

Communion: The Fellowship of the Local Church, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just," or you might translate that, faithful and righteous, "to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That is to say, if we confess our sins, that is to acknowledge our sins before God, to admit that we've committed them, to identify our sins as the sins that they are, that's what confess means, by the way. *Homologeō*: homo, same; *logeō*, to say, or, to speak. So it's, to say the same thing as. When you are saying the same thing about your sin, you are saying the same thing about your sin that God says about your sin. You're coming into agreement with God about what you have done, what it is. So you are saying the same things about your sin that God says about your sin; if you will do that, God will forgive you. He'll forgive you.

Notice why, because of his character. God is faithful. That is, he is always consistent. He is never changing. Not only

that, but he's just or he is righteous, meaning he doesn't let sin go. He doesn't wink at your sin. He doesn't just ignore it. No, he fully punished it when he put Christ to death on the cross. All of his wrath was poured out on Christ; none left for you. So in view of Christ's atoning sacrifice, and in light of your fellowship, God will restore us by confession, through confession. He'll restore us back into fellowship with him. He will forgive.

The sin you've confessed, that sin, that interrupted your fellowship with God and broke it as far as you were concerned because there is guilt on your conscience, you feel the shame. You want to hide, just like Adam and Eve when they transgressed the law and they found out in the garden. They immediately hid from one another and then from God, in silly ways. They tried to cover their own sin. They tried to cover it up themselves. They tried to deflect. They tried to counter accuse. They tried to blame; shift blame around. They didn't deal with sin directly, did they? The same thing we do, isn't it?

No, if we come clean, if we come and confess to God, that sin that interrupted our fellowship can be wiped away. He'll

forgive it. He'll forgive it, not only that, but the sin that you're unaware, noted there as, all unrighteousness, that sin; he'll cleanse you of that, too. So you come confessing the sins you know about, he will forgive those. The sin that you don't know about, that you're unaware of, he'll cleanse that too. So gracious, so gracious.

Listen, that is why confessing sin is so vital for maintaining fellowship. That's what we face whenever we come, we do it here monthly, whenever we come to celebrate the Lord's Table. We remember what happened that night, how the Lord washed his disciples' dirty feet. He stooped down before them, taking the role of the lowest slave to wash the filth and the muck from their feet.

Boy, when you think about that, what a terrible position we put our Lord in when we sin against him, right? No wonder Peter didn't want to see him kneeling before him, washing his feet, seems like such an inappropriate place for the Lord to be, such an unfitting role. But if we fail to confess our sins, if we fail to come to him so that he'll wash our dirty feet, remember

what Jesus told Peter, "If I do not wash you," Peter, "you have no share with me." "You have no fellowship with me."

Jesus had bathed them already, having cleansed them by the washing of the water with the Word, but since they dirtied their feet, had broken fellowship with him, Jesus was so gracious to restore them to fellowship by cleansing their feet. He leads us to confess, and then he forgives us when we do. It's all of grace. All of grace. The fellowship of Christ and his church is for those who cleanse their consciences through confession. We proclaim a pure fellowship. Confessing our sins is vital to preserving this fellowship.

There is another lesson the disciples are to learn here. We proclaim an intimate fellowship and a pure fellowship. Point three: Communion is a humble fellowship. Communion is a humble fellowship. That's the other lesson Jesus wanted his disciples to learn from his act of washing their feet. They needed to learn humility, to take a low position with one another, to take the role of a slave. Look at verse 13, "You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one

another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."

The disciples, let me tell you, desperately needed to learn this lesson. No sooner had Jesus washed their feet, told them to do the same, and they were arguing over which one of them was greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Unbelievable, but so like us. Prideful dissension, petty bickering, poisoned their fellowship. Attitudes that were so out of place in plain view of the Lord's immediate object lesson. That was the same inappropriate attitude that existed in the Corinthian church, too, pride and self-centeredness.

In light of Christ washing his disciples' feet, in light of the cleansing he provided by selflessly going to the cross to forgive us of all of our sins, isn't our pride absolutely shameful? Our pride is an utter disgrace, particularly when we come together to celebrate the Lord's Table. For those of us who struggle with pride and which of us doesn't? We need to repent of that sin immediately. We need to mortify it daily, killing it with extreme prejudice because it is so unfitting and inappropriate in the church, particularly here at the Lord's

Table. Communion is to be a humble fellowship before the Lord with his saints.

