

## Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations

# IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

### LESSON 4 – HOLY COMMUNION

(All citations of Holy Scripture are from the English Standard Version.)

**There is actually more unity of the church present where Christians of differing confession honorably determine that they do not have the same understanding of the Gospel, than where the painful fact of confessional splintering is hidden behind a pious lie.**

Dr. Hermann Sasse, "Union and Confession," *The Lonely Way*, Vol. 1, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 2002, p. 265.

### THE PROBLEM IN OUR SYNOD

Today, in our Synod, many have abandoned the practice of closed communion despite the fact that this is the Scriptural, Confessional, and historical practice of the Church, (and the official position of our Synod). Lutherans and non-Lutherans with whom we are not in altar and pulpit fellowship" are routinely welcomed to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod altars. Sometimes a broad invitation is clearly stated either in the congregation's worship bulletin or verbally by the pastor. At other times no statement, either in writing or verbally, is provided to visitors, leaving the matter of communion fellowship entirely up to the visitor. Or, a brief list of 4-5 points of doctrine are provided and if they can be answered in the affirmative, the prospective communicant is welcome to commune. This, of course, is in conflict from the meaning of Closed Communion, which is agreement in every article of Christian doctrine as the standard for admission to the Lord's Supper.

Moreover, it is not infrequent that LCMS Lutherans have no qualms about attending communion at non-Lutheran or Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) altars when visiting family or friends, thus compromising their own confession of faith and adopting the confession of the altar at which they commune while at the same time making a mockery of the unity to which participation at the altar is supposed to give witness.

Still others in the LCMS (pastors and laity) have come to the erroneous conclusion that it is participation in the Lord's Supper that establishes Christian fellowship despite the contradictory beliefs of those communing. Quite the contrary, participation at the Lord's Table is supposed to be an expression of the existing complete unity of communicants gathered at that altar with Christ and with each other.

### QUESTIONS

1. While "agreement in every article of Christian doctrine" is the standard for admission to the Lord's Supper, to properly administer the Lord's Supper, how does the unbiblical practice of "Open Communion" mock that unity?
2. In light of the last sentence above, what is a pastor and congregation saying to Christ, to each other, and to the world when they admit to the altar those holding and confessing a faith different from their own.

## THE TRUE NATURE AND DANGER OF THE PROBLEM

There has been an erosion of a proper understanding of fellowship (*koinonia*) in the LCMS. Proper altar fellowship has to do with stewardship of the mysteries of God and preserving the marks of the Church (the Word and Sacraments given according to Christ's institution). Anything other than proper fellowship puts the marks of the church in jeopardy and endangers the well-being of those gathered. Welcoming members of the ELCA and even non-Lutherans as if there are no serious heresies among them is delusional. Their errors are imported like communicable diseases. Proper altar fellowship functions like an immune system or a medical quarantine.

**Danger!**

In recent decades proper fellowship has been degraded with very little meaningful ecclesiastical supervision in the matter. The following terms and practices describe the loose distribution of the Lord's body and blood and indicate serious problems:

- ✓ "Responsible" fellowship.
- ✓ Communion hospitality or hospitality fellowship.
- ✓ A strong insistence on "close" rather than "closed" communion.
- ✓ Reducing the sacrament to the communicant's personal self-examination and excluding congregational or pastoral duty

Also notable, as we will mention elsewhere, is that very often when a faithful pastor attempts, by teaching and by patiently carrying out his call, to be a faithful steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1-2), he is persecuted in his congregation, in his circuit and by some district presidents. He may even be run out of the congregation or made so miserable that he resigns for health or family reasons.

To be sure, suffering is part of the cross pastors must bear as they serve, but congregations and district officials agree to the same doctrinal standard in Scripture and the Confessions. Unfortunately, politics and other human considerations often prevail. Generic American Protestantism coupled with the ecumenical movement and emotions often form a mix that declares hospitality and being nice in the name of outreach. The pastor is persecuted and dismissed with a severance package (see Hebrews 13:17). How soon it is forgotten, "Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do unto Me" (Matthew 25:40).

The *koinonia* that the congregation and Christ share in the Sacrament of the Altar is consecrated and set apart, for it is an intimate union and is holy. What God has called holy we may not call or treat as ordinary. It is the Lord's Supper, not the Christian's supper.

