

The Communion of Saints

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of recognizing the presence of the Lord in communion and maintaining doctrinal integrity within the church community.

Duration: 32:07

Scripture: John 1:29, John 14:8, Acts 2:1-4, Acts 13:2, 1 Corinthians 11:29, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Thessalonians 4:14

Topics: "Communion"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of God's judgment and how it is different from condemnation. He uses the analogy of two boys playing in a backyard, where one boy is disciplined by his father while the other boy is sent home to his own father. The preacher then refers to the book of Revelation, specifically chapters 1, 2, and 3, where he highlights the decline in love, morality, and doctrine among the believers. He emphasizes the importance of discerning the presence of the Lord in communion and warns against partaking in a unworthy manner, as it can lead to damnation. The preacher also mentions the universal longing for God and how humanity is caught between the desire for God and the fear of Him. He references the Apostle's preaching to the Greeks and the hunger for God that exists in people. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the ministry to the Lord and the need to cultivate an awareness of God's presence.

Transcript

Now I am to speak this morning, briefly, before the communion service. The topic is the communion of saints, and the texts are John 14, 8, Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. We'll be satisfied if we can but see the Father.

Then in the 11th chapter of Corinthians, a passage that seems to have no relation but does, here is this verse, verse 1129. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. That's the section I wanted to get to, not discerning the Lord's body.

Now, it is well known that man is caught, we are caught, we humans are caught, in a strange dilemma. We are caught between the desire for God and the fear of him. The longing for God is age-old.

The Apostle said in preaching to the Greeks that they felt after God if perchance they might find him. And the history of the world, since man has been writing and leaving his thoughts for others later to read, has indicated that there is a hunger after God. Men are hungry for God.

Some go away into the mountains and caves and try to cultivate an awareness and get to know God that way. Others tell us in India, whether they still do or not, I don't know, but they used to inch their way to wash in the Mother Ganga, the Ganges River, falling flat on their faces, marking where their foreheads touched the ground, walking to that spot where their foreheads touched the ground, and falling again. And thus, taking those falls, if a man is five feet and a half or six feet long or tall, the length and the height of his body, thus falling and inching his way to the Mother Ganga that he might find God.

And yet there is a fear of God. That is, we have along with our longing for God. In the book of Genesis it tells us that when God appeared in the garden, that Adam ran and hid among the trees of the garden, and God had to say, Adam, where art thou? And God had to be the aggressor in search for Adam.

And when our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, Peter fell down and said to him, when he did a certain miraculous act, he feared and said, I am an unclean man, and fled from his presence. So that man is caught in the middle between fear and fascination. There is a deep fascination within him that makes him want to know God, and there is a deep fear within him that makes him afraid of God.

Then there is a love of sin in him that shuts out the face of God from him. So man is thus caught in this terrible situation. Now the Greeks thought about local habitations, mounts and groves and rocky peaks, and they thought they'd find God there.

And if they went to those places, they would find God. So they brought heifers and garlands with flowers. If you own any Wedgwood pottery.

Now, I happen to like Wedgwood. I'm not a China lover particularly, but I do like Wedgwood, and I have bought my wife a piece. I used to come to Canada and buy it and take it back to the States because I could buy it cheaper up here because it came from England and you didn't have to pay custom on it here, so I managed to get it in that way by getting a little cheaper.

Preachers have to cut corners, you know. And if you have any Wedgwood china, if you will look on it, you will see against a blue or green or black background, you will see little cameo pictures. Almost every instance, those cameos are Greek, from Greek mythology.

Sometimes you will see a man leading an animal up toward an altar, and that is the Greek offering, the Greeks were all going to offer to their gods. And old Josiah Wedgwood caught this idea and put it in his very beautiful Wedgwood chinaware. Now, this idea that God is somewhere and that we have got to sacrifice and take animals to him, this has come down the years.

And then God brought the truth to light, and he swept away the errors and the fancies and the shadows, and he showed what the Old Testament had hinted at and pointed to and prepared us to receive, that God should appear as a man, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which is being interpreted God with us. And he said, when he had grown to manhood and was teaching, he that hath seen me hath seen the Father. Now, a man, not man, but a man, is the focal point of manifestation, and that man was Christ Jesus the Lord, so that where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Now, we are gathered here this morning in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if you have brought in with you a psychology of denomination, then I most heartily recommend that you ask God for a cleansing from it this morning, because we ought not to divide the children of God into imaginary divisions. They are

imaginary from God's standpoint. We ought not to do that.

