



COMMUNING TOGETHER

What does it mean when we commune together? What does it mean when we do not? It is easy to forget the first of these questions, but so few today share our practice of "close" communion that we are more often confronted with the second question. It is good to ask both. And our answers will depend a great deal on how we view the Lord's Supper. Why do we commune at all? What is the purpose and benefit? Why is the sacrament so important, anyway?

"We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." How deep was the disappointment expressed in those words of the Emmaus disciples! As far as they could see, the horizon was filled with the wreckage of their hopes and dreams, for themselves, for their people, and for the world. To them the death of Jesus not only meant three years wasted and gone, but it also meant failure....with a capital F. The whole direction of their lives had been a failure.

"We had hoped that he was the one..."

But Jesus knew beforehand how His disciples would feel. On the very same night in which He was betrayed, He gave them rich assurance that much was actually accomplished through the death of His body, through the shedding of His blood. Knowing that He would be nailed to the cross in apparent defeat, triumph was what Jesus looked forward to.¹ He looked forward to gaining the forgiveness of all sins.

¹"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

Jn 17:5

In our day, soldiers returning from battle, as well as relatives of those who have not come back, all crave the comfort that the efforts were successful, worthwhile, or at least appreciated. Our Savior had this comfort Himself,² and moved to share it with His own when He, "on the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, brake it and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take eat, This is my body which is given for you....Take drink....this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. This do in remembrance of me."

²"Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,...because he poured out his life..."

Is 53:12

"For the remission of sins." This was what gave meaning to the path that lay before Jesus. This was the benefit of giving and shedding His body and blood. But this benefit was not for Himself. It was for His disciples. And the Lord's Supper was not something the disciples did for Him, (no mere toast, or roast, or banquet in His honor) but a meal with which He honored them. When Jesus says, "This do," it is not an eleventh commandment, to give the knowledge of sin, but a gracious "come unto me," a Gospel invitation.



It remained just that for the church at Corinth, and so it also remains for us today. In the Lord's Supper we are gifted with the Lord's own body and blood (as His Word declares),¹ and therefore with personal assurance of our redemption by His death (as His Word declares).²

¹"This is my body...my blood"

²"for the remission of sins"

The Lord's Supper is first and last the Gospel. It is the good news of reconciliation and peace with God, of adoption as God's own children, of the forgiveness of all our sins. It is the new covenant.

This is what must hold captive our thoughts as we administer and partake of the bread and the wine. It is this understanding that must govern our practice, and be reflected in our celebration of the sacrament.

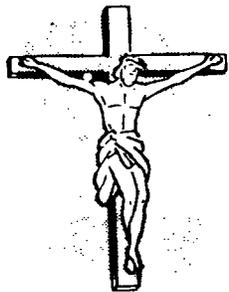
But how does this understanding actually affect our practice?

A. The Lord's Supper was not given to confer any special virtues or "added ingredients" to our life (such as "feeling the presence of God in a time of trouble") except as a fruit of the Gospel of forgiveness. With the forgiveness of sins comes every needed grace and blessing.

Therefore, to commune an unbeliever in the hope of maintaining peace or increasing love among people is to pursue a vain hope, and to misuse the sacrament. The Lord's Supper is not a ritual of magic. There is no virtue in the Sacrament outside of the Gospel, and unbelief rejects the Gospel. Thus it has been rightly said, "Partaking of the Lord's Supper is in and by itself not beneficial, rather the benefit depends on how one partakes. It does not work ex opere operato." ¹

¹Walther, Pastorale,
p.144, quoted in
F. Pieper's Dogmatics

But to commune an unbeliever is more than vain, for the sacrament involves something else. While it might be said that we are saved by the "Gospel plus nothing," the Lord's Supper brings this in a special way.



² 1 Jn 3:2

Often when the skies are dark, and there is no sun in our lives, we rely on His word that the sun still shines above the clouds, or beyond the horizon. We look to His word that "now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known."² In short, we trust His word without material evidence in our lives. We have only the eyewitness accounts of His life, death, and resurrection. It is enough.

But in the sacrament God gives us the same assurance, the good news of forgiveness, in connection with material things.

