

Series So Far: The Holiness of the Church

In this series of The Holiness of the Church, we have been discovering God's vision for a holy Church. Each study has built upon the last, revealing how God is calling, shaping and preparing His people to reflect His character and fulfil His purposes in the world.

Week 24 – Called Out, Set Apart: The Holy Assembly: God calls a holy people out of darkness and into His Kingdom.

Week 25 – Christ Loves a Holy Bride: Christ loves, cleanses and prepares His Bride.

Week 26 – Built Together as God's Dwelling: God builds believers together into His dwelling place

Week 27 – One Body, Many Members, One Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit unites every member with a unique place and purpose within Christ's Body.

Week 28 & 29 – Love: The Bond of Perfect Holiness: Love is the visible expression of genuine holiness and the bond that unites God's holy people. God's holiness gives love its purity and God's love gives holiness its beauty.

Week 30 & 31 – Holiness and Church Discipline: God disciplines those He loves and His Church is called to lovingly restore those who wander from His ways.

Week 32 – A Holy People at the Lord's Table: Communion calls God's people to remember Christ's sacrifice, examine their hearts and approach His table with faith, repentance, gratitude, reverence and expectation.

This week Ps Samuel concludes our teaching on church discipline by considering the particular responsibility carried by those who lead God's people. From there, he turns our attention to the Lord's Table and challenges us to rediscover communion as more than a familiar weekly practice.

Holiness and Church Discipline

Over the past two weeks we have considered the heart of biblical discipline: redemption, reconciliation and restoration. Ps Samuel concluded this teaching by applying these same principles specifically to those who lead the Church.

Scripture holds leaders to a high standard because leadership carries influence and influence carries responsibility. Church leadership is not presented in Scripture as a privilege or position of importance, but as a stewardship entrusted by Christ. Jesus remains the true Shepherd of His Church; pastors and leaders are stewards of people for whom Christ gave His life.

This is why character matters so deeply in Christian leadership. Ps Samuel pointed to the qualifications for leadership given in Scripture—being above reproach, faithful, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable and gentle, among others. Significantly, most of these qualifications concern character rather than gifting. As Ps Samuel expressed it, “Character is more important than gift.”

When a leader does fall into sin, however, the purpose of biblical discipline remains the same as it does for every believer: to redeem, reconcile and restore. Leaders should neither receive harsher treatment because of personal dislike nor softer treatment because of their position. There must be truth, accountability, repentance and appropriate restoration. Where wrongdoing also breaks the law, repentance before God does not remove responsibility for earthly consequences.

This brings our study of church discipline back to where it began: God's desire is for a holy people. Accountability within the Church—including accountability for its leaders—is ultimately about protecting the holiness of Christ's Body and helping God's people remain faithful to Him.

A Holy People at the Lord's Table

Having concluded his teaching on discipline, Ps Samuel turned to another important expression of the holiness of the Church: communion.

Because communion is celebrated regularly, it can easily become something familiar—bread is taken, the cup is received and we move on without deeply considering what we are doing. Yet Paul presents the Lord's Supper as something far more profound. Communion is remembrance, proclamation, participation, celebration of grace and a solemn call to holiness. Ps Samuel encouraged us therefore to approach the Lord's Table with faith, repentance, gratitude, reverence and expectation.

Communion is holy because it belongs to Christ. Jesus Himself instituted the meal, taking bread and saying, *"This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me,"* and taking the cup as the new covenant in His blood. The holiness of the table therefore begins with the holiness of its Host.

As Ps Samuel put it: "The table is not ordinary bread for ordinary people, living ordinary lives. It is an extraordinary grace for a people called to extraordinary holiness."

The Lord's Table takes us back to Calvary. Jesus is our Passover Lamb, whose body was broken and whose blood was poured out for us. Yet communion does not only look backwards. It reminds us that Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again. It points backward to the cross, upward to the risen Christ and forward to His return. Ps Samuel described this beautifully: "Every communion service stands with one foot at Calvary and the other foot in eternity."

Communion is also more than a mental exercise of remembering Jesus. Paul describes it as a participation in Christ. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit we are drawn again into fellowship with our risen Lord. The Spirit reminds us of Christ's sacrifice, convicts us of sin, strengthens our faith, renews our assurance and deepens our love for Christ. This is why we can come to communion with expectation rather than simply going through a familiar routine.

But this holy encounter also calls us to self-examination. Paul tells each believer to examine themselves before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. This does not mean waiting until we consider ourselves worthy. None of us comes to Christ on the basis of our own worthiness. Rather, we honestly ask whether there is unconfessed sin, spiritual coldness, unforgiveness, bitterness or broken relationship that God is calling us to address.

"So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world."

1 Corinthians 11: 27 – 32

The instruction is not examine yourself and stay away, but examine yourself and then eat. We recognise our need, repent and receive again the grace Christ has made available to us. This brings us straight back to the three truths we have been learning through church discipline: redemption, reconciliation and restoration.

Ps Samuel summarised the heart of this teaching in one simple statement:

“The table welcomes repentant sinners, not careless hearts.”

We do not approach communion because we have lived perfectly. We approach because Christ has died for us. We come humbly, remembering His grace, allowing the Holy Spirit to search us and responding wherever He calls us to repentance. In doing so, communion becomes not merely something we do each Sunday, but a regular invitation to return our hearts to Christ and remember the extraordinary grace by which His holy people live.

Key Takeaways

- Communion was instituted by Jesus and belongs to Him.
- The holiness of the Lord's Table flows from the holiness of Christ, its Host.
- Communion is remembrance, proclamation, covenant, participation, celebration and a call to holiness.
- We approach communion with faith, repentance, gratitude, reverence and expectation.
- Communion looks backward to Christ's sacrifice, upward to the risen Christ and forward to His return.
- Through the Holy Spirit, communion becomes more than remembering Jesus; it is an opportunity for living fellowship with Him.
- Self-examination is not intended to keep repentant believers away from the table but to bring us honestly before Christ.
- Communion challenges us to examine both our relationship with God and our relationships with one another.
- The Lord's Table welcomes repentant sinners, not careless hearts.
- Communion should never become so familiar that we lose our wonder at the grace of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Ps Samuel described communion as more than a symbol or weekly ritual. What difference would it make if we approached communion each week expecting to encounter Christ and receive from the Holy Spirit?
2. Ps Samuel said, “Every communion service stands with one foot at Calvary and the other foot in eternity.” How might our experience of communion change if we saw it not only as remembering Jesus’ death, but also as celebrating our future with Him?
3. Paul tells us to examine ourselves before taking communion. How can we practise genuine self-examination without falling into condemnation or believing that we must make ourselves “worthy” before coming to Christ?
4. What might change in our church if we regularly approached communion with all five of these attitudes: faith, repentance, gratitude, reverence and expectation?

This Week's Challenge

The next time you receive communion, resist the temptation to move through it automatically. Before taking the bread and cup, deliberately pause and consider five words:

Faith – Repentance – Gratitude – Reverence – Expectation

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anything that needs to be confessed, forgiven or reconciled. Remember what Christ has done for you, thank Him for His grace, and approach His table expecting Him to minister to you.

For those who feel comfortable doing so, consider setting aside a quiet time during the week to share communion at home and intentionally reflect on Christ's sacrifice.

Scripture Memory Challenge

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”
1 Corinthians 11:26 (NIV)