## QUESTIONS

1. If proper altar fellowship is to function like an immune system or medical quarantine, what does that say about pastors and congregations who ignore this principle in light of St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:27-31?
2. In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, what does St. Paul say is "required" of those who are "stewards" of Christ? What does that imply the steward is to do when there is conflict between the head of the house and the members of the house?

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## CHURCH FELLOWSHIP IS LORD'S SUPPER FELLOWSHIP

Note what comes prior to mentioning "fellowship" and "the breaking of bread" in Acts 2:

***And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*** and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:42 (emphasis added)

This description of established church life has been preceded by the apostles preaching the law and gospel and Holy Baptism (see earlier in Acts 2). Sharing in the Sacrament of the Altar together presumes baptism and teaching and affirmation of the apostolic doctrine.

The root of the English word "communion" is "union." It indicates unity; to ignore doctrinal differences among the participants in the Lord's Supper is a contradiction of unity. As pointed out in the unit on unionism and syncretism, there can be no "Reconciled Diversity" at God's altar. He simply does not "celebrate" disunity!

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## PASTORAL STEWARDSHIP OF THE HOLY SUPPER

Giving the Holy Supper of Christ's body and blood is not a matter of hospitality but a matter of the church and her ministers properly overseeing the administration of divine gifts. The pastor is like a pharmacist who dispenses

serious medicine. Note St. Paul's words in the first epistle to the church at Corinth:

**1** Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. **3** But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. **4** For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. (1 Corinthians 4:1-4; King James Version)

The writer to the Hebrews also reminds us:

**17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. **18** Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. (Hebrews 13:17-18)

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## CONGREGATIONAL STEWARDSHIP OF THE SACRAMENT

Pastors, congregations, and individual have a shared responsibility to see to it that the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood is used according to His institution, both for the safe personal benefit of the communicant and within the unified doctrinal fellowship of the church. One cannot reduce receiving Christ's body and blood to a "me and Jesus" moment apart from the context of a particular congregation or church body with its confession or denial of biblical teaching. St. Paul makes clear the importance of being unified with the confession of the church and reconciled in the forgiveness of Christ. The negative example of the troubling situation in Corinth again serves as an example:



**17** But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. **18** For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, **19** for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. **20** When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. **21** For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. **22** What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. (1 Corinthians 11:17-22)

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## INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY—COMMUNING UNWORTHILY IS HARMFUL

In the previous chapter of 1 Corinthians it is clear that a Christian cannot "straddle the fence" with other religions or with any confession not entirely of the truth. We recall our Lord identified Satan himself as the "father of lies."

**14** Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. **15** I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. **16** 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? **17** Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. **18** Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? **19** What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? **20** No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. **21** 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. **22** Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:14-22)

## QUESTIONS

1. If Church fellowship is Lord's Supper fellowship, and the responsibilities are shared among pastor, congregation, and individual members, does Scripture identify who has the final say regarding who is to receive the Sacrament?
2. How is the Church to respond to the party in this shared responsibility who refuses to acknowledge and fulfill their role?

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## POINTING OUT ERROR AVOIDS DIVISION

The Lord's Word gathers even while it makes division evident. Error is where divisions originate:

**17** I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. **18** For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. Romans 16:17-18

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. 9 Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, 11 for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. (2 John 7-11)

19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

The Scripture is clear that there is a danger to the church and the local congregation when proper altar and pulpit fellowship is not maintained. Again, St. John in his second epistle:

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, 11 for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. (2 John 10-11)

Allowing false doctrine and practice to be tolerated is approving and uniting with it. With regard to a situation in Corinth in which the congregation was sticking its head in the sand regarding a critical need for church discipline, St. Paul writes:

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)



## QUESTIONS

1. What are the verbs the apostles use in the above verses to teach the Church how to respond to those who bring or promote error?
2. In regard to St. Paul's words, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump," Luther writes:  
We are surely prepared to observe peace and love for all men, provided that they leave the doctrine of faith perfect and sound to us. If we cannot obtain this, it is useless for them to demand love from us. A curse on a love that is observed at the expense of the doctrine of faith, to which everything must yield – love, an apostle, an angel from heaven, etc.!"  
In regard to Holy Communion doctrine and practice in the Synod, is the Synod "sticking its head in the sand," and if so, how do Luther's words inform us on what needs to be done?

