

COMMUNION: WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

1st Corinthians 11:23-26

(23) 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: (24) And when He has given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. (25) After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. (26) For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come.

Introduction

Of the six interrogatives, who, what, when, where, how, only “why” seeks to discover the reason or purpose for something that has occurred, is occurring, or will occur. So, it is only natural to ask, “Why is Holy Communion so important?” Church bodies disagree on the number and selection of ordinances, but all of them include Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Humans have a need to ritualize significant events. We come together and ritualize birthdays, weddings, graduations, ordinations, baby dedications, various anniversaries, and even funerals. The feast days in the Bible, such a Passover, were obviously to celebrate and ritualize significant milestones in Hebraic history. As the Olympics are underway, the gold, silver, and bronze medalists stand on a podium and their victories are ritualized. Ritualization is part of human nature. It is encoded in our genes.

Many of the students who did not have a public graduation ceremony during the pandemic often said they felt as if they had not graduated. Their diplomas and degrees were either picked up on campus or mailed to them. So, what was missing? The ritualization of the accomplishment! This proves the point, anecdotally, that we crave for ritualization of special occasions. Christianity's most important function is to provide a way to eternal life, but it also serves the function of allowing us to ritualize important spiritual events.

Let's take a little time and examine a few of the reasons the sacred ritual of Holy Communion is important to believers.

Exposition

1. A Reminder Of God's Sacrificial Love For Us.

(Jesus Went To The Cross To Save Us.)

2. A Reminder Of How Horrible Sin Is.

(All Sins Are Horrible.)

(Sins Cause Pain And Suffering.)

(Personal Sins Are Horrible.)

(Systemic Sins Are Horrible.)

(Sins Of Omission Are Horrible.)

(It Took The Horror Of Crucifixion To Provide A Remedy.)

(The Harsher The Illness, The Stronger The Medicine.)

3. A Shared Time Of Fellowship Of Believers.

(It Is A Family Meal.)

(Everything Should Be In "Table Order." - See End Note.)

4. An Acknowledgement That The Blood Still Works.

(After More Than Two Thousand Years, The Blood Is Still Fresh And Powerful.)

Closing Thoughts

I will close with a story that has floated around for decades. There are several versions with several endings. Some say it is totally factual, some say it partially factual; others say it is a beautiful story, but pure fiction. The story does, however, have a very meaningful message.

In World War II, during the invasion of Tarawa, the marines were ready to come to shore and fight the enemy. The official procedures required that one marine must remain on the ship while the others would storm the shore and engaged the enemy in battle. The reasoning was that the ship should not be totally abandoned. The commanding officer, named Hawkins, asked for one volunteer to stay behind. Hawkins inspired so much confidence and comradery that no one would volunteer to stay behind. The general consensus was, "If my buddies have to go into battle and risk their lives, then I should also go." Finally, Commander Hawkins ordered one of the marines to remain in the ship. This marine lagged behind, but disobeyed orders and came to shore any way. When Commander Hawkins discovered he had disobeyed his direct command, he told the marine, "I could have you court marshalled for disobeying a direct command. The marine replied, "If we both make it out alive, you have every right to bring me before a tribunal." As the story goes, because of his quick thinking and innate military skills, this marine saved the lives of more than fifty of his fellow marines. Instead of having to stand before a tribunal, he was awarded several medals for bravery and his military skill.

The important message of this story is not to advocate the disobeying of orders, but to demonstrate loyalty to your comrades. The question was raised: "What if the marine had stayed on the ship?" The answer is simple: fifty more marines would have been lost. Now I pose the same question about Jesus, "What if Jesus had stayed in heaven and not come to earth?" "What if He had decided we were not worth saving?" The answer is obvious." We would all be lost for eternity. John 3:16 would not exist. John Newton would not have penned **Amazing Grace**. Our fore-parents would not have sung **I Know It Was The Blood** or **Give Me Jesus**. They celebrated the marine who left the comfort and security of the ship and gave him medals of honor. Jesus left heaven, where angels were praising Him 24/7 by crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Let us celebrate our Savior, by praise, worship, and obedience. These are our ways of giving our Savior shinning gold medals of honor.

Give God Glory! Give God All Of The Glory!

End Note

I was blessed to pastor the St. James Baptist Church in Gulfport, Mississippi. During that time, when I would ask the elders how things were going, they would often reply, "Everything is in table order." I had not heard that phrase before; it was a regional figure of speech. I confessed my ignorance of the idiom and asked them what it meant. It meant they had no complaints and things were going as well as could be expected, under the circumstances. It meant there was no bad news and the family was safe.

After further conversations and research, I discovered the phrase "in table order" goes back to the Red Summer of 1919, in which it was not safe for Blacks to go anywhere at any time. During that era, all families ate together, especially the evening meal. If every family member made it home safely and was around the supper table eating and conversing, there was a sense of great relief. Not only was the entire family at the table, but there was also adequate food on the table. The grace before the meal would often thank God that things were in table order. As we gather around the communion table, we should have that same sense of peace and relief. We should recognize that we are family and there is peace and contentment when we sup with the Lord. When we partake of the communion elements, we should all be in table order for there is adequate spiritual food on the table.

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