

INTRODUCTION

No matter what circle of people you associate with the group may do certain things in the same way for years. People call that tradition. If you violate their traditions people may be upset. School traditions are huge in U.S. I graduated from a university where football is more important than breathing. You may attend a school where if you do not watch football people think that you came from another planet. There is a long list of football traditions in my school. For example, everyone in the stadium stands instead of sits to watch a game. When we score the guys will kiss their girl-friend or wife. Some guys would fight for their lives to keep this tradition! Also, we have a female shepherd dog that serves as our mascot. The dog goes with a dedicated person who takes care of her to his classes. If she barks during the lecture then the class will be dismissed. Don't ask why that is so. It is a tradition. Even churches have their unique traditions. But whichever church you attend there are two sacraments or ceremonies every Christian church observes. They are communion and baptism. Unlike human tradition it was Jesus who commanded Christians to administer those two sacraments. Today we will study a passage on communion from the first book of Corinthians. Paul wrote this section as a reminder and warning. At that time communion was part of the love feast. This meal gathering is quite similar to our potluck today. However, the context tells us that some richer believers in the church were not considerate about their poorer brothers and sisters. They only knew how to enjoy the food they brought and they even got drunk, while other Christians were hungry. Paul admonished them that such attitude should not be tolerated in the church. The Corinthians believers must go back to the basic why they observed the communion. As for us, we may go through the ritual so routinely that we can use a refreshment course. A clear understanding of the communion helps us observe it in a way our Lord intended it to be.

EXPLANATION

1. 遵守聖餐的意義 Meaning of the Communion (v. 23-26)

First, Paul reminded the Corinthian believers the meaning of the communion.

A. 設立 Its Establishment

The communion was established by our Lord. Paul said in **verse 23**: For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread. Notice the succession here: Paul received the instruction about the communion from our Lord, then Paul passed it down to the Corinthian church. On the night when Jesus established the communion He was eating the Passover meal with His twelve disciples. Traditionally, people call that dinner the Last Supper. The Passover is to remember God's miraculous rescue of the Israelites from Egypt. Our Chinese Sunday school classes have just studied the record about it in Exodus recently. God ordered every family to kill a lamb, roasted it and ate it together. People also had to put some blood from the animal on the top and sides of the door frame. That night God went through every house in Egypt to kill the firstborns. When He saw blood on a certain house He would pass over

the house, hence the name Passover. The Passover lamb was a foreshadowing of Jesus. He shed His blood on the cross to cover the sins of those who believe in Him. By establishing the communion at the Passover Jesus fulfilled the meaning behind the Jewish festival. Jesus used the bread to represent His body that was broken for us. Then Paul continued in **verses 24 and 25**: 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” The cup symbolizes Jesus’ blood poured out for us on the cross. Jesus used His blood to establish a new covenant with us. As such, we as Christ’s followers become God’s people and the Heavenly Father becomes our God. We observe the communion to remember Jesus’ death. There is nothing magical in the bread and cup. Unlike what the Catholic Church believes they will not be changed into the real body of Christ and His true blood. Therefore, in the communion we are not slaying Jesus again. The bread and cup remind what He did for us. We all like to celebrate our birthdays and most couples, especially the wives, see wedding anniversary as a big event. My wife was a June baby and we were married in May. One year I made a dumb mistake for doing nothing on Mother’s Day, our wedding anniversary and her birthday. You don’t want to know how I suffered as a result of my ignorance. We remember important moments of our life with a present, a special meal or a vacation. Similarly, Jesus established the communion to help us remember His death for us.

B. 參與 Its Engagement

We have reviewed why our Lord established the communion. Next, Paul instructed us on how to engage ourselves in the communion. He told us in **verse 26**: For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. There are three things we can learn from this verse. First, it is about the frequency of communion observance. The word “whenever” means “as often as possible to you” in the Greek text. Therefore, Paul asked us to observe the communion as frequent as our schedule permits. Most churches I know do it once a month. Our church arranges a communion once every two months. It is part of our tradition. Also, Paul told us that when we observe the communion we are proclaiming the death of our Lord. Communion has an evangelistic effect to it. The sharing of bread and passing of cups are vivid expression of our faith to the unbelievers among us. Thirdly, Paul asked us to keep observing the communion until the Lord returns. Therefore, in the ceremony as we look back to what Jesus did for us we also look forward to His second coming. We long for that day to come when Jesus ushers all the believers to heaven. Besides, it goes without saying that communion is observed by the whole congregation. While you can pray or read the Bible in private, there is no such thing as a “personal communion.” From verse 23 to 26 all the pronouns “you” appear in plural form. It is evident in the Chinese translation. Southerners would render it “you all.” Paul made it clear in **10:16-17** of the same letter about the corporate nature of the communion when he said: 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. When we observe the communion as one church we affirm our unity in Christ. That was why Paul convicted the richer Corinthian believers for despising their poorer brothers and sisters. There should be no difference in Christ regardless of social status or ethnicity. All the believers are one body in Christ.