As He once came to His disciples in a material body, so He comes again. He comes in connection with bread and wine. It is a miracle, but it is no crowd-pleasing "sign from heaven," no leap from the pinnacle of the temple. It is a miracle of love.

But just as Jesus' physical presence in Nazareth¹ was no guarantee of acceptance---no irresistible grace--so also is His presence in the Supper no magical conversion technique. If His Word is not believed, the ~~real~~ ^{real} presence and the benefits will also meet with scepticism.² Luther, speaking of receiving the elements without faith, said, "if such a reception made a Christian, then a mouse would be a Christian, for a mouse can nibble the bread and even sip the wine."³

¹Isn't this Joseph's son?
Lk 4:22

²Isn't this just bread and wine?

³The Martin Luther Easter Book, ed. R. Bainton, p35

As a matter of fact, could not an unbeliever's tasting of the elements even harden him in his unbelief ["I knew it was nothing but bread!"]?

People do not receive the Gospel proclamation to their harm. They either receive it ~~by faith~~ or not at all. But in the sacrament even an unbeliever would receive (to his great harm) the Lord's body and blood, though despising it.

Thus we do not invite non-Christians to partake of the sacrament, even though Christ died and rose also for their justification.

It is a distortion of apostolic teaching to say:

Because he died for the reconciliation of 'the world', the world is invited to reconciliation in the supper.....the crucified Lord's invitation to his supper.....even

reaches beyond the frontiers of Christianity; for it is addressed to 'all nations' and to 'tax-collectors and sinners' first of all. Consequently we understand Christ's invitation as being open, not merely to the churches, but to the whole world.¹

¹Jürgen Moltmann, quoted in Verdict, vol 5, #2

Of the disciples to whom Christ gave the sacrament He declared, "They are not of the world."²

² Jn 17:14,16

Sinners

B. The Lord's Supper was given to us to assure us of God's grace and the forgiveness of all our sins. Therefore, although an unbeliever cannot partake with benefit, our sins should not keep us away from the sacrament. Even the sins of which we may not be aware³ need the same forgiveness offered and given with Christ's body and blood. Nor is there any special "list of sins" which would disqualify us from participation at the Lord's Table.

³Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Ps 19:12

Manifest Impenitence

Rather it is (openly) rejecting forgiveness, and therefore coming for some other reason, that amounts to communing unworthily. When the Corinthian Christians came together, it was not to receive forgiveness, but to eat and drink.⁴ The same thoughtlessness which they exhibited in the idol-meat question ("All things are lawful")⁵ was also in evidence when it came to the Lord's Supper. But now they not only sinned against one another (one thirsty, while another drunk). They also failed to see what the sacrament was all about.

⁴ 1 Cor 11:22

⁵ 1 Cor 10:23

We do not exclude people from the sacrament because they have committed certain sins, either knowingly or unknowingly, but because they have manifested a disregard for the forgiveness of their sin. The Lord's Supper has nothing more to

offer them at that point, except to their harm. We point to the true purpose of our communing when we prepare for it by confessing our sins and our need of forgiveness.

C. Even among Christians there are those who deny that Jesus actually gives His body and blood with the bread and wine. This is a serious matter not only because such people contradict the plain words of Jesus, but because in so doing they have given up the Gospel content of the sacrament. As Christians, they know and confess that we do not receive forgiveness by anything that we do, but only by God's gift and grace. So when they follow their reason to deny receiving Christ's body and blood, they make of the sacrament nothing more than a memorial meal. It is then no longer a gift that the Savior gives to them, but a gift they give to Him, a meal consumed in His honor. It is, moreover, a "gift" prescribed by Him, and a keeping of His law.

Deny "Real Presence"

Freely admitting that we are not saved or forgiven through our keeping of laws or commandments, these Christians do not look for forgiveness of sins in the sacrament. They are, therefore, not yet ready to receive the sacrament to their benefit. To commune them would be to risk their becoming guilty of misusing and sinning against the body and blood of Christ.

