**Healing and Communion**

**Introduction**

* God loves me. God loves you. God loves us all.
* Often we focus on our love for God, which is not wrong, but I think we need to realise in a deeper way that God loves us.
* Peter was a man who said that he would follow Jesus wherever He went.
* He said that he would lay down his life for Jesus.
* Peter was focussing on his love for Jesus.
* John however focussed more on God’s love for him.
* Five times John calls himself the disciple who Jesus loved (**John 13:23; 19:26, 20:2; 21:7** and **21:20**).
* John was focussing on Jesus’ love for him.
* At the foot of the cross Peter was nowhere to be found despite all of his boasting in his love for Jesus, but John was present.
* Why? Because John knew he was loved.

**16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.**

**1 John 4:16**

* I believe we can experience this love of God through Holy Communion.
* So in this teaching we will look at Holy Communion in some detail.
* I am aware that this teaching goes out to Christians from many different churches, so the term The Bread and Wine might not be used in your church.
* Often it is referred to as The Lord’s Table, The Lord’s Supper, The Breaking of Bread, Holy Communion or just Communion.
* In this teaching I will use these terms interchangeably. Whatever terminology is used we need to know more about Holy Communion.

**See Jesus**

* One of the most helpful things for me when I partake of Holy Communion is to see Jesus as He was at the Last Supper.
* I picture His eyes full of love, and the tone of His voice full of love for me. That makes it personal – as though Jesus died just for me.
* Often we hear people say that they feel unworthy to take the bread and wine, or they have sinned on their way to church and so feel hypocritical to take the bread and wine.
* That is just the point – it is because of our unworthiness that we **must** participate in the bread and wine.
* When we see the love Jesus has for us it will cause us to focus on Him, not our own sinfulness.

**Discerning the Lord’s Body**

* Sadly, many Christians are far too aware of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about taking the bread and wine unworthily.

**27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.**

**28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.**

**29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.**

**30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.**

**1 Corinthians 11:27-30**

* Let us spend some time examining this passage.
* First of all let us see why Paul wrote this *to the Corinthians*.
* Notice that Paul wrote this specifically to the Corinthians, not the Ephesians, Philippians or anybody else.
* Of course, there is much we can learn from this passage but we must also understand why Paul was so specific only to the Corinthian Church.
* In ancient Greek plays the stereotypical Corinthian was a pleasure-seeking drunkard.
* If Athens was the ‘cultural’ capital of the ancient world then Corinth was the ‘sin’ capital.
* At the temple of Diana in Corinth there were about 1000 male and female prostitutes offering their services to please Diana.
* People would often drink too much wine and then spend time with a prostitute as a form of their worship. This is the background to Paul’s letter. This is why he chastised them:

**20 When ye come together therefore into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's supper.**

**21 For in eating every one taketh before *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.**

**22 What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not.**

**1 Corinthians 11:20-22**

* We can see from these verses that some Corinthians were rushing to eat the food whilst others were drinking wine to excess.
* Paul was saying that they should eat at home first before taking communion.
* Notice that in verse 29 Paul spoke about eating and drinking *unworthily*.
* The word *unworthily* is an adverb which means it describes the verb; it describes the *action* of eating and drinking, *not* the person who is eating and drinking.
* The Greek word used here is *anaxios* which means ‘irreverently’.
* In other words it means to treat the Lord’s Supper as a normal meal.
* Paul did not say that if you are an unworthy person you cannot partake of the bread and wine.
* In and of ourselves we are all unworthy, but it is the worthiness of Jesus that enables us to partake of this wonderful Holy Communion.
* I believe that many in the church have misunderstood this verse and taught that if you are unworthy (i.e. you have sin in your life) then you cannot partake.
* They continue to teach that many in church are sick because they have sin in their life whilst taking the bread and wine.
* **They have taken God’s blessing to us and made it a curse.**
* Paul was saying we should not partake *unworthily*.
* But what does that mean?
* Verse 29 continues with the answer – ‘not discerning the Lord’s body’.
* In other words if you fail to understand the true spiritual significance of Jesus accomplished on the cross you are eating and drinking unworthily.
* The Corinthians partook unworthily because they did not understand the truth about what Jesus had accomplished.
* They were treating this as a party or a social function, not reverencing Jesus.
* Now, we cannot lay the blame fully on them as I am sure they were acting in ignorance, as many in the church today are.
* If our attitude is ‘this is just a bit of bread and a bit of wine’ then we have missed it; we will have robbed ourselves of the benefits of the cross.
* **So when we take the bread and wine we need to examine ourselves to see that we are in faith and understanding the true spiritual significance of what we are doing.**
* **Paul did not say to examine yourself to see if you have sin in your life.**
* **Paul said to examine yourself to see if you truly understand the spiritual significance of the bread and the wine.**
* So what does it mean in verse 29 where we read, ‘…eateth and drinketh damnation to himself’?
* Let me say that it does *not* mean that God will damn you to hell or put some sort of sickness on you as a punishment.
* The Greek word used for damnation is *krima* which means a sentence passed for a crime.
* When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden a divine sentence (*krima*) was placed upon their bodies.
* God’s protective glory was removed from around them resulting in ageing, sickness and death.
* This was not God’s plan for His creation.
* This verse is saying that when we partake of the bread and wine in faith and understanding we will be able to see a reverse of the effects of the curse of Eden.
* Yes, there is power in the act of eating.
* I know that some people might find it difficult to believe or understand that eating a small amount of bread and drinking a small amount of wine can have such a dramatic effect.
* But remember that sin came into the world because Adam and Eve ate a bit of fruit!
* Let me put it this way: the act of Adam and Eve eating in faithless disobedience to God brought sin, sickness and death into this world.
* The act of eating and drinking in faithful obedience to God can bring health and wellbeing to God’s people.

