

# The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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~ All articles are written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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## Two Related Communion Questions



Brother Carter,

I recently had lunch with someone who had the opinion that Communion must be taken together by the congregation in a "synchronized way". Everyone eats the bread **at the same time**, and everyone drinks the fruit of the vine **at the same time**. They claim that is the meaning of communion. I always thought we commune with God, not man.

Consequent to that position, they also believe some should take communion twice on Sunday. That is, if someone missed Sunday morning service and communion is offered at evening service, then the ones who took A.M. communion need to join the ones taking P.M. communion. I had never heard this idea before. Can you shed some light on these issues for me?

**Brother Carter's Answer:**

I will try to shed as much light on this as I can.

**First**, let me address the issue of everyone eating and drinking at the same time.

It is true that the meaning of the word "communion" is: "fellowship", "participation", "partaking", or "sharing". It seems clear to me from Scripture that it is a fellowship with both God, and our fellow Christians.

"15 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 **The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?** 17 **For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.** 18 Observe Israel after the flesh: **Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?** 19 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and **I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.** 21 **You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.** 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" **I Corinthians 10:15-22 (NKJV)**

From **verses 16, and 18-21**, we see that we are fellowshiping with God in communion and thus we cannot do the same with demons which is what happens in idolatry. However,

from **verse 17**, we see that, in partaking of communion, we Christians are also united with one another. Thus, it is a fellowshiping with other Christians as well as with God. It is not communion with God **or** one another. It is communion with God **and** one another. Not "either or", but "both and".

Certainly, the Scripture does instruct us to partake together.

"21 **For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others;** and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or **do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?** What shall I say to you? **Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you...**33 Therefore, my brethren, **when you come together to eat, wait for one another.** 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, **lest you come together for judgment.** And the rest I will set in order when I come. **I Corinthians 11:22-23, 33-34 (NKJV)**

It is true that Communion is intended to be a corporate event or action. However, that is not the same as saying that we must all eat at drink at exactly the same moment. If we sit together for a meal, we certainly have fellowship with one another whether our individual bites are "synchronized" or not. We are sharing a meal together. In fact, I would argue that focusing on "synchronizing" our bites might

actually detract from our fellowship in the process.

Personally, I prefer the “partake in unison” approach but that is merely a personal preference. You certainly could not insist on such a practice from the text. The point of the text is that we do it together as a group, not that we “synchronize” each bite or drink.

I might add here that if we insist that we “synchronize” our eating and drinking, we need to ask how closely we must be “synchronized”. Is half a second close enough? What if I fumble the bread or cup a bit and end up eating or drinking a full second after everyone else? Who is to judge such things and how? Of course, this is ridiculous but that is exactly my point.

If we are required to “synchronize” our partaking of Communion, we also must ask about those who are shut in. Do they need to “synchronize” their partaking with the rest of the congregation? If so, how exactly could they have done that before modern communication methods? Or are they simply excluded from the fellowshiping because they are unable to attend and thus “synchronize” their partaking?

This leads us to the second question which is very much related to the first. If we must “synchronize” our eating and drinking, obviously we must all partake together when any of us are partaking. That would mean that everybody would partake on Sunday evening whether they had done so on Sunday morning or not.

I have run into this argument before. There was a man in my brother’s church who insisted on this practice. He argued that communion was to be a corporate event, not an individual one. He used **I Cor. 11:21-22, 33-34** as proof of that.

I will share with you what I shared with my brother. He said it was a “slam dunk”. The man in his

congregation, however, did not find it convincing at all.

“I agree that communion is meant to be a corporate event and I do think that **I Cor. 11:21-22, 33-34** shows us that. But that is not the end of the discussion here.

Under the Law of Moses, they were required to keep the Passover feast in the first month of the year. It was certainly a corporate event. In fact, it was a national event.

Just the second time that Israel was to keep the feast, a question arose. There were men who had become defiled by a human corpse, and therefore, they could not participate in the feast although they wanted to. They brought the question to Moses, and he inquired of the Lord about it.

What God commanded was that if anyone was ceremonially unclean or on a far journey when Passover was to be kept, they could partake one month later. Notice carefully, however, that it was not the entire nation that partook the following month, just those who could not partake the previous month. This is all found in **Numbers Chapter 9**. (For more details on this, see the article/sermon “*Fellowship in Passover*” in this issue.)

While God has not specifically addressed the issue of those who cannot attend Sunday morning services, this issue with Passover is clearly an analogous case. Looking at God’s instruction about Passover ought to be a clear guide for us concerning Communion. There is a clear connection between the Passover and Communion in that Jesus is our Passover Lamb, so I am not just making up a connection; Paul made the connection for me. “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For **indeed Christ, our Passover**, was sacrificed for us.” **I Corinthians 5:7 (NKJV)**

Following the precedent we have with the Passover, it makes perfect

sense for us to make provision for those who cannot attend morning services to partake in the evening. However, the precedent would also show us that only those who were not there in the morning would need to partake in the evening, not everybody.

The man in my brother’s congregation rejected this out of hand because it was “from the Old Testament”. But those things were written for our learning and admonition. The real question is whether we want to understand God’s Will or defend our position.

“For **whatever things were written before were written for our learning**, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” **Romans 15:4 (NKJV)**

The earlier questions concerning those who are shut in would apply to this second issue as well. Are they excluded from partaking altogether or are they required to partake “in sync” with the congregation for both morning and afternoon services?

One final thought that concerns both of these related issues. It seems to me that when Paul says, “**For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.**” **I Corinthians 10:17 (NKJV)**, this includes more than just the people in a given local congregation. I believe Paul is saying that we are one body with all true Christians everywhere through the partaking of the one bread. Therefore, if this verse proves that we must “synchronize” our partaking in a local congregation, it also proves that we must “synchronize” it with all Christians everywhere.

How could that possibly be done? Christians around the world live in different time zones. What about those on the other side of the international date line?

For example: Howland Island is 24 hours behind Wake Island. That means that at the very instant that

Sunday begins on Howland Island, Sunday also ends, and Monday begins, on Wake Island. How could Christians in both places partake “in sync” while still partaking on the first day of the week? It only becomes the first day of the week on Howland Island as it also becomes the second day of the week on Wake Island.

This doesn't even take daylight savings time into account for a place like Wellington, New Zealand. Wellington is technically 25 hours ahead of Howland Island meaning it is already 1:00 A.M. Monday there at 12:00 A.M. Sunday on Howland. How could Christians in Howland Island and Wellington New Zealand ever “synchronize” their partaking without somebody partaking on the wrong day?

Someone may say that this is ridiculous. That is precisely my point. Whenever a position logically leads to an absurd conclusion, there is something wrong with that position. Of course, you can always come to absurd conclusions from valid positions if you don't proceed logically, but I think we have proceeded logically here.