## SO WHAT? FALSE DOCTRINE METASTASIZES; THAT'S WHAT

This passage of Paul (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) echoes similar language of our Lord in Matthew 16:5-12, about the leaven (false teaching) of the Pharisees and Sadducees. False doctrine is transformative like yeast in a lump of dough. It is like cancer in a living body. False doctrine is like a tumor that continues to grow, metastasize and take over until the body suffers and dies. Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh collaborate against the truth of God. Fellowship is a matter of resisting the undermining, doubt-encouraging question of Satan, "Did God really say?"



It is ironic that while some may have a strong concern for germs while communing with other people (hence the adoption of Baptist disposable plastic cups), there is often little concern for the germs of false doctrine and errant practice imported through open communion and adopting worship practices from Baptists and Assemblies of God. The great American Lutheran, Charles Porterfield Krauth, writes in his famous *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* on the progression of error in the church:

When error is admitted into the Church, it will be found that the stages of its progress are always three. It begins by asking toleration. Its friends say to the majority: You need not be afraid of us; we are few, and weak; only let us alone; we shall not disturb the faith of the others. The Church has her standards of doctrine; of course we shall never interfere with them; we only ask for ourselves to be spared interference with our private opinions.

Indulged in this for a time, error goes on to assert equal rights. Truth and error are two balancing forces. The Church shall do nothing which looks like deciding between them; that would be partiality. It is bigotry to assert any superior right for the truth. We are to agree to differ, and any favoring of the truth, because it is truth, is partisanship. What the friends of truth and error hold in common is fundamental. Anything on which they differ is ipso facto non-essential. Anybody who makes account of such a thing is a disturber of the peace of the church. Truth and error are two co-ordinate powers, and



Charles Porterfield  
Krauth (1823-1883)

the great secret of church-statesmanship is to preserve the balance between them.

From this point error soon goes on to its natural end, which is to assert supremacy. Truth started with tolerating; it comes to be merely tolerated, and then only for a time. Error claims a preference for its judgments on all disputed points. It puts men into positions, not as at first in spite of their departure from the Church's faith, but in consequence of it. Their recommendation is that they repudiate the faith, and position is given them to teach others to repudiate it, and to make them skillful in combating it. [*The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1871), pp. 195-196.]

## QUESTIONS

1. Since untreated false doctrine in the Body of Christ (the Church) metastasizes like cancer or tumors in the human body, what should be the Church's response to the slightest hint of its appearance?
2. If Charles Porterfield Krauth accurately describes the problem with tolerating error in the Church, at what stage is the LCMS now? What is the best way to treat the problem?

## CLOSED COMMUNION IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

As we will see from the Lutheran Confessions, closed communion practice is clearly the intent of our Lutheran forefathers at the time of the Reformation. This is important to note, because some claim that closed communion, by whatever name, is not taught, presumed or prescribed in the Book of Concord. Those who practice open communion are forfeiting an important part of their Lutheran identity and practice and are departing from their confessional subscription in their ordination vows or in their congregational constitutional standard.

Luther writes in his preface to the *Small Catechism*:

But those who are unwilling to learn it (the catechism) should be told that they deny Christ and are no Christians, neither should they be admitted to the Sacrament, accepted as sponsors at baptism, nor exercise any part of Christian liberty, but should simply be turned back to the Pope and his officials, yea, to the devil himself. (*Small Catechism*, Preface)

Luther writes in his *Large Catechism*:

In the same manner as we have heard regarding Holy Baptism, we must speak also concerning the other Sacrament, namely, these three points: What is it? What are its benefits? and, Who is to receive it? And all these are established by the words by which Christ has instituted it, and which everyone who desires to be a Christian and go to the Sacrament should know. For it is not our intention to admit to it and to administer it to those who know not what they seek, or why they come. (*Large Catechism*, Sacrament of the Altar, paragraphs 1,2)

We must, therefore, make a distinction here among men. For those who are wanton and dissolute must be told to stay away; for they are not prepared to receive forgiveness of sin, since they do not desire it and do not wish to be godly. (*Large Catechism*, Sacrament of the Altar, paragraph 58)

To be sure, it is true that those who despise it and live in an unchristian manner receive it to their hurt and damnation; for nothing shall be good or wholesome to them, just as with a sick person who from caprice eats and drinks what is forbidden him by the physician. (*Large Catechism*, Sacrament of the Altar, paragraph 69)

The Augsburg Confession also states:

**1]** Of the Supper of the Lord they [our churches] teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed **2]** to those who eat the Supper of the Lord; and they reject those that teach otherwise. (Augsburg Confession, Article X (Of the Lord's Supper))

