

Close Communion



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Almost all of the major denominations today took this matter seriously in their early history. Sadly, most have lost this Scriptural practice along with many others, as they have lost faithfulness to the Word. That’s why “Close Communion” appears to be the unusual practice to so many today.

God’s Word has not changed. We desire to be faithful to that Word. This Sacrament of the Altar is the Lord’s Supper, not ours. It is His Word and command which set the guidelines for us to follow as we administer this sacred meal.

We do not wish to offend anyone with a pompous or self-righteous attitude on our part. We are but redeemed sinners, entrusted with this precious gift of His Supper. We are striving to follow the true Word and to “speak the truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15)

Our prayer is that our own members, and all in our synod and those synods in fellowship with us, would desire the Lord’s Supper often for the forgiveness of their sins, the upbuilding of their faith, and the strengthening of true unity among us.

“Close Communion” emphasizes the Biblical concept that only those who are one in faith may enter into the intimate fellowship of receiving Holy Communion together. Close Communion is not a man-made rule, nor is it to be practiced with a “better-than-thou” attitude.

When practicing “Close Communion” we are not attempting to judge the heart of another, for only God can see the heart, but we are looking at that person’s confession of faith. If we are of the same confession of faith, we may receive the Sacrament together in true unity. For this reason we ask that visitors announce to the pastor or an elder before communing in our services.

THE WORD OF GOD:

To explain why we practice “Close Communion”, we must look at what God’s Word says concerning the Lord’s Supper and how to receive it properly. The Bible alone must direct us in this practice. As mere men, we dare not set limitations on something God has ordained. However, God himself does set limitations on the Sacrament of the Altar.

GOD’S QUALIFICATIONS FOR COMMUNICANTS:

Jesus preached the Gospel to all. He commanded us to baptize “all”. He passed out the bread and fish to all the 5,000+ in the wilderness. However, when He instituted the Lord’s Supper, He showed that it is intended for a certain group of people to eat and to drink:

1. They must be Christians, that is, believers in Jesus as their only Savior from sin. Jesus instituted this holy meal for His “disciples” who were to celebrate it in “remembrance” of Him, and to “proclaim

His death” for their sins. (Matthew 26:20,26-28; Luke 22:19-20; I Corinthians 11:23-26).

Of course, only a Christian, a believer who has learned of Christ, can “remember” and “proclaim” His death for the forgiveness of sins.

2. They must know what the Lord’s Supper is. That is, they must recognize and believe that it is not just plain bread and wine, not just a symbol of Christ, but His true body and blood “in communion” with the bread and wine. (Matthew 26:26-28; I Corinthians 10:16) The Bible clearly says, “Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the Body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (I Corinthians 11:29) Because the Corinthians were misusing the Sacrament, such judgments were coming upon them. (v. 30)
3. They must examine themselves before communing, that they might see their sins, remember their faith in the Savior, and have a desire to change their sinful life and follow God.
God says, “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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (I Corinthians 11:27-29)
Both points #2 and #3 show that there must be proper instruction in the Christian faith, and the Lord’s Supper particularly, before a person can become a “communicant.”
4. They must be united in one confession of faith. One-ness at the altar should be a confession of “oneness” in faith. God says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42) After describing the union of Christ’s body and blood with the bread and wine, Paul speaks of the unity of the communicants, “We, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” (I Corinthians 10:17) To disregard a person’s confession of faith, when it is contrary to ours, would be to disregard God’s Word in Ephesians 4:3 that we “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” or in I Corinthians 1:10, “That all of you agree with one

another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

Remember that God also warns us to “watch out for false prophets” (Matthew 7:15), to “watch out for” and “keep away from” those who cause divisions and teach contrary to the Truth (Romans 16:17), and not to become “partakers in their wicked work” (II John 10-11).

We act in love toward those who are in churches following false doctrines (though the individual may be unaware of them), when we warn them of these errors. To take Communion together when there are such differences between churches would give a false impression of unity which does not exist, and a misuse of the Sacrament.

Sad to say, even Lutheran churches have become divided today because of false teachings introduced since the Reformation, and all “Lutheran” groups are no longer united in doctrine. Therefore, all “Lutheran” synods do not have Communion fellowship together.

5. The pastor is called to be a faithful steward of the Word and Sacraments, the “secret things of God.” (I Corinthians 4:1-2) He is not merely a distributor of the Sacrament of the Altar, then, but one called to distribute it according to God’s directions. Therefore, as a faithful steward, the pastor may have to deny the Lord’s Supper to someone because: a) he is not a Christian, b) he has not yet been instructed in what the Lord’s Supper is, c) he is unconscious or deranged and unable to examine himself, d) he is living in an open sin and has not repented or corrected his situation, or e) he is of a different confession of faith and not of a church united in fellowship with us.

In points “a” through “d” the pastor is actually protecting an unknowing person from receiving the Lord’s Supper for his harm. This is a positive act of love. In point “e” he is giving a loving warning against false doctrines and practices and against a false show of unity. There are those who have come back later and thanked pastors for not allowing them to commune, as they then looked more deeply into the doctrines of their churches and found them to be in error.

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