

Church Services/ Ministry Outreach

The Church & The Mission:

TWO SEPARATE THINGS

A problem's arisen that wasn't present in the early church. Due to Christianity becoming socially popular, it became more than the gathering of saints. It became the place to go, in many communities, to be an active part of society. This has presented new concerns. The "Pastor" now sees the "congregation" as more than a gathering of saints. He sees them as a mixed multitude of saints and people to reach for Christ. We see, in 1 Corinthians 14, where Paul said that if a stranger comes into your midst and sees your gathering, he will have various responses. The gatherings were to be open for the unbelievers to come in, but the difference has come about that the strangers are now treated as part of the church. This poses some grave dangers and contradictions to scriptural details in body life.

FOR EXAMPLE: Consider that you have a mixed multitude assembly. You have numerous regular attendees that haven't made Christ their Lord. They profess they believe the Bible, but you're aware true conversion hasn't taken place. Having

that knowledge, you don't deal with them as a fellow believer. ***Here comes the trouble!*** Putting yourself in the position of the "Pastor", you see the pews filled with some Christians and some unbelievers. You see, "Johnny Unbeliever" starts cheating on his wife, and you see "Johnny Believer" cheat on his. You confront "J. Believer", he doesn't respond favorably. You approach him with some other brethren. He fails to respond favorably again. You bring it before the church for excommunication. He repents and fellowship is restored. "J. Unbeliever", on the other hand, isn't a believer, just a social obligations attendee. Since he isn't a believer, you don't follow through with him following the Matthew Chapter 18 outline. After all, you know he's a potential convert, not a true believer. There are others in the assembly who don't know he isn't a true believer, or even those outside the church looking on. Some in the assembly avoid "J. Unbeliever" because they see his unfaithfulness as contaminating so gossip about him. Others see that Matthew 18 is ignored. "J. Believer's" nonconverted relatives look on and see the church almost excommunicated their relative, yet "J. Unbeliever" is allowed to carry on. They think, "What a double standard! What favoritism!" Do you see the difficulty over what point we begin requiring brotherly accountability.

I saw an example where a converted teenager joined a church. She had been morally loose, and the other teenagers in the youth group knew her from school. They wanted nothing to do with her. Their ostracism drove her from the church. Now we know that all are welcomed to Sunday School. The group of youth in a church youth group don't have to be believers. These unconverted youth have the power to drive away a newly converted sister. ***See how dangerous this soup kitchen and church combo are!***

Due to the style of church we blindly accepted, we ended up mixing the "Christian Soup Kitchen Mission" - the WORK, with the "Christian Church" - the ASSEMBLY. The two are vastly different and can't be safely blended.

You might logically ask, "What's the solution? Does the

Bible layout directions that would help prevent this kind of problem?”

COMMUNION

I believe the answer lies in the church services. The standard “Pulpit/Pew” with a “Pastor/Congregation” arrangement creates the kind of atmosphere that promotes the confused fellowship. I find the communion gathering to be the core of the fellowship in the New Testament. Such a core makes a clear differentiation between believers and nonbelievers. Believers clearly take their stand on being part of the brotherhood with a distinct focus on dealing with sin in the assembly.

The biblical basis of communion was very distinct. The partakers of communion had to be believers in free fellowship. Those in a governing capacity, which would naturally follow to be elders, are charged with the responsibility of seeing to it the people had to examine themselves and be Christians, or they weren’t allowed to partake of the communion.

OPEN COMMUNION

I’ve heard of what’s termed, “Open Communion”. In this, the church says to discern yourself, saying it can’t stop you from taking communion, if you chose to partake, yet aren’t really Christian. They discourage partaking, saying God will judge. Seeing such a communion spurred me to see if there was a real basis for such “openness”. I saw someone who didn’t believe Christ is the Only Way, partake of such a communion. I also saw infants fed such a communion. They were unable to profess a conversion to Christ. They couldn’t even talk yet! These sights troubled me. Was partaking of such a mixed communion with undiscerning parents and non-Christian people a defiling of that special meal? I set about to find out.