We ought to remember that we are a family and that we are met in his name. We are met around the person of a man. In the 13th chapter of Acts it tells us that they met and ministered to the Lord.

Their ministry was to the Lord. Now, it wasn't the preacher that was ministering, but the people ministered. They were there, worshiping the Lord in the beauty of holiness, and met around the person of the Lord.

It was at that time that the Holy Spirit said unto them, Separate me, Barnabas and Saul, and they called out missionaries and sent them out, because they were worshiping the Lord, meeting the conditions of New Testament worship. And the Lord blessed them and smiled upon them, and said, They are worthy to have some missionaries go out from there. So he sent missionaries out.

They gathered unto him, as I trust we are gathered unto him now. We are gathered unto him, knowing that he is here, and knowing that all deity is present, hidden from our sight certainly, from our grosser sight, but present, all with one accord in one place, the scripture said, when the Holy Ghost came upon them. They were all with one accord in one place.

When the Spirit came, I repeat, we now pray, O Lord, send the Holy Ghost in order that we may be of one accord. But that's not scriptural, for the Holy Spirit did not come to make them of one accord. He came they were of one accord.

Music does not come to make your piano get in tune, it comes because your piano is in tune. It is not the music that tunes your piano, it's the tuned piano that makes your music. And the word that they have there, that one accord, is a musical term, and it's a term for harmony.

And those disciples were already tuned to each other. They were in harmony with each other, and because they were in harmony with each other, the Holy Ghost could come and fall upon them and bring the music of the spheres to the hearts of the disciples, because they were one. But they had to become one before the Spirit could come upon them and baptize them into the body of Christ.

And so let us not pray, O send the Holy Ghost that we might be one. The Holy Ghost can't come and make two deacons who don't like each other, or two sisters who are jealous of each other's voices. The Holy Ghost can't come and make them one, but if they will get right, then he can come upon them.

We must get right, and then the Holy Spirit comes. He came because they were all of one accord in one place. The Corinthian Christians met like that, and they met together, but they were guilty of a serious error.

I am a believer that while the fellowship of Saints is as broad as all the born-again Christians, I believe also that we ought to be very careful to hold the faith of our fathers, every tenet of the Christian creed, right. There is a movement on now to receive into the fellowship of Christians persons who do not hold the faith of our fathers. For instance, the Seventh-day Adventists have been brushed off and dusted up now, and brushed off, and they say now that they are also evangelicals and ought to be accepted as evangelicals.

I happen to know, I debated with one of their leaders back in the day when I was foolish enough to debate, and I know they are wrong on six points. I remember what Paul said about two men. He said that he had turned them over to the devil, that they might learn not to blaspheme.

Do you know what the blasphemy consisted of? It consisted of teaching that the resurrection was already past. They had it figured out somehow. They went to the Greek original, and they proved by juggling one text against another one that the resurrection was past.

Now, somebody nowadays would have said, Well, it's simply a mistake. They're just mistaken, but they're nice Christians. Take them in.

Paul said, They've got to learn not to blaspheme. It's blasphemy to teach and believe that which is contrary to the scriptures. So I believe that we ought to have as the foundation of our fellowship a solid New Testament theology.

I came out and I dare not teach. I dare not teach that Jesus, that God laid the sins of the world on the devil as the Adventists do. I dare not teach it.

I must teach that he laid the sins of the world on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, and he bore them all and frees us from the accursed load. If I do not so teach, I'm blaspheming because I am teaching a doctrine that is not true. I dare not teach that I am saved by grace and the keeping of the law.

I must teach that I am saved by grace alone without the works of the law, or else I'm blaspheming. I dare not teach that souls of the righteous, when they die, sleep in the earth until the resurrection. I must teach that the souls of the righteous, when they die, go to be with their Lord at the right hand of God with the Savior, and come back and are reunited with their body at the coming of Christ.

This is traditional historic faith of our fathers and New Testament teaching. So therefore I believe that we should be bold and strong, and if we need to be, we need to fight for the faith of our fathers once delivered to the Saints. You give the devil one inch and he'll take a mile.

You let the devil's camel stick his dirty nose in the tent and the whole hump will be in there before nine o'clock tonight. So you keep the devil out. You keep him out in your doctrine.

Keep him out in your pulpit. That's why for the years, the 31 years, if you'll allow me to repeat that again now for the 90th time that I was pastor in my church, one church in Chicago, I stood with a club before that pulpit. No man could preach in that pulpit unless I knew that he was worthy to preach morally and doctrinally.

