



# **The Church: United in Communion**

Last in a 3-part series titled: *United*

Pastor Matt Friend – February 11 & 14, 2021

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## **– OUTLINE –**

### **What's today's big idea?**

In the church, nothing nurtures union like communion.

### **In what ways does communion unite us as a church family?**

- #1 – It's a time when we, together, remember what Jesus did on the cross. ([1 Corinthians 11:23-25](#); [Luke 22:19](#))
- #2 – It's a time when we, together, confess our sins. ([1 Corinthians 11:27-32](#); [1 John 1:5-10](#))
- #3 – It's a time when we, together, praise and thank God for all He has done for us. ([Matthew 26:30](#); [Mark 14:26](#); [1 Corinthians 10:14-17](#))
- #4 – It's a "meal" that symbolizes our peace with God and one another. ([Genesis 18:1-19](#); [26:26-30](#); [31:36-55](#); [Exodus 18:9-12](#); [24:1-11](#); [Deuteronomy 14:22-29](#); [2 Samuel 3:6-21](#); [2 Kings 4:38-44](#); [Psalm 23:1-6](#); [Isaiah 25:6-9](#); [55:1-3](#); [Joel 2:12-27](#); [Luke 5:27-34](#); [7:33-50](#); [9:10-20](#); [10:38-42](#); [11:37-54](#); [14:1-24](#); [15:11-32](#); [19:1-10](#); [24:13-43](#); [John 21:1-14](#); [Acts 2:42-47](#); [20:7-12](#); [1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#))
- #5 – It points us to the second coming of Jesus when He will make all things new: Christians, the Church, and the universe. ([Isaiah 25:6-9](#); [Matthew 26:29](#); [Mark 14:25](#); [Luke 22:13-20](#); [1 Corinthians 11:26](#); [Revelation 19:6-9](#))
- #6 – In a way that we can't fully comprehend, like baptism, communion is a time when we, together, "participate" with Jesus in a spiritual way. ([Romans 6:1-4](#); [1 Corinthians 10:16](#))
- #7 – It's a time when we enter the spiritual presence of Christ together as a church family. ([Matthew 26:26-28](#); [Mark 14:22-24](#); [John 6:1-59](#); cf. [Matthew 18:20](#); [28:20](#))

### **Today's Takeaway...**

Let's protect our union by taking communion.



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### **– NOTES –**

#### ***Introduction***

This weekend we conclude the 3-part *United* series. May we always remember: The church is not something we go to; it's a family we belong to.

Today we're looking at a particular tradition we celebrate as a church family: communion. For the foreseeable future, today we'll begin celebrating communion weekly.

Admittedly, we'll need to work hard to avoid the *danger of tradition*. Let us not allow weekly communion to become stale, rote, or mindless. May we never become so focused on the method or the liturgy that we forget the heart behind it.

However, in our day and age—in our post-Christian culture—I'm actually more wary of another hazard, the *danger of gospel amnesia*. Perhaps more than ever, it seems easy to forget what our sin did to Jesus as He died on the cross or what Jesus really did for us on that cross. Simultaneously, our society seems to respect those who “fix” themselves (pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps) while perceiving those who run to Christ as weak. Therefore, I believe we need the weekly rehearsal of communion now as much as ever.

I pray today's message will serve as a flag-in-the-sand and a stake-in-the-ground kind of sermon that we can look back on for decades to come in regard to communion.

#### ***What's today's big idea?***

In the church, nothing nurtures union like communion.

Our world is divided on epic proportions; however, Jesus' Church is called to be peculiar. The unity we have in Christ is, indeed, counter-cultural to our divided world. Just as church membership and baptism are symbols of that unity, so is communion.

## ***In what ways does communion unite us as a church family?***

#1 – It's a time when we, together, remember what Jesus did on the cross. ([1 Corinthians 11:23-25](#); [Luke 22:19](#))

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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." 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." (1 Corinthians 11:23-25 NIV)*

One purpose of communion is to remind us of what Jesus did on the cross 2,000 years ago. That horrible day was a sensory moment for everyone. Had you been there, you would've heard, felt, seen, smelled, and tasted the aroma of death. In a similar way, God has designed communion to engage all our senses.

The bread, in particular, is broken and chewed up... just like the body of Jesus. The wine/juice represents not the blood that was in Jesus' body, but the blood that spilled out of his body. Therefore, communion transports us back in time—back to that very real place where Jesus died for us.

#2 – It's a time when we, together, confess our sins. ([1 Corinthians 11:27-32](#); [1 John 1:5-10](#))

*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. Everyone ought to **examine themselves** before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were **more discerning with regard to ourselves**, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32 NIV)*

God has designed communion to be a time when we confess our sins, together, as a church family. Communion isn't the only time we confess our sins, but it's the time each week when we do so collectively.

Ask yourself...

- How is my heart toward the Lord? Is He first in my life? Do I love Him?
- Do I have any unconfessed sin?
- Am I knowingly harboring any actions or attitudes that displease the Lord?

- What is the present state of my relationships with others?
- Am I promoting any division or retaining any bitterness?

#3 – It's a time when we, together, praise and thank God for all He has done for us. ([Matthew 26:30](#); [Mark 14:26](#); [1 Corinthians 10:14-17](#))

Another name for communion is “eucharist,” from the Greek word for thanksgiving. In the gospels, we see that after the first communion, Jesus concluded with a song.

*Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the **cup of thanksgiving** for which we **give thanks** a participation in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:14-16 NIV)*

The last year has been beyond difficult for most. However, do we have anything left for which to praise and thank God? Sure, we do, especially our eternal salvation!