My journey started with a search of the Old Testament feasts. I remembered that the three main feasts were listed and specifically mentioned something about preparing and welcoming a place for strangers. If the Passover provided for strangers,

I felt there might be merit in open communion found there. I was surprised at what I found, for I remembered it wrong. The absence and presence of the command to provide for strangers was even more revealing. The passage showing the three feasts is found in Deuteronomy 16. The first verses, 1-8, cover the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which starts with Passover. The Feast of Weeks was covered in 16:9-12, and the Feast of Tabernacles in 16:13-15. We find the strangers welcomed in verses 11 and 14, but the strange absence of such command for the Passover. I wondered why God was so specific to mention for two and not all three. After all, if the stranger was to be part of all three, it only needed to be mentioned once and enjoined upon all the feasts. I found the answer to my dilemma in Exodus:

43 And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: 44 But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. 45 A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. 46 In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. 47 All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. 48 And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.

Exodus 12:43-48

This passage holds the answer! The Passover was only intended to be partaken of by those who were part of the covenant of circumcision. The blood covering of the lamb is only applied to those who are saved. *The command of no strangers allowed, under any circumstances, was very clear! God's word didn't allow for "Open Passover".*

Carrying this on, the question of the "open communion" naturally follows. Communion flows from the Passover. It's specifically for the children of the New Covenant.

What about giving communion to children who haven't yet confessed Christ? For the Passover, it was clear the children had to have the mark of the covenant. That was given just after birth. With the new covenant, joining it requires personal choice, which a young child is incapable of doing.

The passage that was used to promote open communion was that found in 1 Corinthians:

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. 27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 1 Corinthians 11:26-30

After looking at this passage, I noticed an important phrase, "let a man examine himself, and so let". Something about it caught my eye. You see, these words are repeated quite often just a few chapters later in 14:26-30,34. In these verses, the expressions stand out as directions for someone who's overseeing the assembly, presumably elders, to see things are done properly.

What we find, in this passage, is that all believers are to be allowed to evaluate themselves and so partake of communion. Sloppy evaluation will risk God's personal wrath on that individual, but not on the brethren. In 1 Corinthians chapter 5:6-11 we find details for not eating with a brother who commits sins of disfellowshipping gravity. If a brother's life doesn't bear the marks of such depravation, the communion responsibility for evaluation is to remain in the hands of each person.

There naturally follows the question as to how we can "qualify" someone for communion. This isn't a difficult problem. We "qualify" someone for "water baptism" without grief. The same basis that would grant us freedom to baptize a new convert, is the basis for communion. You don't baptize unless you're confident

they've believed, the same is simple enough for communion. If we make a mistake, God will not destroy us. What he requires is that we make an honest attempt at ascertaining a person's true faith. We cannot guarantee against being deceived, but we obey the principal to the best of our ability. Having that basis of true Christian identification, we have the protection of true body disease prevention as it were. Those who are professed believers, are held accountable for living for God in a true fellowship of believers. If an unbeliever tried to become part of the brethren, without real conversion, and went into an adulterous relationship, the Matthew 18 outline would be followed, and the appearance of hypocrisy and double standard wouldn't rise up. The unbeliever would also be brought to the true knowledge of himself, that being his profession was a pretense to something unreal.

Would a fellowship where you specifically drew a line at the communion table unnecessarily offend? I see no legitimate reason. Many denominational churches make a requirement that you be confirmed before you're welcome to join in communion, or whatever they call it, such as Catholics in their Mass. Visitors understand that's their procedure and find no cause of offense in such. Why should they have a fit because of our following convictions in such a matter? No reasonable person would.

THE CENTER

Different churches partake of communion at different frequencies such as yearly, quarterly, monthly and some weekly. At one time, I doubted as to how often was biblical. I couldn't find it specifically stated. Look carefully at 1 Corinthians 11:

17 Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. 18 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. 20 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's

supper.

1 Corinthians 11:17-20

In this passage to the Corinthians, Paul addressed their improper gathering for communion. It dawned on me it would have been extremely unusual for Paul to address their communion service as having such problems, as he detailed, if they only partook annually, say on Passover. This would have been a special event, and not so common as to have the problems continually occurring as Paul addressed. The section demanded a more frequent communion. Looking carefully, you'll notice partaking of the Lord's supper, in verse 20, is tied to the coming of the church together in verse 18. **The gathering of the church was around the communion meal!** The natural reason was it looked to the Lord, and that's what the church is to gather for! At this gathering, we see the service develop through the rest of 1 Corinthians chapter 14. The believers partook of the communion and ministered in the various ways chapter 14 described. Over several chapters, we see they prayed, they prophesied, they delivered whatever messages the Lord laid upon the hearts of the men and they exercised various gifts. There was undoubtedly singing.

