomed, but after that test him and find out. You will use your discretion either for him or against him. So it should be with much fear and trembling that we forbid someone from participating in the Lord's table.

At the same time, we have other instructions and other scriptures in first Corinthians five. It says, **for on my part, though absent in the body but present in the spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus when you are assembled, and I with you in the spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to satan for the destruction of his flesh so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed, therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people. I did not mean at all with the immoral people of this world, with covetous and swindlers or idolaters: for them you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler, not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? do you not judge those who are within the church?**

but those who are outside God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. He talks about leaven leavening a whole lump. Remember what I said about the Passover, and how they were to celebrate this thing? they were supposed to totally purge their dwellings and I don't know about their whole land, maybe at least their dwellings were supposed to be totally purged of any leaven. I think there's a strong type there. In first Corinthians 10:21 he says you cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and of the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons. Paul says somewhere, maybe in second Corinthians, I believe, where he talks about have no koinonia with the unfruitful works of darkness: no fellowship, no communion, have no common sharing, no participation, no partnership with the unfruitful works of darkness. In the book of Jude, Jude is giving the church a stern and a strong admonition. He says there's men who have crept in and they are ungodly men and here's what they do, they are spots in your love feast. While they feast with you without fear and so when we when we have ungodly people participating in this communion. It pollutes, it blemishes, it spots. It's spots and blemishes in our love feasts.

The Didache says, *let no one eat and drink of the eucharist but those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord, to this too the saying of the Lord is applied: do not give what is holy to the dogs.* That comes from that passage in Matthew where Jesus said, **cast not your pearls before swine, and don't give what is holy to the dogs, lest they turn themselves and rend you.** Over the years I've thought a lot about that passage, and I really think that is what he is talking about, like he's not talking about: *don't speak a word of God to an ungodly man* or sometimes you're maybe trying to share the gospel with somebody who just gets angry at you and maybe it's a good idea to just use some wisdom and think, *well now's not a good time.* But that is not what He's talking about when He says, **don't cast your pearls before swine.** I don't think and the clue is in that He says, **lest they turn and rend you.** How do we get rent? is it not when we baptize people who ought not be baptized? is it not when we give and partake or participate in the Lord's table with those who ought not be, who are dogs, who are who are swine? and we bring them in to the benefits of the church and those people, once they're within they start rending the thing apart. It might have some broader applications. A lot of the things that Jesus said was this broad stroke of an of an application that is an absolute universal truth, and I think that principle that He gave has a broader application than what I just said, but I think this one is for sure in it. And so it should be with fear and trembling that we forbid someone from partaking in the Lord's table. It should be with fear and trembling that we invite someone to partake in the Lord's table, and though it may sound controlling, we have been given this grave and solemn charge to guard the Lord's table that these ungodly people that want to creep in cannot defile and pollute this. We've been given that charge. It's great. It's severe. It makes it makes me fear.

There's another category of people that should not take communion, that I would not necessarily entirely classify as ungodly and not in the faith, and that is a brother who has a quarrel against another. Things come up within the fold, whatever it starts with: an ill feeling, a misunderstanding, it starts with an assumption, it starts with whatever, and there's this thing that happens and all of a sudden it escalates to a quarrel, and there is a level in which that person is out from underneath the Lord at the time and yet I don't necessarily think he's this ungodly man like I was describing earlier, and yet until that gets resolved and until that thing has been made right, that person also defiles the Lord's table. Jesus said in Matthew, **if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.** the Didache says, *when you assemble to break bread,*

no one quarreling with his brother may join your meeting until they are reconciled. Your sacrifice must not be defiled. The question comes up: 'but are we not instructed to just examine ourselves?' Very true. Corinthians says that a man must examine himself and he must not take of this in an unworthy manner, but that instruction to examine ourselves and not take this in an unworthy manner does not conflict, but rather harmonizes, with the instruction that we have to judge what is within. It does not conflict, but it harmonizes with the responsibility to purge out the old leaven.

You know, if we think back about that last Passover that Jesus kept with His disciples, we could make a case for the closed communion idea. We could say, 'well, Jesus had other people who received him and believed him, there were a number, it had dwindled by this time, but there were quite a few women, there were quite a few people, and yet he desired to just keep this with His 12 most loyal, the people He had really, really shared a true koinonia with over the last three years. Like with those 12, He wanted to keep this Passover. So, we could make a case for it, but you know what? we could also make a case for open communion because He participated with Judas, and He knew that He was a betrayer, like of the worst of all people in the world. Of that man it was said it'd be better if he wasn't even born. Jesus supped with him. You can share what you think about this, but I don't think we can make a case for either one out of that instance. I think Jesus was instituting something new, He was giving, like he did often, when He told His disciples many things, that when they were just those 12 and He planned that those 12 would then go and instruct the church and lead the church and spread the faith. So, He was doing that, there was scripture that needed to be fulfilled about the one who eats with him, you know what's it says, something like turn the heel against him, something like that. I think if we look at the entirety of scripture and the rest of the new testament, we find that it's not really consistent to make a case for either one out of just what happened there at the last supper.