2. 領受聖餐的態度 Manner for the Communion (v. 27-32)

A clear understanding of the communion helps us observe it in a way our Lord intended it to be. After we have revisited the meaning of the communion let us discuss the proper manner we should have when come to the ceremony.

A. 合格 Worthy

Paul told us that we have to make sure that we are worthy to receive the bread and cup. He said in **verse 28**: A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. The word “examine” means to validate something by putting it to a test. The same word appears in one verse that most of us should be familiar with. **Romans 12:2** said: Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. “Test and approve” is the same Greek word as “examine” in the Corinthian verse. When our minds are being transformed to be like Christ’s we will be able to scrutinize everything with God’s standard, and to accept those things that are only approved by God. We have a similar process in the industrial world. It is called quality control. Before a product leaves the factory and goes to the store it has to go through a quality control step to make sure that it can perform all the functions it should have. When we apply the same principle to communion, Paul was asking us to do a self-checkup to make sure that we are worthy to partake the bread and cup. What kind of examination we need? Based on the context we need to ask ourselves if we fully understand the meaning of the communion. That is why we only invite brothers and sisters who have received baptism to partake the communion. Through baptism a person openly witness his/her commitment to the Lord. We should treat the communion with seriousness and come to the table with sincerity. Besides, is there any known or hidden sin that hinders our relationship with the Lord? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal those sins, and be ready to confess them before the Lord. Also, do you have any unresolved conflict with another believer that you need to settle? Above all, are our hearts filled with joy and thankfulness of the underserved grace we received? We are worthy not because of any self-worth, but it is purely because of God’s grace. Therefore, the more we think that we are unworthy, the greater our thankfulness toward God would be.

B. 定罪 Guilty

Paul told us to examine ourselves before coming to the communion. Only those who are worthy can partake the bread and cup. As for those who are unworthy but they take the communion anyway they will be guilty for their sins. **Verse 27** reads: Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. What makes a person unworthy? Paul explained it in **verse 29**: For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. A person is regarded as unworthy if he/she takes the bread and cup not realizing that those elements symbolize Christ. The result is bringing judgment to himself/herself. Recently, some sports players refused to stand up when the national anthem was sung before a game. Some chose to sit down, others kneeled, while some others even waited in the locker room until the music was over. It was a form of silent protest to the President and the government. Those who disagreed with their actions criticized that they not only show contempt to the President or the

government, but they disrespected their country too. Similarly, those who disrespect the communion disrespect the Lord whom we remember through the ceremony.

Now let us look at the judgment Paul mentioned. For one, it is not about losing our salvation. Keep in mind that the Corinthian letters were written to believers. Paul said in **verse 32**: When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. There are two forms of judgment here: discipline for the believers and eternal condemnation of the unbelieving world. When believers trivialize the communion the Lord will discipline them. The word “discipline” means to train up a child through chastisement. God disciplines His children to bring the wrongdoers back to the right path. In **verse 30** of the Corinthian passage Paul told us how God’s discipline came upon the Corinthian believers: That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. In the New Testament, the word “asleep” is used to describe the death of believers. A person who falls asleep will wake up again. A Christian who left the world will rise again when Jesus returns. Therefore, there are different degrees of severity in God’s discipline. Some become ill and others even die. This is a serious warning to us. I do not think that God intends to plague us with overwhelming scare, as if He would strike someone dead during the communion if there is any unconfessed sin. He wants us to come to Him with joy, not fear. The fact that God has the right to discipline us when we sin but He does not do so reflects His grace. God patiently waits for us to turn back in our sins.

CONCLUSION

A clear understanding of the communion helps us observe it in a way our Lord intended it to be. In some ways communion bears resemblance to a wedding ceremony. Before the ceremony there will be a rehearsal to make sure that everyone in the wedding party is well-acquainted with the procedure. Every time we observe the communion we are practicing in a rehearsal. We do not just go through the motions aimlessly. We are actively preparing our hearts for the big party in heaven, where Jesus will eat with all the believers. Jesus promised His disciples in **Matthew 26:29** - “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.” With that said Jesus left the table and went on to the cross. Today as we observe the communion we are still looking forward for the fulfillment of this promise. Brothers and sisters: the best has yet to come!