

The Lord's Supper



What Saith The Scriptures?

“Opened ... Close, or ... Closed” communion?

“The Things That Are Wanting...”

“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting...” (Titus 1:5).

Note:

This, and all of our materials, are not written to persuade anyone to my position. The subject of the Lord’s table is not a simple subject and has not been covered in depth in this material. It is written in hope that it might be of help. **Search the Scriptures to see if these things be so.**

Recently I was invited to be a part of an ordination counsel. During the questioning period we were dealing with the subject of how the Lord’s table should be handled. I was thinking I’m glad it is him up there and not me, because I was very convicted that there was some things I needed to “...set in order” in our local church concerning this important subject. I felt I needed to determine the truth about the Lord’s table.

What Does The Bible Say?

When I came home from the ordination meeting I set out to attempt to find out what the Bible says about the communion service. I spent about forty hours a week for the next five weeks studying that one subject. This article is just a little bit gleaned from that study.

Noah’s Detailed Instructions



When instructions were given to Noah for the building of the ark the Lord said “*And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of*” (Genesis 6:15). Noah followed the instructions to the letter. We read, “*Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he*” (Genesis 6:22). If Noah had not built the ark “...according to all that God commanded him,” it would not have withstood the storm it was about to face. Herein lies the main reason many churches that were once fundamental are falling apart in our present day storm of apostasy.

Detailed Instructions For Moses



When instructions were given to Moses concerning the tabernacle in the wilderness we read “*According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it*” (Exodus 25:9). Moses obeyed in every detail. The Bible says “*Thus did Moses: according to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he.*” **The phrase “...as the Lord commanded” occurs fifty-five times in the Word of God.** We need to follow His commands. Christ said “...why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

The Pastor's Detailed Instructions

First Timothy 3:14-15 says, *"These things write I unto thee...that **thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God**, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* To behave is *"...to conduct oneself in God's specified way."*

The Lord's Table



We have coined our fancy little titles including, *"...open,...close, and...closed,"* communion. What saith the Scriptures? The Lord's supper was instituted by Christ, taught by the apostles, and practiced by the early church. In Paul's rebuke to the Corinthians concerning how they were abusing this great privilege he said what they were doing was not to be considered *"...the Lord's supper"* (First Corinthians 11:20).

A Pastor or A Policeman?

Prior to my recent study on this subject I rested on First Corinthians 11:28 that says, *"...let a man examine himself."* However, First Corinthians chapter five and chapter ten both demand that the pastor must determine who could or could not take part in the Lord's table.

"Ye Cannot"

Paul said, *"**Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils**"* (First Corinthians 10:21). We have here, and again in First Corinthians chapter five, dealing with church discipline, the plainly established principle that pastors have the God-given responsibility to say who could and who could not partake of this great privilege.

"Coming Together For The Worse" (First Corinthians 11:17)

Pastors have a twofold responsibility. One is to help the people who are doing wrong, and the other is to keep the local church pure. It is far more important to keep the church pure than it is to keep it full. With a genuine love and concern for those carnal Christians who were offending God Paul said, *"Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse"* (First Corinthians 11:17).

"Decently And In Order"

First Corinthians 14:40 says, *"Let all things be done decently and in order."* The word decently means *"...to conform with the accepted standards of behavior."* We have seen that things were done according to God's plan in Old Testament times. Second Chronicles 29:35 says *"...the service of the house of the LORD was set in order."* We also have detailed instructions regarding the order God wants in His local churches.

The Lord's Table "Set In Order"

Paul wrote to "*...the church at Corinth*" (Chapter 1:2), concerning many things that needed to be "*...set in order.*" After a very strong rebuke about the way the Lord's table was being abused he said They were fighting with one another (v.18), they were promoting heresies (v.19), and they were eating for the sake of eating and getting drunk all under the banner of the Lord's supper (v.21).

"I Have Received of The Lord"

In verse twenty-three Paul said he received directions from the Lord concerning the communion service. "*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*" (v.23). Paul said the Lord had taught him that we should have communion "*...in remembrance*" of Christ (vs.24-25). The Lord also said to Paul, "*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*" (v.26). The Greek word (kataggello) has been translated "*...shew,*" in this verse. It has been translated "*...preach,*" (ten times) "*...show*" (three times) and "*...declare*" (twice).