So we must examine ourselves and we must judge those things within the congregation. do we always hit it right? do we always hit that mark? I am sure that we don't always, but we have things we can aim for, right? We have this truth, or this bull's-eye, this belief that those who are in the Lord ought to participate, and those who aren't, ought not. And we can shoot for that, and if we aim for that we may or we may not hit it. If we shoot at that a hundred times, we may not always hit it a hundred times out of a hundred times, but if we don't aim for that, will definitely not hit it, okay? and so I think there's these principles that must be established that we've talked about and i think we must strive for those. And I'll give a few of my own opinions about this. I have this opinion that when things aren't obvious, it's something that's just not obvious, there's someone amongst us and we're not certain, maybe there are a lot of question, but it's not obvious to everybody, I believe who have been given charge of oversight and shepherding the flock ultimately need to judge those things, and I think they bear the greater responsibility. There are risks either way and the under shepherds, if you would call it that, will have to give an account to the chief shepherd, they'll give an account for the souls among us. These are hard things; these are things that cause much fear and trembling to me. After all, sometimes wolves come in sheep's clothing and devils come as ministers of righteousness, and sheep never come in wolves clothing. Sometimes they're wild and skittish, sometimes they're stubborn and crippled, they haven't learned to trust anybody, sometimes sheep butt heads, but it doesn't make him not a sheep, right?

And to some degree, we all carry responsibility, but the more responsibility you carry, the more fearful it is. Like the shepherd of actual sheep, he takes a risk if he leaves a sheep out there, if he's bringing his sheep into the corral, let's use that as an example of inviting people to, or bringing people into the Lord's table, if the shepherd is bringing the sheep into the corral, if he leaves a sheep out there, out of

the corral, it's very, very risky. But if he brings a wolf into the corral, it's very, very risky. So there's these risks that we carry. These are the kinds of decisions and judgments that we must make, and we must be humble. We must first judge and examine ourselves; we must love our brother more than ourselves, we must love holiness as much as we love peace, and we must love peace as much as we love holiness. We must love righteousness as much as we love mercy, and mercy as much as we love righteousness. We must be as ready to call people to repentance as we are to forgive them, and as ready to forgive them as we are to call them to repentance. I believe that God has given us authority, has given the church authority, to make judgments to bind, to loose, but that He also meanwhile understands our limitations, and that if we judge as rightly as we understand with humility, without respect of persons, without favoritism or partiality, without a desire for selfish gain, without the fear of man, that He honors those judgments, even if it's not perfectly right. To be right is important too, but to be charitable is more important. So we could decide this is all too hard because indeed it is hard, and we could decide we're going to look for an easy way out, and we could start practicing closed communion and thereby separate ourselves from Christ. Or we could decide to practice open communion and join ourselves with the devil. Or we can stay on this narrow and difficult path and with a single eye on Christ, commune with those of like precious faith.

In summing things up, communion or the eucharist, or the Lord's table/supper that Jesus instituted as He kept it there in the last Passover with His disciples. Jesus is this Passover and they celebrated it with the bread and the cup on the first day of each week when they took this. When we take this bread and cup of blessing, we show the Lord's death till He comes. We remember it, right? We remember it, we become members again of it. We should aim to participate in the Lord's table with those who are baptized in the Lord and are at peace with the brethren. We should not participate in the Lord's table with those who are not in the faith and those who have fallen into sin, or those who have a quarrel with a brother. We should examine ourselves to see if none of these above things are found in us. We should judge those things within the congregation and withhold communion from any that are not in the faith, practicing sin, or in a quarrel with a brother. In short, it should be open to those in Christ and closed to those who aren't. The visitor who we know little of that comes in the name of the Lord, the Didache says we should assist such a man as much as we can. Even just a little, and this is not my own words, even just a little by showing acceptance, sympathy, and mercy, we will bless him and us. But we have to remember that if someone is not a child of God and we accept him in, we're not blessing him at all, neither are we blessing us.

Another thing, and this is my opinion, not a commandment from the Lord, due to the immense charge and responsibility of a local congregation and especially the overseers of it to both include and exclude souls from the Lord's table, I think it is wise for someone to wait till they're invited to the communion table before we go, and when I explain that, I'm not talking about that every time we keep the Lord's table, we who are in intense fellowship with, and regular fleshing out life together, that they would always need an invitation, but what I'd be talking about is like if we go visit another congregation, if we gather with other people, even people who we think are good brothers to commune with, and we go visit them, we should not carry a presumptuous spirit of: *I'm right with God. I want to participate in your table*, unless they invite us. And in the same way, I think we ought to remember that when people come here, we ought not to just try to let them figure this out on their own, we ought to invite them, or give them a reason why we don't. I'd like to do better with that.

We ought to confess our sins before we take in the bread and the cup, so that our sacrifice be pure. We must not esteem the table so lightly that we can easily abstain from it, while we must not esteem the brothers and the purity of the sacrifice so lightly that we can easily partake of it in an unworthy manner.

And like the wheat that was on the hills and gathered and broken into one loaf, may God's people unite from every tribe and nation to be His body, and like the clusters on the vine that were crushed into one vessel and purified for the cup, may we also be pressed by the love and severity of God into sanctification and purity, and may the lamb that was slain receive the reward of His sufferings. Let's pray.