**Healing Through the Bread and Wine**

* So now let us look at how healing can come as a result of the Bread and Wine.
* Firstly, remember that this is not a ritual.
* When Jesus said, “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me” (**1 Corinthians 11:24**) we need to see His face full of love to us and hear his words full of love to us; we need to make it personal.
* We need to see our sins and our sicknesses and our lack on Him.
* I believe that taking communion is a way of maintaining our health that has been missed by many in the church.
* Yes, eating healthily is important and there are many Christian books about healthy eating, the Jesus’ diet, eating a Mediterranean diet etc.
* *But we must remember that almost everybody who Jesus healed was eating a Mediterranean diet!*
* So diet in itself is not the answer.
* The early church believed in the importance of taking communion often.

**42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.**

**Acts 2:42**

**46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,**

**Acts 2:46**

* The disciples continued steadfastly to take the bread and wine.
* The Greek word used for steadfastly in **Acts 2:42** is *proskartereo* which means ‘to persevere’, ‘to be constantly diligent’, ‘to continue’.
* The results of this were that many signs and wonders were seen and people were saved.
* Although the term used in the above verse is *breaking of bread*, we must not forget that this includes the wine.
* The bread and the wine symbolise two different things.
* The blood is for the forgiveness of our sins (see **Colossians 1:14; Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5**).
* So when you partake of the wine you know that your forgiveness is assured.
* The bread represents the body of Jesus and is for our healing.
* We can see this in many scriptures including the account of the Syrophoenician woman in Matthew’s Gospel:

**26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs.
27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.**

**Matthew 15:26-27**

* In context, the bread in this passage is referring to a deliverance which effects a healing.
* Therefore, just as bread is a basic foodstuff, we can see that healing and deliverance are basic rights of those who believe in Jesus Christ.
* Please note that the Syrophoenician woman was willing to settle for crumbs.
* There are many Christians today who are also willing to settle for crumbs when they don’t need to.
* We are children of the Baker.
* We don’t have to settle for crumbs because our Father owns the bakery!
* So when Jesus speaks about the children’s bread (which as we have already seen is referring to His body), He was speaking about healing for people who have a covenant with Him – that includes us.
* The disciples understood this.
* When Jesus said, “Take, eat; this is my body” (**Matthew 26:26**) they did not need a long explanation – they knew that Jesus wanted to impart His life unto them.
* Understanding that the bread represents healing sheds new light on something Jesus said in Luke’s Gospel.
* We can read **Luke 11:3** “Give us day by day our daily bread” as ‘Give us health and healing every day’ or ‘Keep us healthy every day’.