#4 – It's a “meal” that symbolizes our peace with God and one another. ([Genesis 18:1-19](#); [26:26-30](#); [31:36-55](#); [Exodus 18:9-12](#); [24:1-11](#); [Deuteronomy 14:22-29](#); [2 Samuel 3:6-21](#); [2 Kings 4:38-44](#); [Psalm 23:1-6](#); [Isaiah 25:6-9](#); [55:1-3](#); [Joel 2:12-27](#); [Luke 5:27-34](#); [7:33-50](#); [9:10-20](#); [10:38-42](#); [11:37-54](#); [14:1-24](#); [15:11-32](#); [19:1-10](#); [24:13-43](#); [John 21:1-14](#); [Acts 2:42-47](#); [20:7-12](#); [1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#))

As the many Scripture references above reveal, in ancient times God the Father used meals to symbolize peace. Jesus also used meals to create peace with His enemies.

Take a moment and consider how your life has played out while sharing meals with others. While eating with others, consider the...

- Stories or jokes you've shared or heard.
- Lessons you've learned.
- Love you've found or love you've lost.
- Hard conversations you've had.

In every country and every culture of the world, food connects people. It turns strangers into friends. That's one of the teaching points of Psalm 23...

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.** You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:1-6 NIV)*

#5 – It points us to the second coming of Jesus when He will make all things new: Christians, the Church, and the universe. ([Isaiah 25:6-9](#); [Matthew 26:29](#); [Mark 14:25](#); [Luke 22:13-20](#); [1 Corinthians 11:26](#); [Revelation 19:6-9](#))

*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's **death until he comes**.* (1 Corinthians 11:26 NIV)

*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."* (Isaiah 25:6-9 NIV)

In the last chapters of Revelation, just before we're given a glimpse of the new heaven and new earth, we're given a glimpse of a great feast between believers and Jesus. It's often called, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb."

So, communion not only looks back and remembers Jesus' death on the cross; it also looks forward to the day when Jesus will come again and make all things new.

At communion we are like the children of Israel in the wilderness, tasting fruit plucked from the promised land. Communion is the future coming to meet us in the present. Every communion points to a little bit of Christmas, a little bit of Good Friday, a little bit of Easter... and to the second coming of Jesus when He will make all things new.

#6 – In a way that we can't fully comprehend, like baptism, communion is a time when we, together, "participate" with Jesus in a spiritual way. ([Romans 6:1-4](#); [1 Corinthians 10:16](#))

Our creative God gave us two signs—two illustrations, two object lessons—to remind us that we are part of His family: *baptism* and *communion*. Neither baptism nor communion are rituals; instead, they are rehearsals. Through both, we rehearse the gospel story to ourselves, to one another in the Church, and to a watching world.

Romans 6 explains how baptism does this. (If you've not been baptized, consider getting baptized on [Baptism Weekend](#).) Communion operates in a similar way.

*Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a **participation** in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a **participation** in the body of Christ?* (1 Corinthians 10:14-16 NIV)

What does this mean? I don't believe we can know for sure. I surely can't fully comprehend it just as theologians haven't been able to fully comprehend it for two millennia. Nevertheless, I believe it.

#7 – It's a time when we enter the spiritual presence of Christ together as a church family. ([Matthew 26:26-28](#); [Mark 14:22-24](#); [John 6:1-59](#); cf. [Matthew 18:20](#); [28:20](#))

On the individual level, we live in the presence of Jesus. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus declared, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The Latin expression is *Coram Deo* or *Coram Christo*—we live before the presence of God and Christ. He is always "just beyond the veil," as the Christian mystics remind us.

Additionally, on the corporate level, there's something spiritual and supernatural that happens when we meet together for worship ([Matthew 18:20](#); [Hebrews 12:18-29](#)).

Yet, even with those truths considered, Christians have believed for millennia that we step into the presence of Christ in a more intimate way through communion. (Notice Jesus' intentional ambiguity in [John 6:25-59](#), particularly [verse 56](#).)

So, do the bread and wine/juice become the actual body of Jesus in our stomachs? Not at all. There is no Scriptural evidence for such, and that idea seems to have more of a basis in Plato's philosophy than in Jesus' teaching.

However, let us also avoid the other extreme of thinking that communion is only a physical symbol. About 400-500 years ago, in my opinion, the Reformers (the Swiss reformers in particular) swung the pendulum too far the other way. They taught that communion is a bare sign, a simple reminder, of the historic fact that Christ had died for our sins. To some of them, it was simply a cognitive exercise.

Is communion a mental exercise? Sure, but the Scriptures teach that it's *much more* than that. It's also a spiritual and supernatural exercise—a means of transforming grace when Jesus draws near to the church in a special way.

"I don't know and can't imagine what the disciples understood our Lord to mean when, His body still unbroken and His blood unshed, He handed them the bread and wine, saying they were His body and blood... Yet I find no difficulty in believing that the veil between the worlds is nowhere else so thin and permeable to divine operation. Here a hand from the hidden country touches not only my soul but my body. Here is big medicine and strong magic... The command, after all, was 'Take and eat,' not 'Take and understand.'" –C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

Even after writing his detailed theology on communion, John Calvin was still able to say, “It is a mystery too sublime for me to be able to express, or even to comprehend; and, to be still more explicit, I’d rather experience it than understand it.”

### ***Today’s Takeaway...***

Let’s protect our union by taking communion.