Is Communion For Members Only?

In my effort to determine the Bible answer to this question I set out to determine three things:

1. Is there any such thing in the Bible as a universal church?
2. Is church membership optional with God?
3. Should one be a member before having the privilege of partaking in a communion service?

First, concerning the universal church teaching, any Christian who will study the Bible rather than believing the footnotes presenting man's opinions, will soon discover the fact that there is no such thing in the Bible as a universal church. There are also no Scriptural grounds for any Christian organization to exist unless it is under the authority of a local church. Absolutely none! One of the main reasons we face the apostasy of our day is the flood of para-church movements that are "*...doing that which is right in their own eyes.*" God has given His people clear instructions for the local church age. For about 2000 years we did it God's way, and had God's blessings. In recent years, we have set His instructions aside and have accepted the new modern ways of the world. First Timothy 3:15 says, "*...that thou (pastor) mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*"

Second, I set out to determine if membership in the local church is an option with God. Many people view church membership as something that is optional. It has been said there is no verse in the Bible that says we *have* to join a church. They are right; however, some things are so obvious we don't need a verse. There is no verse that says you should put socks and shoes on before going outside in the winter. The other thing is, we don't *have* to join the local church *we get to*. It is a great privilege!

Would God Give Instructions To A Pastor That Are Impossible To Follow? First and Second Timothy, and Titus contain instructions for the pastor concerning behaviour in God's local church. Most of the instructions in those Books cannot be obeyed without a church membership.

Also First Corinthians chapter five deals with a case of church discipline that would be impossible without a church membership. Concerning church discipline First Corinthians 5:12 says “*For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?*” Immediately following Paul’s sharp rebuke of how the saints in the church were abusing the Lord’s table **Paul used the word “...member” or “...members” sixteen times.** In First Corinthians 12:25,26 we read “*...the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*” The context of the discussion concerning the Lord’s table is in relationship with church membership.

Third, I set out to determine if membership in the local church is optional concerning taking part in a communion service.

“The New Testament” (The New Covenant)

Christ instituted the Lord’s table during the meeting we usually refer to as the last supper. It was the last passover feast; however, it also became the first communion service. Christ called it “*...the new testament.*” The word translated “...*testament*” in the verses below is *diatheke*. It has been translated “...*covenant*” twenty times.

The Following Verses Are In The Context of The Lord’s Table.

- **Matthew 26:28**, “*For this is my blood of **the new testament**, (covenant) which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*”
- **Mark 14:24**, “*And he said unto them, This is my blood of **the new testament**, (covenant) which is shed for many.*”
- **Luke 22:20**, “*This cup **the new testament** (covenant) in my blood, which is shed for you.*”
 - In Matthew chapter twenty-six the Lord and His disciples **started out** celebrating the Passover Feast. Israel had been keeping this feast for 1500 years.
- **Verse 17**, “*Now the first day of **the feast of unleavened bread** the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat **the passover**?*”
- **Verse 18**, “*And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep **the passover** at thy house with my disciples.*”
- **Verse 19**, “*And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready **the passover**.*”

The Change From The Passover To The Lord’s Table

In verse number twenty-six Jesus introduced the “...*new covenant*” that we now refer to as the Lord’s table.

- **Verse 26**, “*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**.*”

This was something new. Unleavened bread had always been a symbol of freedom from the bondage of Egypt. Now it symbolizes the body of Christ. In First Corinthians when Paul was explaining the Lord’s table we read “*Take, eat: **this is my body**, which is broken for you*” (V.24).

The Local Church And The New Covenant

First Corinthians 11:25 says, *“After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament (covenant) in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

What Is The Scriptural Answer Concerning Who Takes Communion?

- Does the Word of God promote our “*open*” position that says all Christians can take part?
- Does the Bible teach our “*close*” position that only those of our denomination who are baptized and members of a church of like faith can take part?
- Does “*...like faith*” include those who have dumped repentance or hold to Calvin’s heresy that God has predestined some people to Hell?
- Does “*...like faith*” include the subject of separation from the world and disobedient Christians?
- Does our “*closed*” position that demands that only members are allowed to take communion line up with the Word of God?

