

## Understanding Communion or The Lord's Supper

This information sheet is intended to help people understand the biblical significance of communion. Communion is an act of worship whereby the church commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The very word communion speaks of relationship and unity and as we will see, this is central to the meaning of the act.

Jesus himself instituted the practice on the night before he was betrayed, (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20) designing it to be done in his remembrance.

### The Meaning of Communion:

The act of communion is a simple act of sharing bread and juice/wine, but the bread and juice have deep spiritual meaning. We see this meaning in Luke 22:19-20, which reads, "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

From this passage we see that the central meaning of communion is the remembrance of Jesus Christ and the saving significance of his death. The bread signifies Jesus' body given to us and the cup represents his blood poured out for us. This point is driven home as we recall that Jesus instituted communion the night before he literally gave his body to us and poured out his blood for us, when he died on the cross. Communion is a symbolic act which focuses our attention on Jesus and his death for us. As 1 Corinthians 11:26, "for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

As such communion finds its meaning in the message of salvation. As we understand the significance of Jesus' death, we see the significance of communion, for communion is an act of remembrance of this death. The significance of Jesus' death is that he died as a substitute for us. We all have sinned and deserve to die as the penalty for that sin, but Jesus traded his innocent life for our guilty lives. The penalty for our sin was satisfied by Jesus so that we could find forgiveness. As it says in 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

So as we celebrate communion we do so with great humility and immense gratitude for we remember the high price that Jesus paid to secure our forgiveness.

The act of eating the bread and drinking the juice is symbolic of our faith in Jesus Christ. In John 6:35, Jesus describes himself as the bread of life who satisfies our spiritual hunger and thirst. It reads "Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." In this verse Jesus shows that coming to him satisfies spiritual hunger and believing in him

satisfies spiritual thirst. In a similar way the eating and drinking of the bread and juice are symbolic of coming to Jesus and believing in him.

As the very name “communion” implies, the act of eating the bread and drinking the cup is a celebration of a relationship with God through faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ. We remember Jesus and declare our faith in him; believing him to be the satisfaction of our spiritual hunger and thirst.

In addition, the act of communion, speaks of our unity with other believers. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 10:17, which reads, “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” The bread is symbolic of the fact that we all belong to one body, for we are all spiritually nourished by Jesus. Therefore, communion also reminds us of the fact that we have spiritual union with our fellow believers through our common faith.

Communion is a wonderful act of worship whereby we are reminded of our relationship with God and with our fellow believers. Through the act of communion, God encourages us by reminding us of his grace in Jesus Christ and challenging us to continue in faith and love.

### Who May Participate in Communion?

Based on the meaning of communion, it is only appropriate for believers to participate in communion. The taking of communion symbolizes faith in Jesus Christ and if a person who does not have faith in Jesus takes communion, they are in fact lying and will bring judgment upon themselves.

Scripture instructs us that before we take communion, we must examine ourselves. This means that we need to be sure that we are a Christian and that we are seeking to living in harmony with God and our fellow believers.

1 Corinthians 11:28-29

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

We must “recognize the body” which means that we must examine ourselves to be sure that we are in communion with God and our brothers and sisters. If we are celebrating our relationship with God through Jesus Christ and our unity in the faith, we must not make a mockery of these relationships by living in disobedience to God or hostility towards others.