EXCERPT: Wherefore we must so use the Sacraments that faith be added to believe the promises which are offered and set forth through the Sacraments. **3]** They therefore condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify by the outward act, and who do not teach that, in the use of the Sacraments, faith which believes that sins are forgiven, is required. (Augsburg Confession, Article XIII (Of the Use of the Sacraments), paragraphs 2, 3)

EXCERPT: The people are accustomed to partake of the Sacrament together, if any be fit for it, and this also increases the reverence and devotion of public **6]** worship. For none are admitted **7]** except they be first examined. The people are also advised concerning the dignity and use of the Sacrament, how great consolation it brings anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe God, and to expect and ask of Him all that is good. **8]** [In this connection they are also instructed regarding other and false teachings on the Sacrament.] This worship pleases God; such use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion **9]** toward God. It does not, therefore, appear that the Mass is more devoutly celebrated among our adversaries than among us.



**10]** But it is evident that for a long time this also has been the public and most grievous complaint of all good men that Masses have been basely profaned and applied to purposes of lucre. **11]** For it is not unknown how far this abuse obtains in all the churches by what manner of men Masses are said only for fees or stipends, and how many celebrate them contrary to the Canons. **12]** But Paul severely threatens those who deal unworthily with the Eucharist when he says, 1 Cor. 11:27: Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. (Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV (Of the Mass), paragraphs 2-12)

EXCERPT: **34]** Now, forasmuch as the Mass is such a giving of the Sacrament, we hold one communion every holy-day, and, if any desire the Sacrament, also on other days, when it is given to such as ask for it. **35]** And this custom is not new in the Church; for the Fathers before Gregory make no mention of any private Mass, but of the common Mass [the Communion] they speak very much. Chrysostom says **36]** that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some **37]** to the Communion and keeping back others. And it appears from the ancient Canons that someone celebrated the Mass from whom all the other presbyters and deacons received the body of the Lord; for thus **38]** the words of the Nicene Canon say: Let the deacons, according to their order, receive the Holy Communion after the presbyters, from the bishop or from a presbyter. **39]** And Paul, 1 Cor. 11:33, commands concerning the Communion: Tarry one for another, so that there may be a common participation. (Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV (Of the Mass), paragraphs 34-39)

Confession in the churches is not abolished among us; for it is not usual to give the body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. (Augsburg Confession, Article XXV (Of Confession), paragraph 1)

But this is their opinion, that the power of the Keys, or the power of the bishops, according to the Gospel, is a power or commandment of God, to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments. (Augsburg Confession XXVIII (Of Ecclesiastical Power), paragraph 5)

#### From the Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession:

At the outset we must again make the preliminary statement that we **1]** do not abolish the Mass, but religiously maintain and defend it. For among us masses are celebrated every Lord's Day and on the other festivals, in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved. And the usual public ceremonies are observed, the series of lessons, of prayers, vestments, and other like things. (Apology, Article XXIV (Of the Mass), paragraph 1)

#### From the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope and the Smalcald Articles:

**60]** For the Gospel assigns to those who preside over churches the command to teach the Gospel to remit sins, to administer the Sacraments and besides jurisdiction, namely, the command to excommunicate those whose crimes are known, and again to absolve those who repent. **61]** And by the confession of all, even of the adversaries, it is clear that this power by divine right is common to all who preside over churches, whether they are called pastors, or elders, or bishops. (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, the Power of Bishops, paragraphs 60-61)

Of the Sacrament of the Altar we hold that bread and wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ, and are given and received not only by the godly, but also by wicked Christians. (Smalcald Articles, Part 1, paragraph 1)

#### Finally the Formula of Concord states:

For that not only the godly, pious, and believing Christians, but also unworthy, godless hypocrites, as Judas and his ilk, who have no spiritual communion with Christ, and go to the Table of the Lord without true repentance and conversion to God, also receive orally in the Sacrament the true body and [true] blood of Christ, and by their unworthy eating and drinking grievously sin against the body and blood of Christ, St. Paul teaches expressly. For he says, 1 Cor. 11:27: Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, sins not merely against the bread and wine, not merely against the signs or symbols and emblems of the body and blood, but shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which, as there [in the Holy Supper] present, he dishonors, abuses, and disgraces, as the Jews, who in very deed violated the body of Christ and killed Him; just as the ancient Christian Fathers and church-teachers unanimously have understood and explained this passage. (Formula of Concord-Solid Declaration, Article VII (The Holy Supper), paragraph 60)

**68]** But it must [also] be carefully explained who are the unworthy guests of this Supper, namely, those who go to this Sacrament without true repentance and sorrow for their sins, and without true faith and the good intention of amending their lives, and by their unworthy oral eating of the body of Christ load themselves with damnation, that is, with temporal and eternal punishments, and become guilty of the body and blood of Christ. **69]** For Christians who are of weak faith, diffident, troubled, and heartily terrified because of the greatness and number of their sins, and think that in this their great impurity they are not worthy of this precious treasure and the benefits of Christ, and who feel and lament their weakness of faith, and from their hearts desire that they may serve God with stronger, more joyful faith and pure obedience, they are the truly worthy guests for whom this highly venerable Sacrament [and sacred feast] has been especially instituted and appointed; **70]** as Christ says, Matt. 11:28: Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Also Matt. 9:12: They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick. Also [ 2 Cor. 12:9 ]: God's strength is made perfect in weakness. Also [ Rom. 14:1 ]: Him that is weak in the faith receive ye [ Rom 14:3 ], for God hath received him. For whosoever believeth in the Son of God, be it with a strong or with a weak faith, has eternal life [ John 3:15f. ]. (Formula of Concord-Solid Declaration, Article VII (The Holy Supper), paragraph 68-70)

**89]**Now, it is not our faith that makes the sacrament, but only the true word and institution of our almighty God and Savior Jesus Christ, which always is and remains efficacious in the Christian Church, and is not invalidated or rendered inefficacious by the worthiness or unworthiness of the minister, nor by the unbelief of the one who receives it. Just as the Gospel, even though godless hearers do not believe it, yet is and remains none the less the true Gospel, only it does not work for salvation in the unbelieving; so, whether those who receive the Sacrament believe or do not believe, Christ remains none the less true in His words when He says: Take, eat: this is My body, and effects this [His presence] not by our faith, but by His omnipotence. **90]** Accordingly, it is a pernicious, shameless error that some from a cunning perversion of this familiar rule ascribe more to our faith, which [in their opinion] alone renders present and partakes of the body of Christ, than to the omnipotence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Formula of Concord-Solid Declaration, Article VII (The Holy Supper), paragraphs 89-90)

[Accordingly, with heart and mouth we reject and condemn as false, erroneous, and misleading all errors which are not in accordance with, but contrary and opposed to, the doctrine above mentioned and founded upon God's Word, such as,]

3. Likewise, also, when it is taught that bread and wine in the Supper should be regarded as nothing more than tokens by which Christians are to recognize one another. (Formula of Concord-Solid Declaration, Article VII (The Holy Supper), paragraph 115)

In short, to practice “open communion” or some other euphemistic name for it, simply isn’t Lutheran or confessional. When one hears of congregations that “practice close communion differently,” it simply is not true. Where congregations and pastors of our fellowship practice open communion they are essentially putting us into fellowship with whatever non-Lutheran teaching and practice they admit to the altar. Over time this will have a clear corrosive effect on teaching and practice in a Lutheran synod or church body.



Closed communion is the historic practice of the church before the Reformation, going back to apostolic times and continuing to today. The modern ecumenical movement has brought about the push for ignoring confessional differences among Christians. Prior to the twentieth century, Pietism (which confuses justification and sanctification and stresses individualism and ethics) blurred confessional lines between Lutherans and Calvinists, and Rationalism (which rejects supernatural order and interprets the universe through the reasoning individual) denied Christian doctrine altogether. Treating the Lord’s body and blood as a thing to offer for “hospitality” makes the Lord’s Supper into something more akin to a snack for an open house rather than the holy body and blood of the Most High God who redeemed us from sin, death and hell.

## QUESTIONS

1. With such a profusion of articles regarding the Lord's Supper, what are the Lutheran Reformers seeking to make clear about the Church's understanding and practices when it comes to Holy Communion?
2. According to the Lutheran understanding of the confessional subscription, which all ordained pastors must agree to in their ordination, how significant is it for them to ignore their ordination vows or for their congregation to pay no attention to their congregational constitutional standard? What role would you expect an Ecclesiastical Supervisor to play in such a matter?

## OPEN COMMUNION IS NOT IN HARMONY WITH BIBLICAL EVANGELISM OR WITH THE CHURCH CATHOLIC

The apostolic evangelistic preaching was characterized by preaching repentance, turning from sin, trusting in the merits of Christ’s holy life and His sacrificial death, proclaiming the resurrection as victory over death, and the invitation and command to be baptized with Christian baptism. Modern methods promote an Arminian (the belief that Christ died for all people, but only those benefit who, aided by God’s grace by the Holy Spirit, believe and do His will) or even Semi-Pelagian (the belief that man can in part respond to God’s grace and also refrain from sin on his own) set of theological assumptions – methods which rely on enticement, attracting a crowd, decisions or altar calls, and which sideline the sacraments and thorough catechesis.

Open communion or the Lord’s body and blood used as a hospitality medium is problematic for several reasons:

- ✓ It allows anyone—regardless of being baptized, catechized or confession of faith—to receive the Lord’s body and blood with complete ignorance or apathy as to whether it is received worthily and with benefit according to 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, and 11:17-34.
- ✓ It assumes either an *ex opere operato* (the sacrament is efficacious) view of the sacraments or a view of the sacraments that our faith makes the sacrament what it is, and that the lack of faith would reduce it to mere bread and wine. Both of these views are rejected in the Book of Concord. The presence of the body and blood of Jesus is objective when it is

observed according to its institution, and the benefits are received in faith in Christ's word of promise.

- ✓ It contradicts the clear precedent of church history which excludes unbaptized, un-catechized visitors, those under church discipline, and those outside our church fellowship from partaking of the Lord's body and blood. Indeed, as Werner Elert shows clearly in his book, "Eucharistic Fellowship in the First Four Centuries," in the early church after the sermon, those not part of the body of communicants were dismissed and the doors to the nave were "closed" for the Blessed Sacrament of Christ's body and blood to be given to the faithful ("the holy things to the holy people"). Pastors need to be, so to speak, pharmacists regarding the means of grace.
- ✓ It places the feelings of people above the Lord's own Word as to how His gifts are to be used and it contradicts the charge that pastors and the church have to be stewards of these mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

The uninitiated do not know what the Lord's Supper is, and on a simply human level it will not encourage them to become Christians or members of the congregation (1 Corinthians 2:14). We are not to treat what is holy as a common thing. It also says that what is offered by the church isn't that special and that being casual with God's holy gifts is a virtue; no listening to God's Word, repentance or faith required. Christianity is simply reduced to a thing about "personal relationships" (*coram hominibus*) rather than our standing before God (*coram Deo*).

## QUESTIONS

1. Of the four reasons stated for why Open Communion is problematic to Biblical Evangelism, is it possible to rank them in order of importance, and if so, how?
2. According to 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, St. Paul is telling those who follow in the apostolic office (including pastors), what and how they are to be. Discuss how servants and stewards interrelate in verse 1, and why the office of steward (especially) is called to be faithful.

## WHY "CLOSED" COMMUNION? ISN'T THAT UNFRIENDLY?

In the early church the doors to the room where the congregation was celebrating the Lord's Supper would literally be closed. In some periods of church history this meant that after the sermon anyone who was not instructed or baptized, anyone visiting, or anyone under church discipline was dismissed with a "little benediction." This is described in some detail in the book by Werner Elert, noted above.

This practice is described in German as a "*gemeinschaft*" (fellowship or communion), that is, "*geschlossen*" (closed). The Lord's Supper is expressive of the fidelity between Christ and His Bride, the Church. However, when we speak of a closed (*geschlossen*) door, it is indeed a door, and not a wall. A door can be opened and closed. The strangeness of replacing "close" for "closed" communion is shown by opposites. The opposite of closed is open. And the opposite of close is far or absent. This really shows that while "close" sounds better to some, it really makes no sense and is not correct theologically, linguistically or historically speaking.

The door of closed communion is opened to those who are disciples proceeding on the path of Baptism, thorough catechesis, confession of the true faith and public admission to the sacrament. Those who are charged with stewardship of the mysteries of God open the closed door in accordance with the Lord's mandate to make disciples.

## QUESTIONS

1. The word "fidelity" in the second paragraph above is closely related to the word "faithful" in 1 Corinthians 4:2. If the pastor is not faithful as a steward in the 1 Corinthians 4 sense, what happens to the fidelity between Christ and His Bride, the Church?
2. St. Paul speaks of a "wall of separation" between Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2:14-18. Is there anything in these verses which helps us make a connection to what is written above about the door of closed communion being a door and not a wall?