Such a service, surrounding the Lord's Supper, focuses on body life. It has the functioning body, with the gifts of each properly utilized. It's founded on partaking on the basis of all being part of one body. It's able to operate with the responsibilities of dealing with sin on the basis of the body. That's why 1 Corinthians chapter 5 tells them not to eat with a sinning brother:

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such a one no not to eat.

1 Corinthians 5:11

The gathering on the grounds of the body, brings body life and responsibility.

APOSTOLIC MEETING

You may wonder where the standard church service, as we see it today is found. It's found as a special event of the Apostle

Paul giving a special message after a communion gathering in the book of Acts:

7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. *Acts 20:7*

We see an assembly where the brethren extended their service for a special “guest” speaker. Such has its appropriate place. We have unfortunately replaced the entire service with the “special” occasion message and dropped off the joint functioning of the body around the Lord’s Table!

Preparation For Services

PRE-SERVICE CONSECRATION

In the typical church setting, it doesn’t take much preparation for service by the attendee. If you’re one of those used to that kind of service, you’ll need to change your view on “getting ready” for church. In the “Pastor/Congregation” church, the typical attendee only needs to think about dressing appropriately, if that. In the body grounded meeting, where all are to come prepared to contribute their gift, there needs to be a spiritual preparation, if not some actual studying. There are several important aspects to consider in gathering for worship.

In the “Pastor/Congregation” church, you would be appalled if the Pastor spent no more time preparing than you, an attendee typically would. In the body gathering though, we all have the responsibility to contribute what God would lead us to. In fact, if we neglect preparation, we’re just as much to be blamed as that “Pastor” who wouldn’t prepare. Can you imagine if no one prepared? The service would certainly be one short and lifeless service. Not all are to deliver messages, but all are to spend time seeking God before the service to see we’re open channels for Him to function through. We all need to spend time to be able to be the vessels He wants to use. To skimp in preparation is to short both God and the brethren!

The gathering for the assembly is important, and we should

also treat it with the reverence it deserves. In gathering together, we're heralding the presence of the King in the midst of His body. **THIS is serious!**

PROMPTNESS

In our being prompt for worship, we show the importance of the occasion both towards God and courtesy to the brethren. Think of it this way, would you carelessly show up for work 5, 10, 15 minutes late more that special emergencies would make a necessity? Unless you're the owner, of course not! You would get fired! Respect for the priority your job demands wouldn't allow you to be so nonchalant. If your gathering for worship also held the important place in your life it should, you wouldn't nonchalantly show up perpetually late. **God may not fire you for being late, but He's still not one to tick off!**

In the other aspect of tardiness, we show discourtesy to the brethren. Are they to restart the service for late comers? Are they to constantly have the service interrupted by your coming in and shuffling to your seats after their attention is already turned to active worship? We need to think of the effect it has on others in our attending with a nonchalant attitude.

DIGNIFIED DRESS

In our dress for worship, we need to consider the importance of who we're corporately gathering before. If we truly held the breaking of bread in a reverential fear before God, we wouldn't come in something like our gym shorts and sweat shirt. The importance of an occasion should decide the clothing we wear. Just like for a wedding, we dress suitably to the special call of the occasion, we need to consider our assembly in such.

The awareness for appropriate dress has been considerably lost in our day and age. I was at a wedding where an uncle came in a T-shirt. Even though he had about the biggest beer belly I'd ever seen, special clothes would have carried at least some sign of care. On the other hand, there was one woman at the wedding who had dressy clothing, but the skirt was so short, not having

one at all could have been only slightly worse. Our clothing for assembly needs to be both modest and respectful.

A Day For The Lord

In setting aside one day a week for the special gathering of the saints, we need to search our hearts for real desire. It is such a common thing to see the last pews filled while the front half of the church is almost empty. **After the service, the attendees flee like rats from a burning building!** There are roasts waiting in the oven, or ball games to watch on TV. To many, the service is unbearably long if it exceeds an hour, yet the movie being two hours is sorrowfully too short! Needless to say, such shows the heart's true desires.

