Small Group Guide: The Communion and the Cross

From the Cruciformed Life Series -- 1 Corinthians 11

Overview

This week's sermon explored the meaning and purpose of communion, connecting it to the broader theme of living a cruciform life -- a life shaped by the attitude and example of Jesus Christ. Communion is not merely a ritual or a moment of private reflection. It is a practice of unity: unity with Christ in His death, resurrection, and mission, and unity with fellow believers as members of His body.

Key Takeaways

- **Cruciform living means taking on the attitude of a servant.** Jesus did not come to be served but to serve, and He calls His followers to do the same.
- **Baptism and communion are both acts of unity.** Baptism unites us with Christ in His death and resurrection as a one-time act. Communion sustains that unity repeatedly, in community with other believers.
- **Communion is not about worthiness -- it is about worship.** None of us are worthy to dine with Jesus. That is precisely why He came. Communion keeps the focus on Him, not on us.
- **Taking communion in an unworthy manner means failing to recognize the body of Christ -- the people around you.** The Corinthian church was guilty of using the Lord's Supper to reinforce social division rather than to build unity.
- **Communion is not punishment. It is participation.** It is not about guilt. It is about grace. It is not about listing faults. It is about forgiveness and freedom. It is not about separation. It is about family supper.
- **Communion points forward.** Every time we take the Lord's Supper, we are proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes again, looking ahead to the wedding supper of the Lamb described in Revelation 21.

Scripture References for Further Study

- Matthew 20:26-28 -- Jesus describes greatness as servanthood and explains that He came to give His life as a ransom for many.
- John 17:20-23 -- Jesus prays for unity among all future believers, asking that they would be one just as He and the Father are one.
- Romans 6:3-11 -- Paul explains how baptism unites believers with Christ in His death and resurrection and calls them to live as a new creation.
- Acts 2:41-42 -- The early church devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer following the baptism of three thousand new believers.
- Luke 22:19-20 -- Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, describing the bread and cup as a covenant in His body and blood, given for His disciples.
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-26 -- Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for practicing communion in a way that creates division rather than unity.
- John 13:3-17, 34-35 -- Jesus washes His disciples' feet the night of the Last Supper and commands them to love and serve one another as He has loved and served them.
- Revelation 21:1-4 -- John describes the new heaven and new earth, where God will dwell with His people and wipe away every tear.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. What is one word that comes to mind when you think about communion, and why?
2. Growing up, how was communion explained to you? Did that explanation shape the way you approached it -- positively or negatively?

Going Deeper

3. The sermon described the cruciform life as being shaped by the attitude of a servant. Where in your daily life do you find it most difficult to take on that attitude? What gets in the way?
4. The sermon made the point that Jesus prayed for unity in John 17 specifically for those of us who would come after His disciples. How does it affect you to know that Jesus was praying for you before you were even born?
5. The sermon drew a parallel between baptism and a wedding ceremony, and communion and the ongoing shared life of a marriage. In what ways does that comparison change or deepen how you think about communion?
6. Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for using the Lord's Supper in a way that humiliated the poor and reinforced social divisions. In what ways might Christians today -- individually or as a church -- take communion in a way that fails to recognize the body of Christ around them?
7. The sermon said: "Communion is not about punishment. It is about participation. Communion is not about guilt. It is about grace." Does that reflect how you have typically experienced communion? What would need to shift in your thinking or your approach for communion to feel more like that?
8. The sermon pointed to the washing of the disciples' feet as the context in which Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. What is the connection between serving one another and taking communion together? How should one inform the other?
9. Revelation 21 describes a future meal -- the wedding supper of the Lamb -- where we will dine with Jesus in fullness. How does keeping that future hope in view change the way we approach communion in the present?

Practical Applications

This week, try one or more of the following:

- **Examine your posture during communion.** The next time you take the Lord's Supper, intentionally shift your focus away from your own guilt or personal checklist and toward what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Ask yourself: Am I thinking about myself, or am I thinking about Him?
- **Acknowledge the people around you.** Before or after taking communion, take a moment to recognize the people sitting near you as fellow members of the body of Christ. Pray for one of them by name this week.
- **Have a conversation about baptism or communion with someone in your group.** Share what these practices have meant to you personally and listen to what they have meant to others. Notice where your experiences are similar and where they differ.
- **Identify one person in your life who feels like an outsider.** The Corinthian church excluded the poor from the table. Who in your workplace, neighborhood, or family might feel excluded from community? What is one concrete step you can take this week to include them?
- **Serve someone in a tangible way before next Sunday.** In the spirit of Jesus washing His disciples' feet, identify one act of humble service you can offer to someone this week -- not because it is convenient, but because it reflects the cruciform life.

Closing Prayer Prompts

Close your group time by praying together. Consider praying for the following:

- Unity within your small group and within the broader church body
- A deeper understanding of what it means to live as servants of one another
- Those in your lives who do not yet know Jesus and have not yet been welcomed to the table
- The humility to examine not just our own hearts, but our treatment of the people around us when we gather as the body of Christ