As pastor I stood there. The sheep didn't know it, the board knew it, but the sheep didn't know how I protected them. Because in that great center of religion down there, and snowed under now, I came up there out of a wallow, a snowy wallow.

But that great center of religion, everybody wanted to talk. Just everybody wanted to talk. One man rushed down the aisle to me, wanting to debate me about baptism.

I said, No thanks. Somebody else wanted to come in and preach about what he had seen when he was chaplain of a prison. He wanted to talk about the electric chair.

He said, I want to come in and I want to set an electric chair up on your platform. He said, I want to tell the story of how I saw a woman hanged and she was a heavier head pulled off. He said, I want to talk about that.

I wrote him a letter, brother. It was a Christian letter that I am not afraid to face in the day when the Lord judges the secrets of men's hearts. But if his face didn't turn the color of a ripe oyster, or I mean lobster, when he read that letter, I said to him, my friend, I said, if you've done any good among the prisoners, I'm glad, and if you have brought any comfort to any of the boys who, because of their crimes against society, had to pay the last price, I'm glad.

I said, the idea that you could set an electric chair up on my platform and stand and tell the goggle-eyed saint's gruesome stories of women whose heads pulled off, I said, is beneath the dignity of the Church of Christ. I said, the fact that you can come and then you can take an offering at the door and the awestruck and goggle-eyed saints will throw their dollar bills into your hat, I said, it's a proof, not that you're right, it's a proof of the tragic, backslidden condition of the Church. I never heard from him again.

He never wrote me. He never wrote me. Somebody else came in and he had a paper baler.

You know how they bale things? I don't know if you Canadian friends here in the city particularly know that word, bale. Some of these old farmers do. You press it together hard and tie it up, and they take waste paper and put it in a baler and press it together tight, and they can chip it that way.

So this fellow said, what I want to do is set in a baler in your church. Then he said, you'll announce to your audiences, bring all your waste paper to church. And he said, we'll bale it and you can sell it and thus you can have money to pay the preacher and keep the church and keep your missionary program going.

And I said, mister, now over there's the door, and I said, I want you to get to that door just as fast as you can. I said, I don't want my board even to know that I even talk to you. I said, if they even found out that I'd let you even make a proposition like this to me, they'd be on my neck.

I said, in this church we go down in our pants pocket, pull the money up, take it out and put it silently in the place. That's how we get our offering. We don't bale waste paper.

Can you imagine when God sent his only begotten Son and the best he had, and his Son gave his blood the best he had, and the apostles gave their lives the best they had? We bring God our waste paper? So I built a wall of fire around that pulpit. No man could get into it. No man, no man could preach or talk to any of the groups unless he was all right.

One fellow got through the screen one time. He spoke to our young people. He got through the screen, and he was a liberal.

He'd been a Christian when we knew him. He was a born-again Christian and an evangelical. Then he'd gone off to seminary and had lost his faith, and that's the part we didn't know.

We were in. The speaker allowed him to speak to the young people. I was present, and we had the room full of young people, and he got up and he smiled condescendingly down upon us old-fashioned followers of the old-time religion and proceeded to take the tenets of the faith of our Fathers apart one at a time.

He said, I'm open for questions. Any of you would like to ask me questions? He sat down, and there was a silence that you could have cut with a pie knife. It was perfect silence, not a word.

Nobody said a thing. The young chairman finally got up and said, Will you please stand? We'll be dismissed in prayer. Everybody stood, and we were dismissed in prayer.

This fellow hung his head and went silently stowaway. He thought he was going to have a fight. He thought that we Christians were going to get up and start working on him, but not a person said a word.

They'd been too well trained. They weren't going to argue with a man who'd lost his faith. They weren't going to start a fuss and have a lot of hurt feeling.

They'd just let him die. And when he got out of there finally, nobody said much to him. He said, Well, goodbye.

Thanks for coming. That was about it. The chairman said, Now end of it.

So I believe that we ought to protect our folk. I don't know why this came in really. It's not in the notes and wasn't in my head, but I thought I'd say that to you.

But I believe in the fellowship of Christians, but I don't believe in the fellowship of Christians that go overboard and take in everything. For the day will be when sheep will be separated from goats, and I'm not throwing my arms of fellowship around any goats, if I know it. Let the Lord separate the goats and take care of them.