It is sometimes argued that, as long as people are Christians, that is all that matters.¹ They could not possibly commune in an unworthy manner or to their harm. But when Paul wrote on

¹e.g. "Unless a Christian group is prepared to say that no one outside their number is acceptable to God, it is inconsistent to practice closed communion." Verdict, vol 5, #2,p11

the subject, he was writing to "the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours."¹

¹ 1 Cor 1:2

These are Christians whom Paul praises for remembering him, and whom he censures ("I praise you not") for disregarding one another as they come together for communion.² He calls them "my brothers"³ even when he is warning them about eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

² 1 Cor 11:2,17sq

³ 1 Cor 11:33

Self-examination

D. Certainly no one was more emphatic than the apostle Paul about being justified by faith and not by works. He was unequivocal in proclaiming that we are saved by grace alone, without the deeds of the law. Paul was also very clear about the Lord's Supper being the new testament in His blood, which was shed for the remission of sins.

Yet the apostle did not consider it mixing law and gospel to enjoin the Corinthians to examine themselves before eating of the bread and drinking of the cup. It was important, both to receive the benefits, and to avoid chastisement, that each person test himself, his motives, his needs, and his expectations, in coming to the Lord's table.

Paul asked everyone coming to the Lord's Table to look at his life. Was there nothing needing forgiveness and covering? Then why was he going to the sacrament? Was he going in order to receive solace to continue in his sins, or to receive the assurance that his sins were nailed to

the cross and buried with Christ, assurance that he no longer needed to carry them around and walk in them?

But was Paul adding a ceremonial law to the sacrament by requiring self-examination before communing? Was he adding this effort to the death of Christ for the communicant's standing with God? Or was he perhaps suggesting a new way to avoid the wrath of Judgment Day when he wrote: "If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment?"¹

¹ 1 Cor 11:31

Wasn't he rather simply taking the Gospel seriously? Wasn't he recognizing that it is a dangerous thing, both now and on the last day, to trifle with the grace of God? To go thoughtlessly to the sacrament, to fail to recognize its blessing and our need of it, is to sin against the body and blood of Christ, and to use them for a purpose for which they were not intended.

Accordingly, we do not offer the sacrament to our children who are not yet accustomed or able to examine themselves. In general, children depend on their parents to examine and correct them. When they reach such a stature that they are able to do this themselves, they are admitted to the sacrament. We are not keeping them from the Gospel, for it came to them in Baptism and comes daily in the Word. But we are trying to take the Gospel seriously (not as a magic potion), and to guard our children from the judgments that the apostle attaches to a careless use of the sacrament.

Such practice is no longer universal, even in Lutheranism, as indicated in a news report last year:

"...this new movement...denies that articulation or understanding of what one is doing is a prerequisite," said Fjelstad [pastor of an ALC church]. Some Lutheran congregations now advocate infant communion---with the national church letting them decide who is eligible for the rite....Fjelstad himself believes infant communion is spiritually and logically appropriate.¹

¹ Ketchikan Daily News,
Sept. 29, 1984

To adults who are able to examine themselves, the apostle has one word: do it. "Let a man examine himself..."² Again, this is not a new law, but an exhortation to "come unto Him."

² δοκιμαζέτω 1 Cor 11:28

It is self-evident that this examination is to be done according to the Word received from the Lord, and not according to the Veda, Koran, or other standards of man. Thus we seek also to instruct future communicants in the Holy Scriptures, that the great benefits may be realized by them in partaking.

For these reasons we practice what has sometimes been called "careful" or "controlled" communion. As indicated, our reason for exercising control in the distribution of the sacrament is the recognition of the presence of Christ's body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

E. From the early days of the New Testament church, Christians have been under attack in connection with their communion practice. The first-century Christians celebrated the sacrament in private (in connection with an evening meal) and we are told that "enemies of the Christians accused them of immoral conduct in connection with the evening feasts, declaring that they killed little children and drank their blood and ate their flesh."¹

¹Lars P. Qualben, A History of the Christian Church, p40

Today our communion practices are also looked upon with a kind of horror. Some feel that we are withholding great blessings from our children. The Reformed think that our practice amounts to calling them non-Christian, even though our words speak otherwise. "If you call us Christian, why don't you act like it?"

