

***The Great Sayings in the Gospels***  
***Message 141***  
***Communion***  
***Matthew 26:26-29***

Matt 26:26-30

- 26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.
- 27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;
- 28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.
- 29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.
- 30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

**Introduction:**

We are now at the last day in the earthly life of Jesus Christ before His crucifixion. In fact, by the Jewish way of counting a day, this is the very one of His death, the Jewish day beginning and ending at sundown.

The disciples have prepared and the group has shared their last Passover meal together. Taking the wine and the bread from the Passover table, Jesus instituted the great Christian institution that we have come to know as Communion. This name was not given to the event by Jesus but by Paul in 1 Cor 10, which we shall look at shortly.

As the New Testament will develop the concepts that surround this simple ceremony, the entire conception of what it means to be a Christian and a church is tied to it in various ways. So long as individual churches held on to the collections of truths and principles that are contained in the teachings of the New Testament on the subject they prospered and continued as intended by the Lord. As they began to lose those fundamental concepts, they ‘morphed’ into distortions and corruptions of the original design. Some of them became grotesque caricatures of the model taught in the New Testament and became the very enemies of the gospel and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One thing is clear, I believe, to every student of the New Testament. If we are ever to live individually, and especially, communally as we are taught in God’s Word, we are in desperate need of a clear and firm understanding of the realities that are pictured in that simple little ceremony that Jesus gave His church the night before He was crucified.

**I. The Apostle Paul gave us this name for the ceremony, ‘Communion.’**

I Cor 10:16,17

16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the **communion** of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the **communion** of the body of Christ?

17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all *partakers* (metachomen)of that one bread.

But let us imagine for a little while that we have no idea what the word means. Let us, as it were, erase all previous conceptions, definitions, and thoughts concerning it and see if we can begin with a ‘clean slate.’

What if we had to begin from scratch to try to define the word and the only help we had was the Word of God itself. Do we have enough definition to create a concrete and well developed notion of it?

Let us remember that the word ‘koinonia’ did have a meaning within the language of the day, as used by the common man. It meant, to the average Greek, ‘partnership,’ ‘participation,’ and ‘social interaction.’ But we must know and remember that once a word became ‘Christianized,’ associated with the doctrines and theology surrounding Jesus Christ and His Work of Redemption, those common meanings were often greatly altered and profoundly changed, not necessarily into something fundamentally different, but in depth of meaning and reality.

Just as an example, the word for ‘redeemed’ changed from being a simple concept of buying back a piece of property against which money had been borrowed to the astounding vision of the Very Son of God hanging on a cross, bearing in all reality the sin and guilt of His people and satisfying that debt before the Infinitely Holy Judge against whom these people had profoundly sinned.

Everywhere the gospel has penetrated since, the concept of redemption, whatever the particular word used in that culture, has been forever and radically altered.

That being said, we should realize that we cannot primarily depend upon the definitions common to humanity apart from the Word of God to give us sufficient understanding of the word ‘Communion.’

## **II. We look, therefore, to the words of scripture themselves for our definitions.**

Quite often Paul and others would help their readers to comprehend this new way that they were using some familiar word or term by using other associated words and ideas to help form this new concept in the minds of their audience.

For example, Paul used one particular circumstance twice to point our understanding of his use of the word in the direction he intended.

During Paul’s last two missionary journeys he had made the Gentile churches of Asia, Macedonia, and Greece aware of the needs of the saints in Israel because of a great drought that had fallen on the country. Some of the churches had determined to collect money for them but one particular group outdid themselves.

Rom 15:24-26

- 24 Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.
- 25 But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints.
- 26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain **contribution** for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

2 Cor 8:1-5

- 1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;
- 2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.
- 3 For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;
- 4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the **fellowship** of the ministering to the saints.
- 5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. KJV

Sometimes the words used in and around one that we are trying to understand help us, as we shall see in just a little while but at other times an entire story describes the sense of the word. This is the case here. The churches of Macedonia were so poor that Paul thought it improper to press them for a gift but they had another idea. They not only collected money but they gave so much that it put many of them into deeper poverty than they already were.

In Rom 15 the word normally translated ‘communion’ is given as ‘contribution’ and in 2 Cor 8 it is rendered ‘fellowship.’ This can mean nothing less than the sympathetic and loving action of sharing the burden of another and taking it upon one’s self to help. In Christian ‘*communion*’ there is to be the understood willingness to share the burdens of others within that ‘*fellowship*’ even if that means sacrificing ourselves. There may not be the constant need of some tangible gift as there was with the Jerusalem church but the *willingness* is always part of the equation

If we go back to 1 Cor 10:16-21 we find that Paul emphasizes the idea of becoming a ‘participant’ or ‘partaker’ in something profound.

1 Cor 10:16-21

- 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the **communion** of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the **communion** of the body of Christ?
- 17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all *partakers* (metachomen)of that one bread.
- 18 Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices *partakers* (koinonoi)of the altar?