I'm not condemning them or damning them. I'm just not having them in fellowship. That's why it's hard to get in this church, because we don't want any goats in here.

When you start letting goats in pretty soon, you have a goat's nest instead of a sheepfold for your church. And yet I don't think that we ever ought to attack the goats. You know, if you do that, some preachers, God bless them, they're so anxious to maintain the faith of our fathers that they carry a club into the pulpit and beat the goats from the pulpit.

I don't think it's a good idea. One preacher, one Southern preacher said that he had a certain doctrine that had gotten in, and he wanted to get rid of it, and he knew there were goats in the congregation, and he said he wanted to get after the goats. So he spent three weeks preparing a sermon in which he was going to pulverize those goats.

He said, there won't be any goats left. He said, I'll kill them, they'll get out of here. He spent three weeks making up that sermon.

He said it was his sermon. He emphasized the fact that the Lord hadn't anything to do with it. He made the sermon, and he said, I got up there, and he said, for about an hour I poured it on.

And he said, when I was finished, there was lamb's wool all over the building. But he said the goats were all sitting there rubbing their hands and saying, Amen, Brother, pour it on. He said the goats were the ones that didn't get affected.

So he learned his lesson. No more after that. So I don't believe in attacking the goats from the pulpit and just pointing and saying, Now, they're goats.

They don't believe the truth, and they're not living right. But the Saints of the Lord ought to be Christians living right and believing the truth. Now, these printing Christians believed the truth, but they had made one error.

That's how I got off where I was. They had made one error. That is, they did not sense the presence of the Lord in the communion.

In the text which I read, it was this one, not discerning the Lord's body, not knowing the Lord was present. They ate and they drank, but they did it in an unworthy manner, bringing judgment on themselves, because they did not realize the Lord was there. They did not observe the communion in a proper way.

So when this sense of the Lord in the communion was lost to the Church, the Church began to backslide. You'll find in Revelation 2 and 3, their love cooled off and their moral lives degenerated and their doctrine got warped, and they got a name to as the years went by and centuries followed centuries, because they had failed to observe or discern the presence of the Lord in the communion. They were not having the right kind of fellowship.

You know you can have fellowship around whatever it happens to be. I was talking, I had lunch with two of our six sons in the city of Chicago. We'd wallowed up in the snow.

I ate with them, and one of them used to play ball for the Navy and was invited to play for the Boston Red Sox and refused. I'd been a ball player. We got to talking about music finally, and the other boy was a great music fan.

This older boy, a lawyer, said, I am not going to allow myself to become a fanatic on music. Now I like it and I listen to it, but I am not going to become all wrapped up in it. He said, when I played baseball with the professionals, I used to play ball because I liked it.

I went and played the game and went home. But some of them were fanatics. They gathered around and they talked about rubbing the bat down to the bone, whatever that meant.

I never did know, don't steal. They talked about how they rubbed the bat down to the bone. I didn't know there were any bones in bats, but that's a phrase they used.

They talked about averages and curves and all the rest. He said, bored me, I want it out of there. He said, I like baseball, but not that much.

Well, he wasn't a good baseball man, really. To be a good man, a good hockey man, a good baseball man, you've got to just live for it, have it in your blood. But he didn't.

Now, that fellowship of those men that will sit around, they call that the hot stove league down in the states. They will sit around the hot stove in these stores and settle all the ball games that were played the season before. Sit around there and sit in the sawdust box and settle all of the games that have been played.

If Casey Stengel hadn't pulled that pitcher there in the seventh inning, I think they'd have won and so on. That's a hot stove league. Well, those boys, they have a fellowship, but it's rather an unworthy fellowship, I would say.

It's a fellowship of sports, a fellowship of baseball, and they know everybody back to Holmes Wagner. I've seen a few games, but I'm not that interested. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And truly our fellowship is with the Saints and with the children of God. Therefore, instead of our having a fellowship, instead of our talking endlessly for a day at a time about some local affair, politics or literature or music or sports or anything, we talk a little about it, because we're naturally intelligently interested in what's going on around about us, but our big interest lies with Jesus Christ the Lord. Our big interest lies with the Savior and the Lord, and so that's where our fellowship lies.

And Christ is our center of fellowship, and this church has Christ as its center of fellowship. Jesus Christ is everything here. Not I, not I. Not the new man who's coming here to associate with me in this work.

Not us. Not Jim Clemenger, the chairman of the board. Not Al, who leads the choir so beautifully.