So communion is marked by intimacy with the Lord, purity of conscience, humility before God, before others. There is something else I want you to notice there in John 13. As Jesus was teaching Peter about the necessity of washing his feet, something wasn't quite right with the fellowship. And that something was a someone and he didn't belong. Look at verse 10 again. Jesus said, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that is why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

There is a fourth point here about the kind of fellowship we are proclaiming in communion. We're proclaiming an intimate fellowship, a pure fellowship, a humble fellowship, and the fourth point: Communion is an exclusive fellowship. It's an exclusive fellowship. As we noted earlier, Judas had arranged with the Jewish leaders to betray Jesus and hand him over to death. You know we saw that mentioned in Luke 22:3-6, but up to

this point, Judas was still in the company of the disciples. He's still there. That was a problem.

As Paul pointed out in 2 Corinthians 6:14-15, a series of rhetorical questions there, he says, "What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?" Implied answer, none. "Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" None. "What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?" None and none again.

Judas shared no partnership, no fellowship, no accord, and no portion with Christ and the rest of the Apostles. He didn't belong there. And beloved, unbelievers don't belong at the Lord's Table either. This is an exclusive fellowship between Christ and his church. Only Christians may participate in the Lord's Table. So in John 13:21-30, Jesus purged the fellowship. He identified and exposed that false disciple, and then his words, there, his handing of the morsel to Judas, drove Judas Iscariot from their midst.

Don't forget, Jesus had demonstrated love to all of them, washing all their feet. Judas had been among them. Jesus washed his feet, too. Judas was completely calloused to the significance of what the Lord was doing. Why? He had, his heart was not there. His heart was not with them. He couldn't learn anything. He was unteachable, unsubmitive to the Lord. So when it came to partaking of that last Passover, when it came to instituting this first communion, Jesus discriminated. Jesus excluded. The Lord's Table is a fellowship for Jesus and his disciples, for them exclusively. So Jesus sent Judas away and he spent that evening with his true disciples.

And that's what the final step in church discipline does for us, beloved. It purifies and it protects the church. The last step in church discipline, after you've followed the three previous steps in Matthew 18 of trying to restore somebody who is sinning, restore him, restore him, restore him, if he completely hardens his heart and refuses to repent, we need to excommunicate. We need to send him away. It's sad, but that's what that final step in church discipline does for us. It purifies and it protects the fellowship, so we also proclaim an

exclusive fellowship. This communion table is for members only.
Members only.

Well, with Judas gone, Jesus could proceed with the rest of what he had planned for that evening. Go ahead and turn back, at this point, to Luke 22. Go back to Luke 22, we're going to see the conclusion here of the Passover meal, the institution of the Lord's Supper and that brings us to another point in our outline, which is really the most fundamental point of all of these, maybe it's out of order, I don't know. But it's fundamental because without this point, none of the others would matter at all.

In observing communion, we proclaim an intimate fellowship, a pure fellowship, a humble fellowship, an exclusive fellowship, fifth point here: Communion is a redeemed fellowship. Communion is a redeemed fellowship. We are purchased. We are redeemed. We are owned by God. Without redemption, all the other points would be moot, wouldn't they? It wouldn't matter. Without redemption, there is no intimacy with Christ, no purity of conscience, no humility, certainly no exclusivity, no separated people, so let's

consider this: how the Lord's Table proclaims the redemption of the saints.

Let's look at verses 17 and 18, there in Luke 22. "And Jesus took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'" You can see down in verse 20, Luke mentions another cup and it says, "And likewise the cup he took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This is the cup that is poured out for you it's the new covenant in my blood.'"

So is this the same cup mentioned twice? Is there more than one cup? Which one is the communion cup if there are multiple cups? There are actually four cups, four cups that were part of the Passover celebration. The, the Jews celebrated Passover, using Exodus 6:6 through 8, as an outline summarizing God's covenant promises to Israel. It's Exodus 6:6-8. You don't need to turn there, but along with reading that text, the Jews drank four cups of wine to signify the four blessings that are

contained in the promises there in Exodus 6:6 through 8. So four cups.