If the gathering is truly dead however, you can understand why people would want to quickly see it over. The fault isn't just in the attendees.

I have a scripture that shows something rather remarkable about the Old Testament Day for the Lord, the Sabbath:

13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: 14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth . .

Isaiah 58:13,14a

This passage shows what kind of day the Lord saw man needed to set aside for seeking Him. Not just a quick, go to church in the morning day. This was a day where we diligently sought the Lord. A full day of seeking nothing but the Lord. We may not be under the Old Testament Sabbath command, but the basic need of man is still for such a day of seeking the Lord to enable us to walk fearfully and continuously with Him. When we fail to seek Him, with committed diligence, we stray and grow weak in our walk with Him. Such a danger is too great.

Look closely at that passage. A day for the Lord is to be something we should "*call a delight*." Not just a day of rest either, but a

day seeking God's ways, God's pleasure and the conversation being God ward. Verse 14 shows that when we do verse 13, we will be taking "*delight*" in such a day. If we seek the face of the Lord, He will give us His heart to seek Him even more and we will delight in such a day. It won't be a burden. It's only a burden when spiritual death is present. Sin and rebellion raises an immediate wall that casts dark clouds over our fellowship and conversation. A day truly for the Lord and God will bless our paths.

Miscellaneous Services

There are whole books written on the different types of services we find in the church. I have chiefly addressed the communion service. For brevity sake, I will just list some of the other important gatherings the body should see develop. There is the prayer meeting, which is extremely important. There were special women's prayer meetings, which should be highly encouraged. Special Bible studies are another. These can be done from home to home. The youth can have their own if that seems favorable. There are many possible services that can take place that are allowable, or desirable, as long as they keep Christ the focus. As soon as they become simply extra curricular gatherings, they hold the great potential of weakening the church and becoming gossip centers. Such might be a "Women's Quilting Bee". There also needs to be care taken to see the "Women's Meeting" doesn't become a platform through which the women "run" the church. I've seen such happen.

Ministry Outreach

As I pointed out, the church and the work are totally separate items. For another example of how dangerous combining the two is to the body of Christ, consider the following:

One Pastor was sharing with me how a person shouldn't choose his church unless they were ready to accept the ministry to "juvenile type delinquents" his church conducted. There were always such youth coming and going, and if you didn't want to

see them, his church wasn't the one for you.

Other examples include the often seen "Ministry" that has a church inside it. The participants of the ministry assemble together on that common ground. **This isn't a biblical foundation for establishing a church!**

The Biblical pattern is the sending out of the body some to outside work, such as the apostles Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13: 1-4), as called by the Holy Spirit. Such work doesn't become a branch of the church. It can only carry the blessing and prayers of a local church. The Holy Spirit may call others within a local church to minister in something like an "Unwed Mother's Home" within the community. Such ministry would be under those called to serve in that particular ministry. The local church would have no control or say over the ministry. The local church would have say over the conduct of members in a ministry. Ungodly activity that might begin within some particular ministry would be held accountable with the brethren. Such is relatively obvious, but matters of direction, etc. are not under the jurisdiction, as it were, of the elders of the local assembly. Any new converts through that ministry however, should start assembling with the brethren in the local assembly. The converts can't form a nucleus around the ministry to assemble around that. A ministry is solely an outreach and an aid to help others, it cannot be its own church.

There must also be the understanding there's a difference between outreaching ministries, that some or all of the members of a local assembly may participate in, and the natural ministry that takes place within the body. Such as this would be the outreach described in Acts 6:1-6. There was the daily need of the widows and the church appointed the "deacons" to take care of the need. Such church ministry was that under the jurisdiction of the deacons. There is the local body ministry that is the natural care of the body. Such comes about through seeing a need of the brethren and acting to take care of it. This is not the same as a "Skid Road Soup Kitchen Mission". Such a mission would not be under the deacons or elders of the local church.

Parallel Roads, Not The Same Road

Dividing asunder the church and the work is a necessary step to a powerful living body. Only by doing such, will we see a true church that raises the call to believers to walk the higher path. Only by such will sin be able to be properly addressed and repentance find a proper pedestal.

The church and work could be compared to parallel roads. They are both going the same direction, but under no circumstances would you call them the same road.