Nothing. Not these musicians. None of these fine-looking men who go up and down the aisle here as kind of stewards or whatever they would be, showing you the seats and taking your hat.

No. We're all one in Christ Jesus, but nobody is the magnet nor the center of attraction. Jesus Christ is the center of attraction, and we want to keep it that way.

So this church is not an institution. People complain about institutionalized Christianity, but I say this church is not an institution. This church is an organization.

This church is more than an organization, it's an organism. It's a group of born-again people who know Jesus Christ as their Lord. And if this church is only an organized institution run by a constitution with offices of authority given to certain men in their elections once a year, then it may not be a church at all.

But if it's a fellowship of the Saints, a gathering of believers around the magnetic person of God's Son, then it's a church. But the Corinthians forgot that. They forgot that they were coming and that Christ was the center of attraction, they forgot it.

At least they forgot it for the time when Paul had to write and rebuke them. If we're here for any other reason, if the reason is humanly worthy, I suppose we'll not be judged nor punished. But if the reason is unworthy, then we'd better take Paul's warning, because Paul says, "...for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. A good, patient, kindly God, even when we take communion in an unworthy manner, is ready to forgive us that he might not need to judge us and condemn us." He judges us, but he judges us in a disciplinary way and brings us to repentance in order that he might not condemn us.

There's a difference there. Two boys are playing in the backyard, and one of them is yours and one of them isn't. One of them belongs two blocks down.

And those two boys get into real mischief. They decide they're going to break all the windows that they can get to within sight. And so they break out all the garage windows and kitchen windows and start on the back porch and then start throwing rocks next door, and you go out and catch them.

Well, now one boy is yours and one boy belongs two blocks down. And you're going to treat those two boys differently. You're going to say to one boy, Go home, I'm calling your father.

You're going to say to the other boy, Come in, I want to chat with you. I know I've done it. We had one boy, God bless him, who would get increasingly obnoxious for three months.

At the end of three months I'd take him to the basement. He's sweetened up like an orange and stayed that way for about a month and a half. Then for a month and a half more he'd get increasingly impossible.

And then when it got impossible for me to endure it, we went down to the basement. I've known something about the cool air down there. It sort of seemed to do something for the boy.

Now there's a difference between the two. If he's your child, you will love him, and you're smiling underneath, really. But you're not going to let him get away with that.

You're thinking of his future, so you'll discipline him and punish him. But if he's not your boy, you send him off. So God says, I am going to discipline you because you belong to me.

I'm sorry you're living the way you are, but I'm not going to condemn you, you're mine. I'm going to judge you and discipline you, and that's another thing altogether. David said he'd rather fall into the hands of God than fall into the hands of man.

He knew that God was better than man. So at this communion table this morning I trust that we'll be worthy, and I trust that our purpose in being here is right, and I trust that our communion and our fellowship will be as near perfect as it's possible to be in this life. But if you feel in your heart that you are not worthy, and that there's something within you that shouldn't be there, don't invite the discipline of God by going ahead and being neglectful of it.

Deal with it. Deal with it now. Deal with it now before God in confession and forgiveness and cleansing.

Because if you do not, the Lord will have to discipline you. If you're a sinner, not his child, he'll condemn you. If you're his child, he'll discipline you.

It's a difference. But I have learned the ways of God enough that I don't want to fall into the hands of God, either, if I can help it. I do not want the discipline of the Lord.

For the Lord uses the whip in order that he might not condemn us. He does it that we might be partakers of his holiness. It's only the recalcitrant mule that you have to whip.

It's only the wild skiddy's horse that you have to pull back with bit and bridle. The well-trained animal doesn't have to be pushed and kicked and whipped. I believe that the children of the Lord ought to be so domesticated and so easy to handle, that the Lord only has to whisper to them and they get it.

They keep their conscience clean and their lives clean. They keep right. And if they even think a thought that isn't right, they grieve before God and repent and get it away under the blood of the Lamb.

God doesn't have to use the whip on them, and he won't. I trust that we'll turn this service today not into a danger to us, but we'll turn it into a blessing. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together, carry one for another.

If it's merely a meal you want, let a man eat at home if he's hungry. But you can't come not together to condemnation. How sweet is the fellowship of Saints.

Here's a hymn. Draw near to Jesus' table, ye contrite souls, draw near. The hungry, sick, and feeble are made most welcome here.

Let Jesus' death and graven upon your hearts remain, thus here and thus in heaven, eternal life you gain. Now we'll shortly have the communion service.

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