

Communion

Recently, over the three-day Easter period, I shared in Communion on two occasions, first in a Pentecostal church and then in an Anglican church. Although the settings and styles of worship were quite different, both Communion services were deeply moving and spiritually enriching experiences for me.

Communion must never become an empty religious ritual. Yet, like anything repeated regularly, it can gradually lose its freshness and vitality if we participate without thoughtful reflection. We must guard against allowing this precious remembrance to become merely routine.

The Communion meal was not an extension of the Passover feast. It was part of the New Covenant. Nowadays Communion is referred to as the 'Lord's Supper', 'The Eucharist', 'Holy Communion' and the 'Remembrance feast'. All these different titles endeavour to emphasise some aspect of the importance of the meal.

Relationships

In the early church, Communion was not merely a ceremonial observance, it was woven into everyday life.

'Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people' Acts 2:46,47.

Good relationships are still a basis for Communion - with God first and then sisters and brothers in the Lord. For this reason, it is important that self-examination occurs before observing Communion to see if our life is in order. Failing to do this may cause weakness, sickness and even death (1 Corinthians 11:27ff). Incidentally, Christians under church discipline could in some instances be discouraged from taking Communion for a determined period until the repentance process is completed. Sometimes, this is hard to know when it applies so an interview may be necessary before there is full restoration to the fellowship of believers. This not only protects the disciplined person from infirmities, but it also prevents the church from becoming weak and powerless.

Reasons for Communion

Symbolism

The bread and the juice were symbols of the body and blood of Jesus (just as a world globe is a symbol for planet earth). These elements do not literally change into the body and blood of Jesus (transubstantiation), but when we eat and drink of these elements, we remember the meaning behind it and what happened upon the cross.

Recipients of Grace

This understanding goes further than symbolism. It means that we appropriate now all that the body and blood of Jesus accomplished upon the Cross. For example, as we eat the bread and drink of the cup, by faith we may appropriate cleansing from sin and healing.

Ways to take Communion

Some of the following approaches may help:

- Have the pastor or the elders serve the people from the front.
- Serve the people where they are sitting.
- Arrange the people to serve one another in small groups.
- Plan creative church services incorporating dance and drama.
- Have it at the end of a meal.
- Have it in a Home group.
- Have it during a wedding service.
- Serve the sick at home or in hospital.
- Have it at a camp.
- Use different people to serve.

Points to note

1. Nowhere in Scripture are instructions given as to how often Communion is to be held, although we are encouraged to have it regularly 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
2. Scripture never specifically mentions the word 'wine' as an emblem for Communion although it probably was wine. The cup however, refers to the 'fruit of the vine' (Matthew 26:29). I have found however that serving wine can create problems for some converted alcoholics, so for obvious reasons I prefer to use grape juice. Others may in fact use coconut juice etc.
3. Scripture never makes an age requirement before people can receive Communion. The requirement was simply that they 'believe'.
4. Remember – good *relationships* are of vital importance at Communion. I
5. It is useful for children to get their parent's permission before they receive Communion.
6. There is no Scriptural basis for the view that only specially trained or officially recognised leaders may serve Communion. Nevertheless, it is a sacred privilege to do so, and those who serve Communion should approach the responsibility with reverence, sincerity, and at times joy for Jesus is risen!