**The Last Supper and the Passover**

* The Last Supper was celebrated at Passover (**Luke 22:15**) because Jesus is our Passover Lamb (**1 Corinthians 5:7**).
* The Old Testament is the shadow of the New Testament reality.
* So the Passover is a shadow of the Lord’s Supper.
* So let us look briefly at the Passover.
	+ The Israelites took a spotless lamb, killed it and put its blood on the doorposts of their house.
	+ This caused the angel of death to pass over their houses (**Exodus 12:3-14** and **28**).
	+ They then ate the roasted lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.
	+ This meal provided them with strength for their journey, but it was not just a physical strength for an arduous journey.
	+ No, we are told that none of them were feeble (**Psalm 105:37**).
	+ The word *feeble* in Hebrew is ‘kashal’ which means ‘to stumble through weakness of the knees or ankles’, ‘to fall’, or ‘to falter’.
	+ There were 600,000 men plus women and children in the exodus; for none of those former slaves to have any weakness in them is miraculous.
	+ These people were slaves making bricks without straw.
	+ Their diet was not the best either – leeks and onions etc.
	+ Naturally they would be weak and feeble.
	+ YET THERE WAS NOT ONE FEEBLE. What a miracle!
* If eating a Passover lamb (a shadow of Jesus) can produce this health and wealth, how much more feeding on Jesus, the real lamb?
* Shadows – **Hebrews 8:5** and **10:1**.
* Shadows aren’t as beneficial as the real thing:
	+ The shadow of a meal never fed anyone.
	+ The shadow of a glass of water never refreshed anyone.
* **Hebrews 7:22** and **Hebrews 8:6** say that we have a better testament.
* Therefore, we should have better than the Old Testament saints.
* How did the Passover Lamb benefit the Israelites?
* They ate it.
* How do we benefit from Jesus, our Passover Lamb (**1 Corinthians 5:7**)?
* The same, we eat. But how?
	+ We feed on our Passover Lamb by reading the Bible (**John 6:35, 48, 51, 54-58**).
	+ We feed on our Passover Lamb by taking communion (**John 6:35, 48, 51, 54-58**).
	+ This is acting in faith.
* Remember that we have a better covenant?
* In the Old Testament the sacrificial blood was a temporary covering of sins, it did not remove them.
* Now remember we have a better covenant and so Jesus, our Passover Lamb, ‘takes away’ sins (**John 1:29**), not just covers them.
* The Passover lamb had a two-fold effect:
	+ the blood on the doorposts was shed for forgiveness, and the body of the lamb was eaten for health.
	+ Forgiveness and healing went together.
* King David knew this and recorded it for us:

**2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:**

**3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;**

**Psalm 103:2-3**

* God loves us so much that through Jesus on the cross He forgave us and healed us.
* What a wonderful truth.
* If you were to ask a Christian if God has forgiven them they would say yes because of the cross.
* But if you asked if they were certain of healing they would not be so sure.
* Yet we have seen that forgiveness and healing are to be experienced together.
* The same faith you have in God’s word for your forgiveness is the same faith for your healing.

**As Often…**

* We have already seen that the early church took communion often because they understood its significance.
* Paul exhorted the Corinthians to take the bread and wine often.

**26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.**

**1 Corinthians 11:26**

* This is an interesting verse and is worthy of some study.
* The Greek word for often is *hosakis* which simply means many times.
* In other words Paul is expecting believers to take communion many times.
* That would mean that communion is not limited to a Sunday.
* The Greek word for shew is *kataggello* which means to declare, preach, teach or speak of.
* The Greek word for angel, *aggelos* is a cognate of *kataggello*.
* So when we take the bread and wine we are declaring or speaking about all that Jesus accomplished at the cross.
* But who are we declaring it to?
* I think the answer is two-fold.
* *Firstly*, we are speaking it to ourselves.
	+ We are saying that we are forgiven, we are healed, we are loved etc.
	+ That edifies us and makes us strong in our faith.
* *Secondly*, we are declaring it to the devil.
	+ We are telling him the same thing and reminding him that he is defeated.
* What a glorious blessing it is to be able to take communion.
* No wonder the devil is happy when churches relegate communion to once a month or only if it fits in with everything else in the Church service.
* No, I believe that communion must be central to our Church services.
* Sadly, some denominations have made communion so ‘holy’ that only a qualified or ordained minister is able to administer the bread and wine.
* That is not so.
* You do not need a priest or pastor or anybody else to give you communion.
* The Apostle Peter makes it clear that all believers are priests.

**5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.**

**1 Peter 2:5**

**9 But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;**

**1 Peter 2:9**

* If you are a Christian you are qualified to take communion all by yourself if you want to.
* When I am preparing for some meetings the Lord will lead me to take communion by myself.
* So, “How often is often?” you might ask.
* As often as you want to or need to.
* If you are sick and the Lord leads you to take communion, take it every day.
* Many people take the bread and wine as a part of their daily devotions, or at a weekly family prayer time.
* We are not limited to taking communion in a church.
* But remember we are to continue taking the bread and wine until the Lord comes.

**26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.**

**1 Corinthians 11:26**

* Holy Communion is a wonderful reminder of God’s love to us – which includes healing.
* As we partake of the bread and wine we can show our love for Him until He comes again.
* Come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen.