

RESTRICTED LORD'S SUPPER

There are three different practices by which local autonomous churches recognize those individuals eligible to partake of communion (or the Lord's Supper)—unrestricted/open, restrictive/close, and strict/closed. The first, unrestricted or open, allows any professing believer in Christ to participate in the church's observance of communion. Restrictive or closed communion is when only adult, baptized believers who are members in good standing of that church or a church of like faith and practice (i.e., one that actually practices meaningful church membership and discipline) are eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper. The finally category, strict or closed, limits participation only to adult, baptized believers who are members in good standing of that particular church and no other.

ChristChurch Macy practices restrictive/close communion—limiting eligibility to only adult, baptized believers who are members in good standing of that church or a church of like faith and practice—for several reasons:

I. First, communion is an ordinance of Christ given specifically to the local autonomous church, not to individuals, families, or small groups/Bible studies (Acts 2:41-42, 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-22, 33-34). Communion is an ordinance of unity among the congregants of a Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Only the Body of Christ can have communion (*koinonia*—*fellowship*) at the Table of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27).

II. Secondly, as such, the local church has a gatekeeping (or “fencing”) responsibility to ensure that participants partake of communion in a worthy manner (i.e., they are baptized members in good standing) (1 Cor. 11:27, 29). This is a duty to protect the sanctity of the ordinance itself (1 Cor. 10:14-17), 11:17-34), the purity of Christ's Bride (Eph. 5:27), and to prevent unworthy individuals (1 Cor. 11:27, 29) from sinning by partaking of the Lord's Supper (Prov. 27:5-6; Matt. 18:15; Lk. 17:3; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 5:11; 2 Jn. 10-11). If the church does not guard the Table, therefore, it is acting unrighteously.

II.A. If, for instance, it is the church's responsibility to examine prospective candidates for water baptism to ensure that they are adult believers (Acts 8:37, 10:46-47), then certainly it has the same responsibility with regards to the Lord's Supper. Again, if it is the church's responsibility to limit membership to adult baptized believers (Matt. 28:19, Acts 2:38-41; Rom. 6:1-4), then certainly it has the same duty with regards to the Lord's Supper. In short, there are no Scriptural grounds for why the Table of Christ should be protected less than baptism or church membership.

II.B. Furthermore, the church is to purge out the old leaven, for only a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6-7). Consequently, the church has the Scriptural mandate not to extend fellowship to a non-believer or to a professing believer who lives in unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15). In conclusion, therefore, the most practical means of protecting the flock is by church members subject to church discipline, and consequently the reasonable and appropriate line to draw in

“fencing the table” is at church members in good standing. The church, however, should extend fellowship to an visiting adult, baptized believer who is a member of good standing with their home church (Acts 20:7, 11; 1 Cor. 11:23).