

Communion: The Christian Love Feast

- I. Ask any ordinary Christian today what a Christian meeting was like in the days of the apostles and you will get various answers!
 - A. The answers will generally be formed by their particular tradition.
 1. The basic Evangelical will say - It consisted primarily of preaching!
 2. The Charismatic will general say - It was full of expressive praise and exercise of spiritual gifts!
 3. An Anglican may respond - It was principally a celebration of the Eucharist!
 4. While I'm sure all of these responses are somewhat true at various times in the early church meetings, history seems to reveal that the dominant part of early church gatherings was a meal shared together!
 - B. The early church Christians referred to this meal as The Agape!
 1. It seems that in our busy independent western culture we have lost one of the core principles of our faith; Being a genuine part of each other's lives!
 2. While I do think each cultures expression of Christianity may look different, we must embrace the heart of our faith...
RELATIONSHIPS!

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

3. Within a century or so after Constantine's conversion and influence on Christianity this important part of apostolic worship had disappeared!

II. What is the true origin of this practice?

- A. The origin of communion or The Lord's Supper is actually found in the disciples sharing of a meal together. The Jewish Seder Meal.

Matthew 26:17, 20, 26-28 (NIV)

17 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." 27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

1. So, the first communion was instituted in context of the close close fellowship of a meal!
2. Does that mean we should eat a meal every time we have communion? No, but I think it does place the context of this practice of our faith! Relationship!
3. There will always be cultural aspects of our faith but I also desire to always get the point and bigger picture of scripture!

- B. From scripture we see that this celebration meal of communion is a place of level, respectful and equal ground!

1 Corinthians 11:20-26 (NIV)

20 So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. 22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter! 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, 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." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1. In the midst of one of the most intimate practices of our faith, we are being directed to consider others!
2. HOW you practice your faith is extremely important to God!
3. This is perhaps best illustrated by Paul in Romans 14!

4. We often hear that faith is a very private issue. To the contrary! It is actually meant to be very public! Just in a very humble and serving way!
 5. I believe what Paul is saying to the Corinthian Church is, “You can only get drunk if you have more wine than you need.”
 6. Let’s not live with excess! Let’s be generous and giving!
- C. Our faith is one of constant growth, maturity and progression!
Our daily challenge is to become more like Jesus and represent Him to our world!
1. In the midst of this very intimate practice we see the Lord through Paul encouraging us to do just that; examine ourselves!

1 Corinthians 11:27-28 (NIV)

27 So then, 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. 28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

2. Am I thinking of others?
 3. Do I live from a selfish standpoint?
 4. Am I serving others?
 5. Am I demanding my way?
- D. Jude has some very direct words!

Jude 12 (NLT)

12 When these people eat with you in your fellowship meals commemorating the Lord’s love, they are like dangerous reefs that can shipwreck you. They are like shameless shepherds who care only for themselves. They are like clouds blowing over the land without giving any rain. They are like trees in autumn that are doubly dead, for they bear no fruit and have been pulled up by the roots.

1. Reefs can be hidden under water and can do damage without you knowing it!
2. He warns of selfish leadership pushing their own agenda.
3. Folks that make a lot of stir but have nothing to give.

4. Those among us that bear no real fruit in their lives.

III. Across all expressions of Christianity, it is generally agreed that we have a faith that is based on RELATIONSHIP! Relationship with God and relationship with each other!

A. Here are some quotes from a wide range of Christian expressions:

1. Conservative Evangelical Dictionary of Theology:
“Certainly, by the time of Paul’s writings to the Corinthians, around 55 A.D., it is evident that the church observed the practice of a common meal together before communion.”
2. Anglo-Catholic Perspective:
“The term agape is applied also to the common religious meal which seems to have been used in the early church in relation to the Eucharist.”
3. The Liberal Oxford Companion Bible Notes:
“The love feast is the common meal with which Christians first followed Christ’s command at the Last Supper.”
4. The Protestant International Standard Bible Encyclopedia:
“In the opinion of a great majority of scholars, the agape was a meal at which not only bread and wine, but all kinds of viands were used, a meal which had a double purpose of satisfying hunger and thirst and giving expression to Christian brotherhood.
5. The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity used by Protestants and Catholics says:
“In the history of early Christian practice, agape is a liturgical term that means “love feast”. It comes from a meal that the New Testament calls the “breaking of bread.”

B. When changes came to the Body of Christ!

1. During the second and third centuries the “love feast” and communion were separated during Christian worship.
2. This seemed to be the early beginnings of the “modern church services.”
3. In 313 A.D. Constantine declared Christianity a State recognized religion with support and protection.

4. With that came gatherings with “social Christians” with no real relationships and intimacy with God or each other.
- C. So, let’s commit to the Lord and each other that when we come together as a congregation to our “love feast” we:
1. Come with open hearts for the Lord and each other.
 2. Not only love each other but respect and value each other.
 3. Sensitive to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

Ephesians 4:3-6 (NIV)

3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.