The first cup was called, the cup of Kiddush, it was really, which is really the Cup of Sanctification. Kiddush or kadosh is the word for holiness, sanctification, being set apart. God said, Exodus 6:6, "I will bring you out of Egypt." I'll bring you out of Egypt, so he made a distinction between Israel and Egypt. That first cup signifies the separation of God's people, the sanctification of God's people, separating them from unbelievers. That is the first cup in Luke 22:17. "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves.'" So by separating Judas from his disciples, jud, Jesus had set them apart. He made a distinction among them. Jesus had sanctified them as his people. First cup.

Second cup is called the Cup of Plagues, or the Cup of Deliverance. The Cup of Plagues, or the Cup of Deliverance. Also in Exodus 6:6, God said, "I will deliver you from slavery." That cup, you understand delivering them from slavery involved the plagues. Involved the plagues, a tremendous judgment on Egypt.

And that cup is not mentioned in any of the accounts we see of the Lord's, the Lord's Supper here. But it says there, notice in Luke 22:19, it says, "He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance for me.'"

I don't want to make too much of a possible connection that's not explicit in Scripture, as if Jesus meant to replace the second Cup of Plagues in Passover with the breaking of bread. But the breaking of bread did signify his broken body, the ultimate plague on him. I don't think it's unreasonable to see a connection here. Jesus did in fact become a reproach. Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, God made his son, "The one who knew no sin, to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In a certain sense, you could say, Jesus endured the Cup of Plagues for us in his own body, on the cross, so that we might drink the cup of his deliverance.

Third cup shared in the Passover, it's called the Cup of Redemption, Cup of Redemption, the Cup of Blessing and that's

the one there mentioned in verse 20. Likewise, he gave them the cup after they had eaten, this is the third cup, cup of Redemption, Cup of Blessing, he says, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Exodus 6:6 says, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment."

God had spared Israel from the worst acts, worst of those great acts of judgment there in Egypt, that death of the firstborn. He covered them by the blood of an innocent lamb. You know in the same way, Jesus redeems his people saying that he will save them from God's great act of judgment; his full and final wrath, casting them into hell, he'll save them from that. He'll save them from that. God covered us with the blood of the lamb, the sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ, because of the cross.

One final cup, the fourth cup, it's called the Cup of Hallel. Hallel, means, praise. So it's the Cup of Praise. They drank this cup in view of the promises pointing ahead to Israel's restoration as a people. Exodus 6:7 says, "I will take you to be

my people. I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God." It's interesting, in none of the accounts did Jesus drink that cup. Jesus postponed partaking of the fourth cup until the promise was completely fulfilled. Luke 22:18, "I tell you from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Israel's national restoration is still future. Still future. Because they rejected their Messiah, everything, all the promises, the restoration for them is future.

So this whole Passover meal pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ. Communion points backward to the sacrifice of Christ. It's in communion that we celebrate Christ's redemption. And we, we also observe, figuratively speaking, the Cup of Sanctification, the Cup of Deliverance, the Cup of Redemption, and the Cup of Praise. Our Communion proclaims a redeemed fellowship, which is purchased by the blood of the Lamb of God.

In our participation at the Lord's Table, we proclaim the intimacy, purity, humility, exclusivity, and redemption of our

fellowship with Christ. The last point, point six: Communion is a learning fellowship. Communion is a learning fellowship. It's about discipleship. It's about learning. Jesus spent the rest of that evening with his disciples late, late into the night teaching them. Teaching them.

Jesus was the consummate teacher, the consummate preacher. He gave himself to his people, that is the great act of love he showed for them continually is by teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching. Think about that. He's got his betrayal coming just hours away, his death coming just hours after that. Do you think there was a lot on his mind? But what was his singular thought? Teach them. Prepare them. Teach those disciples. Prepare them for his death, prepare them for his burial, resurrection, his ascension and departure into heaven when they'll be alone, so to speak and yet, not alone. He'd send the Holy Spirit. He wanted to comfort them, John 14.

