

The Lord's Supper at Gatlin Baptist Church

We welcome you as our treasured guest tonight as we reverently remember Jesus Christ's death during our Lord's Supper (Communion) service. *Our view of the proper observation of The Lord's Supper is that only members of Gatlin Baptist Church should partake of the elements that will be passed to the congregation.* So that you may understand why we observe The Lord's Supper in this way, we offer the following explanation.

Churches practice one of three types of Communion: Open Communion, Close Communion, or Intimate Communion.

Open Communion

Churches practice Open Communion when: (1) they permit anyone in attendance to participate in Communion, or (2) they permit anyone in attendance that *professes to believe in Christ* to participate in Communion.

Close Communion

Churches practice Close Communion when they permit participation of *non-members of the same or a similar denomination.*

Intimate Communion

Only members of our church participate in Communion, sometimes called "closed" or "restricted" Communion, but we prefer to call our method "Intimate Communion".

Although modern Christianity has almost completely abandoned Intimate Communion, history attests to numbers of churches that practiced "closed" or "restricted" Communion as a safeguard against moral and doctrinal laxity. But, more importantly, the Bible itself teaches a more conservative approach to Communion, for which we submit the following proofs:

Church Discipline Necessitates Intimate Communion. Anyone who mentions "church discipline" speaks in "an unknown tongue" to the modern churchgoer, but the Bible teaches emphatically that a church must "withdraw" fellowship and the privileges of Communion from any brother and sister "who walks disorderly" and "put away from among" its membership any member who refuses to repent of gross immorality or heresy (1 Corinthians 5:11-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; Titus 3:10).

A church has *real* disciplinary authority over its membership *only*, not over visitors, guests, and friends of the church. Keeping Communion within our membership insures that each of us is subjected to Christ, His undershepherds, and to one another (Ephesians 5:24; 1 Corinthians 5:1-7; Hebrews 13:7).

The Fear of God's Judgment Mandates Intimate Communion. Participating in The Lord's Supper improperly is a serious matter. Because of their permissive attitude towards disorder, immorality, and heresy among the membership, the church at Corinth violated "the Lord's body" and brought judgment upon themselves by participating in an "unworthy" manner. This judgment in the case of some included sickness, and even death (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

God surely judges those outside the churches, but God also commands His churches to judge those within their own membership who continue in unrepentant sin (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). Woe to that church who fails to judge herself, for God will surely judge her!

The Symbolism of Communion Warrants Intimate Communion. Neither the bread nor the wine of The Lord's Supper possesses leaven. In the Bible, leaven symbolizes false doctrine (Matthew 16:6-12), hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), and immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-8). Therefore when a church eats and drinks the unleavened bread and wine, that church publicly witnesses not only to the purity of Christ but also to the moral and doctrinal purity of its membership. This is the Apostle Paul's idea of the church as "one loaf" – one in faith and practice. But how can a church *confidently* attest to one's moral or doctrinal purity unless it fully knows their "doctrine" and "manner of life" (2 Timothy 3:10)?

The Clearest Picture of True Communion Requires Intimate Communion. The word "communion" itself expresses the highest degree of closeness and true fellowship. Likewise, there is no higher expression of this closeness than when we participate together in The Lord's Supper. As members of the same local body of believers, we have a degree of practical closeness and unity that can only be shared by those who have pledged themselves to one another in mutual love and service in "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

Conclusion

By practicing this more cautious, watchful approach to The Lord's Supper, we do not mean to exalt ourselves above anyone outside our membership. To the contrary, we hope this service conveys our humility before God and one another.

Gatlin Baptist Church