This cry has been heard among the Protestant churches since the days of Luther. When Lutheran teachers met with Zwingli, Bucer, and others in 1529, they found many areas of doctrinal agreement. In the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, however, they were not agreed. Luther later reported to his congregation: "They desired fellowship with us; but this, for the time being, we declined and could not grant. For if we recognized them as brethren and sisters, we would be obliged to consent to their doctrine. Of course, this refusal was not viewed with favor, and they pretended that one should show love toward them until God would bring them to our opinion, because we should love even our enemies. Well, whoever wishes to interpret this in an evil way may do so;..."²

²Brüderschaft aber haben sie von uns begehrt, die haben wir auf diesmal abgeschlagen und nicht zusagen können. Denn wenn wir sie für Brüder und Schwestern annahmen, so müssten wir verwilligen in ihre Lehre. Wiewohl man dieses Abschlagen nicht gerne gesehen, und vorgab, man sollte die Liebe gegen ihnen erzeigen, bis sie Gott auch wieder herzu brächte; denn wir auch unsere Feinde lieben sollten. Nun, wer es übel auslegen will, der mag es tun... St.L. III,1770

¹ Du wirst es daher nicht meiner Hartnäckigkeit beimessen, wenn du recht tun willst, sondern meinem Gewissen, wie es denn in Wahrheit ist, und der Not meines Glaubens, dasz ich diese Eintracht ablehne.

St.L.,XVII,1975

²W. Schaller, You Have One Master, the Christ, p6

Several years later Luther wrote, in a letter to Martin Bucer: "Therefore, if you will do the right thing, you will attribute my declining your proffered union not to obstinacy, but really to my conscience and to the necessity of faith."¹

Today doctrinal differences have also arisen among Lutherans. "Having the name of Lutheran does not protect a group from the attacks of Satan. False teachings again and again creep into the churches and do their destructive work. Right after Luther's death many Lutheran teachers began to change the Gospel truths which he had proclaimed to the world."²

What does this have to do with communing together? It has nothing to do with it if communion is not looked upon as an expression of fellowship. If the Lord's Supper is only and alone between me and my Lord, if it is each communicant going to his own meal, then it would not matter where he was, with whom he was, or to whom he went. If he was in the vicinity of a sacramental dispensary, he could receive treatment without any of Luther's "conscience." Nor would it be anybody's business but his own and the Lord's.

But such a self-centered and loveless approach is not fostered by the teachings of Christ's apostles. Paul does not deny that you are united with Jesus Christ in the sacrament, that it is a matter between you and Him. But he also recognizes the involvement, yes, fellowship, with others. When Lutheran confessors taught that the Lord's Supper was to be "a firm bond of union of Christians with Christ, their Head, and with one



another,"¹They were only following the apostle himself: "We, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."² Is Paul saying that the mere partaking unites everyone in the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church? "Then a mouse would be a Christian." But the partaking of the one loaf does illustrate a unity that is already there in Christ. The unity of faith is expressed in the partaking of the one bread.

"We, who are many, are one body..."

When Paul used the same expression (one body) in Romans 12:5, he added "and each member belongs to all the others."

That is why Paul knew it would give the wrong impression if the Corinthians took part in idol sacrifices, even though they knew that "an idol is nothing." that it was just a free meal. They were not operating in a vacuum. Such actions expressed a unity, whether it was true or not, and finally a unity with the demons, for they were at the root of all idol worship.

Therefore Paul says, a few verses later:

If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice" (viz. to an idol), then do not eat it, on account of the man who told you and conscience--the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours.³

So also in the Lord's Supper our partaking of the Gospel affects others as well, for it is a joint confession of Christ, and "whenever you (pl) eat this bread and you(pl) drink this cup, you(pl) proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."⁴

¹F.C., Th.Decl.,VII

² 1 Cor 10:17

A Confessional Act

³ 1 Cor 10:27-29

⁴ 1 Cor 11:26

Now the question arises: With whom shall we make this joint confession of Christ? At this point we are asking not only whether people can examine themselves and receive the sacrament to their benefit, but also whether or not we are ready to represent ourselves as united with each other in the work of the church, worshipping Christ and proclaiming the Gospel.

