

## The Biblical Teaching of Closed Communion

Sometimes people are offended by what they believe sounds like a narrow-minded, unloving practice: closed communion. However, a quick study on closed communion in the Scriptures shows why all people – members of a congregation and visitors alike – should rejoice in the loving practice of closed communion.

The Scriptures speak to the practice of closed communion for two reasons: (1) for the safety of the uninformed, and (2) for the safety of the congregation's doctrinal unity.

The uninformed individual may have every good intention in desiring to receive the Lord's Supper. But, St. Paul admonishes according to the Word he received from the Lord that

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.” [But what makes ‘an unworthy manner’?]: “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks *without discerning the body* eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

In the same way good medicine can be improperly taken, so the Church desires to safeguard the uninformed from taking the good medicine of the Lord's Supper without first “reading the label.” Therefore, the Christian Church will, in love, prevent the uninformed from harming themselves by eating without proper discernment of what the Lord's Supper actually is. Again, St. Paul says, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

The Church is secondly taught by the Scriptures to be concerned for her own doctrinal purity. In no way does closed communion claim that those not welcome to the Table are not Christians (after all, our own uninstructed children are not welcome!). But, by communing with one another, we confess that we agree with one another in *all* points of Christ's doctrine. Christ himself emphasizes this when he “breaks bread” with the disciples and institutes His Holy Supper with the one cup (Jews would not drink from the same cup of someone they could not trust). To gloss over differences in doctrine is to imply that those points (for example: creation vs. evolution, salvation by grace alone vs. salvation by works, the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture) are insignificant to the Truth, who is Jesus Christ.

Against such misconception, the apostle warns, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons,” (1 Corinthians 10:21) and again “What fellowship has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14b) and again “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9).

Further Scriptural citation can be offered, but this brief summary shows clearly why closed communion is a most Scriptural and loving practice – for the safety of the uninformed individual, and for the safety of the Church's doctrine. This is not to say that the visitor is “never welcome” to join the congregation's communion. But, the visitor can appreciate why the congregation and her pastor will *first* teach, *then* welcome to communion. All are welcome to be instructed in the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ... and all who have been taught are then welcome to join the blessed fellowship of God and His people at His banqueting table!