

July 28, 2008

Communion

Before Jesus was crucified he instituted the Lord's Supper or what is also known as communion (see Matt. 26.26-29; Mark 14.22-25; Luke 22.14-20). The Apostle Paul discusses communion at length in 1 Corinthians 11.17-34. From Paul's discussion we learn that in taking communion we look in three directions—we look back, we look in, and we look ahead.

We look back. When taking communion we look back and remember the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. Jesus said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me" (11.24), and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (11.25). Twice we are told to do this "in remembrance of" Jesus. I think most churches do not take communion often enough. If we're not careful we can view Christianity simply as a moral religion, a religion where we try to be good and hopefully go to heaven because we are good. But this is not what Christianity is all about. Christianity is about Jesus dying for sinful people in order to save them, and communion is a constant reminder of this. It is a constant reminder that we cannot save ourselves; only Christ can save us through his blood.

We look in. In Corinth some of the believers were abusing the Lord's Supper. In the early church the Lord's Supper took place in the context of a meal where the members of the church ate together. They ate the bread and drank from the cup, but they also had a full meal together. Yet, some of the Corinthian believers were abusing this sacred time together. Some were wealthier and had more food and wine, and they were eating ahead of time or even getting drunk (11.19-22). Paul rebuked them for this behavior and urged them not to eat the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. He admonished them to examine themselves to make sure they were right with God and right with one another (11.27-32). This is an important element in taking communion. Before we take the bread and juice, we should examine ourselves, confess our sins, and then receive the elements which symbolize God's gracious favor and forgiveness.

We look ahead. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (11.26). When we take communion together, it is an acted-out sermon. It is a proclamation of the sacrificial death of Jesus on our behalf. In the sermon, the minister preaches; in communion, the whole body preaches. And the body makes this proclamation until he comes. Jesus said something similar. He said, "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26.29). On one side you have the cross, and on the other side you have his coming. In between you have communion that connects the two together, for in taking communion we look back to the cross and we look ahead to Christ's second coming. For when he comes, Christ will complete the salvation he has begun in our life.

Pastor Mark