Now we are not simply discussing communion practice, but the doctrine of church fellowship, and this is really where the problem lies for many in our day.

With whom are we going to join forces in proclaiming the death of Christ for our sins? Some say that to ask for anything more than a simple confession--"I am of Christ"--is to add legal restrictions to the Gospel. Since, in God's eyes, we are justified through Christ alone, by faith, therefore we, too, should ask nothing more than simple faith in Christ. Others teach that simple faith in Christ is the basis for joining at the altar, but also require acceptance of the real presence, ability to examine oneself, and avoiding a profligate life.

Proponents of both views would no doubt agree that only God can see the faith in people's hearts¹ and that we must operate in the area of confession of faith (an area of sanctification). But they insist that, since even a spark of faith lays hold of the merits of Christ, making us acceptable to God, we should ask for only a spark of a confession of faith.

There certainly are times when we do this, and Christian burials have been performed on the

¹The Lord knows those who are his... 2 Tim 2:19

subj justif

confession of a tear running down a paralytic's cheek.

But this is not the same thing as ignoring a denial of a Bible teaching, and passing it off as a "denominational delicacy." Such indifference to Bible teachings (even "non-fundamental" ones) appears even when one is zealously affected over

How many Christians have felt the "cold shoulder" when it has become clear that they either do not accept or have conscientious reservations about such doctrines as the rapture, the inerrancy of Scripture, the millennium, etc.¹

¹G. Paxton, Verdict,
vol 5, #2, p17-18

To say that, because I am saved by simple faith in Christ's redemption, I am free to deny or add on other teachings of Scripture is comparable to saying that, because I am forgiven all my sins, I am free to sin. The latter view would not take forgiveness seriously, and the former would not take redemption as God's own people seriously. "He who belongs to God hears what God says."²

² Jn 8:47

It is the denial of God's Word, and not just a different "way of saying and doing things," that disrupts the outward unity of Christ's people and separates us from God's children in other denominations. The "it is enough"³ of the Augsburg Confession was never meant to downgrade any Scripture doctrine, for two years later Luther was still teaching: "But, they say, one might well yield and surrender a bit and keep up fraternal and Christian unity and fellowship with those who err in an unimportant point--as long as one agrees with them otherwise. No, my good man, for me none of that peace and unity one gains by the loss of God's Word!"

³And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.
from A.C., VII

⁴Sondern, ob man gleich in einem geringen Stück irrete da man sonst in andern eine ist, möge man wohl etwas weichen und gehen lassen, und gleichwohl brüderliche und christliche Einigkeit oder Gemeinschaft halten. Nein, lieber Mann, mir nicht des Friedens und Einigkeit, darüber man Gottes Wort verliert.

St.L., IX, 831

Nor is the fact that a false teacher may not be consciously rebelling against God, may yet be a believer and have forgiveness for his false teaching, any excuse for giving him aid and comfort in spreading a word which can lead to misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice. The word of the apostle is clear: "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness,"¹ and this word was quoted by Paul in the context of false teachers "who have wandered away from the truth."²

¹ 2 Tim 2:19

² 2 Tim 2:18

When the apostle Paul was in Philippi on his second missionary journey, he stayed at the home of Lydia and met for worship by the river outside the city gate. One day a girl began to follow Paul and his party shouting, "These men are servants of the most high God, who are telling you the way to be saved."³

³ Acts 16:17

Now, there was absolutely nothing wrong with the message which that girl was proclaiming. It was the "gospel truth," so to speak. But did Paul welcome this testimony? He did not, for there was something more involved. The girl was hosting a spirit of darkness, Python. Luke tells us that when she kept it up for several days, Paul became worked up, turned, and commanded the spirit to come out of her. He was not about to join forces with something evil, even to promote the truth.