- 19 What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?
- 20 But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have **fellowship** with devils.
- 21 Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be *partakers* of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

Here Paul joins the idea of 'communion' to the concepts of joint participation, fellowship, and partnership. He compared the sharing of the Lord's table with (in a positive way) the joint participation of the Jews in the sacrifices at the temple and (in a negative way) with the pagan worship of the Gentiles. On the one hand there was a positive joint benefit in which all the Jews shared that flowed out of the ceremonies of the temple and on the other there was a mutually destructive influence that affected all who participated together in the pagan worship ceremonies. This principle of a joint and collective positive benefit flowing from the Work of Jesus Christ, celebrated in the cup and the bread, is one function of the meaning of our word 'communion.'

By the way, it is for this very reason that the person living in sin is to be forbidden participation at the Communion ceremony. His presence and his unrepentant state of heart and mind is grievous to the Holy Spirit so that the entire group is hindered from receiving a joint blessing. The communion of blessing is turned to collective disappointment.

Paul used that concept more particularly in another place to help us understand our word.

2 Cor 6:14-18

14 Be ye not unequally *yoked together* with unbelievers: for what **fellowship** hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what *concord* hath Christ with Belial? or what *part* hath he that believeth with an infidel?

'Part' = 'meris' which means 'portion' or 'participation.'

16 And what *agreement* hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Here, he compared those in communion to oxen or horses who were harnessed together for some task; to pull a plow or a wagon for example. All of these people knew that if one was going to do that, he needed animals that would work well together. So, the idea of 'working together' is associated with 'communion.'

But he also introduced another word, the root from which we get our word 'symphony.' It is translated 'concord' in v.15 which is also linked to the idea of having a 'part or portion' of something. Anyone who has ever played music or sung in a group knows that everyone must be and remain on the same page, the same rhythm and the same emphasis or the joint venture becomes an embarrassment.

The concept is also compare with the idea of being in practical agreement with, voting with, others.

*And, sometimes, we are helped when one describes the opposite of the word.*

- 17 Wherefore *come out from among them*, and *be ye separate*, saith the Lord, and *touch not* the unclean thing; and I will receive you,  
18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. KJV

The opposite of communion is separation, vehement and profound detachment. So, communion involves being joined in practical and significant ways.

And, finally, John puts it somewhat together for us in practical terms.

1 John 1:1-7

- 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;  
2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)  
3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our **fellowship** is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.  
4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.  
5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.  
6 If we say that we have **fellowship** with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:  
7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have **fellowship** one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Here the idea of a shared life is surely brought into focus. One cannot share his life with God and walk in darkness. Any such claim is pretense and a total lie. Walking in the light (of the revelation of God through His Word) not only manifests a shared life with Him but also a life shared with His people.

Two people who are each in *communion* with God are in *fellowship* with one another. There is a spiritual union with God that was created by Him when He brought us from darkness to light by giving us of His Own Life. But he did the same thing to our brother and our sister, so that the life that is in us and the life that is in them is the same life. It cannot and will not reject itself.

Paul makes a point in one place that no man ever hated his own body but more profoundly than that the Spirit of God in one person never hated the Spirit of God in another person. It is both a logical and a functional impossibility. Saints that are walking in the light happily walk together.

**III. So, Christian Communion means far more than simply sharing the cup and the bread, although that act of sharing celebrates all that Communion means.**

On its' most basic level Communion means that we have actually taken part in the Work of Jesus

Christ on the cross. That broken bread and that poured out wine picture His body and blood and everything that He accomplished for us through the Cross.

Taking these symbols into our bodies celebrates the fact that He has united us to Himself in an eternal union so that His identity and ours can never be successfully separated. All that was once true of us became true of Him (our sin) and all that is true of Him (righteousness and holiness) is forever true of us. Or, as Paul said it:

2 Cor 5:21

21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

However, it also means that we have been united not only to Him but to one another and that we are to joyfully and willingly enter into that union with other believers as we all, together, walk in the light of God's Word.

And that means far more than accepting some theory or abstract truth of theology.

The perfect picture of communion was those early days of the Jerusalem church.

Acts 2:44-47

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

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,

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. KJV

Now the Christian church never accepted this as a universal model though it was repeated at certain times throughout church history out of necessity.

But the unselfishness, the joyful sharing, the happy fellowship have all been a part of true Communion from the earliest days until now.

Christians have shared one another's burdens, even at great cost to themselves. They have walked together the path of obedience to God and helped each other when one has stumbled. They have yoked themselves together in labor, in worship, in struggle and in suffering and they have, as a joint effort and in unity, rejected all false worship and phony gods.

Even though the greatest anticipated joy of the future is being together with their Lord, the second joy to that is the inseparable and eternal company of the saints.

And some of the greatest joy and peace that can be known on this planet and in this existence is the conscious communion of the saints with the Lord and with one another at the same time.

We should really labor for that.