John 14 through 16, it records some of that for us. You can see the intimate fellowship that Jesus shared in that upper room, revealing, unpacking God's truth, teaching them to

understand it. His teaching was one of his most significant marks of his love for his disciples. And the evening ended with Jesus' high priestly prayer as he prayed for his disciples and for all believers, present and future, John 17. He ended that prayer, they sang a hymn together, departed the Upper Room, crossed the Kidron Valley, entered Gethsemane, Jesus spent some more time in private prayer, and then he waited for Judas to come and betray him.

Listen, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the intimacy, the purity, the humility, the exclusivity of our fellowship. Communion is about proclaiming Christ's redemption of his church. And communion is about renewing our commitment to follow Jesus Christ as his disciples, as life-long learners who will learn to observe every word that he has taught us. Now just quickly, as we draw this to a close, how do we apply all of this to our fellowship? How should that night, the night that Jesus was betrayed, what Jesus did that night, everything he did, how should that inform and instruct how we observe the Lord's Table together?

Just quickly, go back to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and let's see how Paul helped the Corinthian church understand the implication of the Lord's Table in their fellowship. When we participate in the Lord's Table together, we come together to practice a ritual of corporate fellowship. We're coming together to proclaim, preserve, and protect that fellowship and that means participation in the Lord's Table calls for right attitudes and appropriate actions in the church. Right attitudes, appropriate actions in the church.

First, we come with an attitude of self-examination. We come with an attitude of self-examination. Look at verses 27-30, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself." That is my, "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died."

God had judged the Corinthian church. He let them suffer physically using sickness and even death to awaken his people to their spiritual sickness, to their pride and self-centeredness in their hearts. Those attitudes of pride and self-centeredness that lead to divisions and self-indulgent behavior, they were poisoning and killing the fellowship.

Precious people for whom Christ died were being marginalized here. They were being humiliated. The sins of some were damaging the unity of the many. So there were some who really needed to examine themselves to see if they were truly in the faith. Others, they needed to examine themselves for attitudes of pride and selfishness. It's a serious thing to come to the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner, to destroy a fellowship that is so important to him. Self-examination is absolutely critical, if we're to make sure we approach the communion table in a way that pleases the Lord.

Second, not just self-examination, we come committed to self-adjudication. Self-adjudication and by that, I mean we need to follow through with what the Lord commanded in Matthew 18 with regard to the process of church discipline. Notice verses

31 to 32. "But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

Several passages help us to understand how to practice what we would, what we would call restorative church discipline. You can see 1 Corinthians 5:1 to 13, 1 Timothy 5:20, Titus 3:10 and 11, all of those are based on Jesus' clear outline for confrontation, which is there in Matthew 18:15 to 17. I'm not going to unpack it now, but Matthew 18, Jesus outlines clearly four steps, easy steps, the church can take when attempting to restore a sinning brother back into the fellowship. Number one, confront him privately. Number two, confront him with two or three others. Number three, confront publicly and number four, remove the offender from fellowship through formal excommunication if he doesn't repent.

So as a church body, we need to have the temerity, we need to have the boldness, we need to have a base attitude of fear of the Lord to purge the false professor from the fellowship. We're committed to a pure fellowship; we need to protect the Lord's

Table. That's not our will that's the Lord's will. That is his desire for the church.

And I can summarize this best by pointing to what Paul said in another place, Philippians 2:1 to 5 he said, "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count one another's more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others; have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Right?

To do that requires a humble attitude that's willing to set personal preferences aside, restrain and discipline the self and consider others more important. Self-examination, self-adjudication, self-discipline, those are the actions and the attitudes that preserve and protect our fellowship. And they ensure that when we come together to celebrate communion, we proclaim exactly what it's meant to proclaim, our fellowship with

Jesus Christ and with one another. Bow with me for a moment of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we just want to thank you for the clarity of your Word. It's really the clarity about what the Lord Jesus Christ thinks about the Communion Table. We never want to offend him who has done everything for us. We want to celebrate this table today with a sincere heart of faith, with a conscience that is cleansed from sin through confession by coming to partake of every grace you have given us. We love you, Father. We love you Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you, Holy Spirit, for leading us, teaching, guiding us into all truth. And we pray even now, that you would bless our time here around your table.