“The Letter Killeth”

As A Pastor I Must Take A Position.

I have come to the following conclusions for the church I am responsible for:

- The communion service is very important to God.
- It must be done “*...decently and in order.*”
- Decently means “*...according to God’s acceptable standard of behaviour.*”
- In order means “*...the way God has ordered it.*”

The Three Areas I Considered

1. Is there such a thing as a universal church?

Absolutely not! There is no question about it. There is no such thing in the Word of God as a universal church.

2. Is church membership optional?

- There is no doubt that the letter of the law requires Christians be members of a Bible believing local church.
- Is there such a thing as a situation where the letter of the law “*killeth*” concerning membership?
- What if you have a sincere teenager who loves the Lord; is faithful to every service, goes visiting the lost with other church members, is regularly winning others to Christ; however, he or she has unsaved parents who will not allow the teenager to join the church?

3. Should only members of the local church be allowed to partake in the Lord’s Table?

The letter of the law would demand church membership for those who would take communion; however, would the spirit of the law allow someone like the teenager mentioned above to partake in the communion service?

The spirit of the law might allow exceptions that must be made as the Holy Spirit would lead the pastor. In my recent study I found it very interesting that the verse that says “...*the letter killeth*,” is written within the context of the communion service. The phrase “...*the new testament*.” (diatheke) or “...*the new covenant*” occurs thirty-four times in the Bible. A careful study of these portions of Scripture is important.

“Ministers of The New Covenant”

Second Corinthians 3:6 tells us that pastors are to be the “...*ministers of the new testament*; (diatheke - “...*the new covenant*”) *not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*” Again, the context of this phrase has to do with the pastor’s supervision of the Lord’s table.



The letter of the law requires that communion is for church members only; however, it would seem that “...*the spirit of the law*” would allow for exceptions. Should someone who can not be baptized because of some serious physical condition be welcome to partake if that person is a sincere Christian, and wants to be a member of the church? The letter of the law says, No! What if the person is a cripple or has a heart- pacer or some physical reason they cannot be in water? The letter of the law says, No! Are there circumstances when a pastor must determine before God to make an exception without worrying about the peer pressure concerning what other pastors might think?

Setting In order The Things That Are Wanting

As previously mentioned I extensively studied this subject and taught it to the folks at FairHavens Baptist Church during every service for over a month. Finally, I came to the place where I announced that only those who were members would be allowed to take part in the Lord’s table. If there were to be any exceptions made under what God refers to as the difference between “...*the letter of the law and the spirit of the law*” **it would be the pastor’s responsibility to make that decision and answer only to God for that decision.**

Everyone Is Welcome In Our Services

Paul said more to the Corinthians concerning setting in order the things that were wanting concerning the Lord’s table than was said to anyone else in Scripture. However, Paul also said to these same Christians, “*Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy...*” (Second Corinthians 1:24). As pastors we must make decisions concerning how things are done in God’s local church. That is our God-given responsibility. **We do not have dominion over anyone’s faith. We are simply helpers to their joy.** If some choose not to join they should still feel welcome at church; however, if they have been taught the truth and simply *refuse* in a spirit of *rebellion*, to join God’s local church they should not feel welcome to take part in the Lord’s table.

A Decision I Did Not Want To Make

If the pastor is taking his God-given responsibilities he will find himself making many decisions. Some of those decisions will be unpleasant such as church discipline.

The decision concerning the communion issue was not one I wanted to make. Personally, I like the position that says if you are a Christian you can feel free to take communion. To suggest to anyone that they can not take part simply goes against the grain for me. **However, what I think, or feel comfortable with is not the issue.** It is “...the Lord's table.” It is not the pastor's table. God has given pastors the responsibility to be sure that His communion service is done the way He wants it done. Pastors are the “...*ministers of the new covenant.*” As ministers of the Lord's table we must realize there is “...the letter of the law and the spirit of the law” and “...the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

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Also: Church members have their hands full with their own God-given responsibilities. The sincere Christian must beware of the devil's trick to get church members to take responsibilities that are not theirs. How a communion service is handled is the pastor's responsibility. This is an important issue; however, “*Only by pride cometh contention...*” (Proverbs 13:10).



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