The apostle calls upon followers of Christ to apply this same principle when he urges them to take note of such who cause doctrinal divisions contrary to the apostolic teaching, and to avoid them.⁴

⁴ Rom 16:17

It is sometimes suggested that this passage applies only to non-Christians, since the verse following describes them as "not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites." But we take this statement (v.18) in the context of the division caused (v.17) and not in an absolute sense (viz. "never serving our Lord Christ, but always their own appetites"). Similarly, our Lord described Peter once as not having in mind the things of God, but the things of men.¹ But Jesus spoke in the context of Peter's rebuke of Him and not in an absolute sense. Not long before, Jesus had declared that Peter was thinking the things of His Father in heaven.²

¹ Matt 16:23

² Matt 16:17

It is sometimes suggested that we harp so much about Romans 16:17 that we have developed a very narrow and limited view toward other Christians, as though we alone are saved, and in at least one area (church fellowship), we are without sin. There is certainly not one of us whose flesh would not enjoy such a thought, and it is surely a yawning trap.

But if we find ourselves slipping into this, and in our weakness we do all become self-righteous, the solution will be in the grace and truth of God's forgiveness for our sin, not in the abandoning of the effort to teach the whole counsel of God,³ and to give a clear picture of Christ. For those times that we have "harped" so much on the separation principle that we forgot to preach Christ, we must plead the doing and dying of Jesus, but our sin does not negate the separation principle, nor will giving up the Scripture principle serve to justify us.

³To claim that there must be perfect observance of all that the church teaches before fellowship can exist is to go beyond Scripture, which demands unity in the preaching of what Christ commanded but itself reveals much incompleteness in the observance of that command...In short, we may claim that in the degree to which we can come to a common understanding of the Gospel, in that degree we are able to work together...

Dr. Conrad Bergendoff
1961

It will not help to separate Christ from His Word. In the area of church fellowship, as in every other area, we are saved alone through faith in Christ. But if our words or practice imply that, as long as we receive Christ, it does not matter if we reject this or that (unimportant) word of Christ,¹ then we are saying "Peace and safety," not through what Jesus has done and said, but through what we have decided to accept of His doings and sayings. This is no longer the Gospel of God's doing. It is our work of evaluation.

¹ Could one get this thought from statements like: "As Christ plus nothing determines how man stands with God, so Christ plus nothing should determine how a man stands with other men."?

Verdict, vol 5, #2, p11

² Jn 6:68

³ Jn 6:63

⁴ μείνετε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ
Jn 8:31

⁵ Rom 10:17 alt. Θεοῦ

⁶ Matt 24:35

⁷ C.C.F., p.18, ¶32

Peter once stated the reason that the twelve did not leave Jesus: "You have the words of eternal life."² But Peter did not just dream this up. Not long before, he had heard Jesus declare: "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life."³ To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to (remain in) my teaching (word), you are really my disciples.:"⁴ To receive Christ is to hear His Word, for "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."⁵ Therefore God has always been very zealous to guard His Word, and will continue to be so while heaven and earth are passing away.⁶ He wants His life-giving Word proclaimed unpolluted. "For when men change the Word of God, they are attacking Christ Himself."⁷

Thus when the apostle implores us to speak the same thing, or to avoid the one causing doctrinal division, he is not adding some new laws to the Gospel, as though Christ plus these actions will assure our acceptance before Him. We, in our weakness may misuse them in this way, but, if we take them rightly, these entreaties amount to tak-

ing the Gospel seriously. He beseeches the Romans as "brothers," and the Corinthians "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The weakness of those who find the apostolic exhortation neither necessary nor practical (possible?)¹ is not just that they have broken the law. Worse than that, they have failed to apply the Gospel, or to take it seriously. Some have tried to pit Christ against His apostle and say: "I am of Christ." But Jesus assured those He sent out: "He who listens to you listens to me."²

How does all this apply to communion practice? If we look on communion as a confessional act, then when we stand together, we will not want to be confessing two opposite things, proclaiming the death of two different Christs,

e.g. one who was born of the virgin Mary, and one who was not; or one who thought that the Scripture could not be broken³ and one who did not think so; etc.

We want no part of a confession of Christ that includes a denial of His Word. Even honesty would call for agreement before "walking together," and for letting people know what they are getting involved with before they "sign on the dotted line."

If someone wants to stand with us on Sunday but not on Monday, we might want to know why, but not even the Synodical Conference made formal membership a stipulation (where good church order was not rejected). "Note: The confession [of faith] need not take on the form of a formal outward joining of the congregation and the congregation accepting the same formally into its union."

¹cp "Sandusky Resolution" also: "The best congregation is only orthodox at a superficial level of examination."

Verdict, vol 5, #2, p11

² Lk 10:16

³ Jn 10:35

Part-time Fellowship

⁴ N.B. Dies Bekenntnis muss nicht die Form eines förmlichen äusseren Anschlusses die Gemeinde tragen und von der Gemeinde förmlich durch Aufnahme in ihren äusserlichen Verband anerkannt worden sein. Pastorale Praxis, NWPB, 1913, p39

Sometimes people think that, by not communing together with others, we are saying: "You cannot have forgiveness of sins unless you agree with all we teach." But we do not withhold forgiveness from our pre-communicant children, nor do we have any power of interdict over others. We simply strive for a careful administration of the sacrament, to the end that, when we come before the altar together, we will be speaking the same thing.

It is true that this practice is not uniquely Lutheran. At one time or another, Southern Baptists, Roman Catholics, Eastern Catholics, Reformed churches, and perhaps others have practiced similarly. But this does not necessarily make the practice wrong.

It is also true that the separation principle is not new in our generation. Over one hundred years ago, when C.F.W. Walther wrote against the decree of 1830 and the unionism he found in the new world, he pointed still further back to comments in the Formula of Concord, such as:

¹ Schwer ist es, dasz man von so viel Landen und Leuten sich trennen und eine besondere Lehre führen will; aber hie steht Gottes Befehl, dasz jedermann sich soll hüten und nicht mit denen einhellig sein, so unrechte Lehre führen...

F.C., Th. Decl., X.

It is a grave matter wanting to separate one's self from so many lands and persons, and to profess a separate doctrine; but here stands God's command, that every one should beware and not agree with those who maintain false doctrine...¹

But the fact that the separation principle was practiced long ago does not automatically make it out of date for our modern day. It does show that the principle has been under attack throughout the history of Lutheranism, and perhaps longer. In Luther's famous commentary on Galatians, we read:

Now-a-days we hear from the Sacramentarians that, in our stubbornness, we break up the love and harmony of the parish through this, that we reject their doctrine of the Lord's

Supper. They say it would be better if we were a little compliant (especially since there is no danger here), rather than stirring up such strife and discord over this one article, which isn't even a fundamental. What's more, they do not differ from us in any other article of Christian doctrine, but only in this doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

To this I answer: Accursed be the love and the harmony for the preservation of which men endanger the Word of God.¹

Summary

To distribute communion carelessly, with a "caveat emptor"² attitude, is not only irresponsible, but it also ignores the distinctive blessings of the sacrament.

To celebrate communion without regard for the people around you is not an expression of the faith "which works by love."³

To suggest that, because communion represents union with Christ, the rejection of other Bible teachings may be ignored is to proclaim a Christ whose Word cannot, or need not, be trusted. This undermines the very object of saving faith.

When we commune, it does indeed testify to a oneness of faith in Christ which we share with the Holy Christian Church, with all believers of all times, known by the Lord wherever they may be. Therefore, when we commune together, or when we do not, we want our use of the sacrament to serve for building up the body of Christ, and not for reducing its faith, or undermining it. To this help us, dear Father in heaven.

¹So müssen wir heutzutage von den Sacramentirern hören dasz wir durch unsere Halsstarrigkeit die Liebe und Eintracht der Gemeinden trennen dadurch, dasz wir ihre Lehre vom Abendmahl verwerfen. Sie sagen es wäre besser, dasz wir ein wenig nachgiebig wären (zumal da hier keine Gefahr sei), als dasz wir um dieses einigen Artikels willen, der noch dazu kein Hauptartikel wäre, so grosze Zwietracht und Streit in der Kirche erregten, vornehmlich, weil sie in keinem andern Artikel der christlichen Lehre von uns abwichen als allein in diesem vom Abendmahl. Hier auf antworte ich: Verflucht sei die Liebe und Eintracht wegen deren Gottes Wort daran gegeben wird (periclitatur) um sie zu erhalten
St.L., IX, 554

² Let the buyer beware

³ Gal 5:6



