

Eligibility for Communion

by John Murray

To be eligible for communion, one must be in communion with Christ, characterized by consecration to God, purity of character, and obedience to the faith.

Duration: 41:38

Scripture: Romans 1:5-8, 1 Timothy 1:15, Hebrews 4:16

Topics: "Communion"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the love of God towards believers. He explains that God's love for us is not based on our own goodness or worthiness, but rather on His own grace and sovereignty. The preacher highlights that God's love is demonstrated through His calling us into fellowship with His Son and working in us the obedience of praise. He encourages believers to humbly accept God's love and to strive for obedience and communion with Christ. The sermon concludes with a prayer for God's blessing and a reminder of the throne of grace where we can find mercy and grace in times of need.

Transcript

The epistle of Paul to the Romans, the first chapter, at the fifth verse, By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name, among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ. To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, all to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As we prepare for and approach to the Lord's table, it is well for us to ask the question, who are eligible to partake of the symbols of Christ's body and blood? That question becomes all the more necessary when we bear in mind that the bread and wine are not only symbols of the body and blood of Christ, but they are also seals.

And if they are seals, they seal something. What is that which they seal? The apostle Paul tells us in that chapter which we read, The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? And principally, the Lord's Supper symbolizes and seals communion with Christ. And so the question inevitably arises, who are they who are in communion with Christ? And in this text, we have some of the basic characteristics of those who are in communion with Christ.

And so we shall deal with those characteristics which are mentioned in this text, which we are so very liable to pass over, simply because they are contained in Paul's salutation, rather than in the more didactic portion of this epistle. And I shall deal with these four characteristics which are mentioned in this text, and

deal with them in what might properly be considered their logical order, rather than the order in which they appear in the text. And the first characteristic of those whom Paul addresses in this particular epistle, as those who are the saints of God, as those who are united to Christ in the efficacy of his death and in the power of his resurrection, is called of Jesus Christ.

You will notice that immediately in this particular text, by whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name, among whom are he also, the called of Jesus Christ. And we may just briefly try to analyze that particular feature of those to whom Paul was writing. And in connection with it, there are two or three things to be noted, particularly derived from the teaching of the apostle in this epistle, and in some of the other epistles which immediately follow this one in our English Bible.

And the first thing to be noted about this feature or this characteristic, is that they are the called of God the Father. We might think that because Paul says here, called of Jesus Christ, that he means by that, that they are called by Jesus Christ. But it would not appear that that is Paul's meaning.

Because in this epistle elsewhere, and in other epistles, he makes it perfectly clear that calling is the specific action of God the Father. In the eighth chapter, you remember, whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called.

And of whom is Paul speaking? He's certainly speaking of God the Father, because he distinguishes between the person of whom he is speaking and the Son, whom he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. Clearly indicates that the person who did foreknow, who did predestinate, and who also called, is none other than God the Father. And in the first epistle to the Corinthians, the same emphasis is brought to our attention when Paul says, ye were called into the fellowship of his Son.

That is, the Father called you into the fellowship of his Son. God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And consequently, the name God there is the personal name of God the Father.

And again, in the second epistle to Timothy, who called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before time eternal. And again, because there is a distinction drawn between the Son and the person who is the subject of the action, the action in that particular case, again, must be regarded as the action of God the Father. Now that, I presume, is something that we are not, perhaps, always ready to recognize.

Because we think of the application of redemption as very specifically the work of the Holy Spirit. And that, of course, is true. It is his particular prerogative to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us.

But we must never discount the action of God the Father in the very application of redemption. I suppose that we have learned from our infancy that the specific action of God the Father in the covenant of grace is to elect a people. That the specific action of the Son is to redeem their people.

And that the specific action of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify them. And all that is true. But we must not allow such formulized deeds to blind us to certain other very important facts.

And the fact I'm trying to bring to your attention now is this, that in this which is the very initiation of the actual possession of salvation, that God the Father is the specific agent. And I think we impoverish our

faith and impoverish greatly the comfort of our faith by not failing to take proper account of the way in which God the Father himself, by very specific action, comes into relationship with men, not only in the planning of redemption, but also in its very application. Now if God the Father is the specific agent in this calling, what does it consist in? Well, if you examine what Paul says in this particular chapter, you will notice at the very beginning that he says he is called to be an apostle.

And if you just take that as your index to what Paul means when he says in verse 6, the call of Jesus Christ, you can very readily detect that the apostle Paul is emphasizing this, that as it was not by his own election, as it was not by his own particular determination that he was set apart to be an apostle, but by the election and by the determination and by the very action of God. So in connection with the calling of which he speaks in verse 6, we are advised of this, that calling is a sovereign and an efficacious summons on the part of God the Father, bringing men, ushering men, into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Again we must remember that it is God the Father who is the effective agent in ushering men into the fellowship of His own Son.

Just as God is the agent in justification, and just as God is the agent in glorification, so He is the agent in calling. It is an efficacious summons, and it is an efficacious summons simply because God in His sovereign grace comes and lays His hand upon them. He lays hold upon them, and He draws them not simply by irresistible grace, but by an irresistible summons into the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

And that is the very beginning of the actual possession of salvation, just as we think of God the Father as the one who initiated the whole process of redemptive grace by electing a people in Christ before the foundation of the world. So our conception of the grace of God is rarely incurred if we do not understand that the very initiation of salvation in actual possession is by an efficacious action on the part of Him who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now you will notice that Paul says they are the called of Jesus Christ.

And the third thing I want to note about this calling is this, that they are called to be the possession of Christ. They are Jesus Christ's called ones, not so much because He was the one who called them. That is the specific action of God the Father through the operation of the Holy Spirit, but they are called to be the possession of Christ.

They are the called of Jesus Christ. They are called into His fellowship, into His communion, and therefore into the intimacy of that relationship with Him as His own property, as His own possession. Now the second characteristic that is mentioned in this text, of those who are really in communion with Christ, and therefore eligible to partake of the seals of His body and blood, is that they are called to be saints.

That word saints has been very seriously misunderstood and misapplied, as if sainthood belonged only to those who were particularly pious, or who were particularly well advanced in the practice or attainment of holiness. Roman Catholic conception of sainthood has, I fear, cast its spell over the thinking even of Protestants. And we are very liable to think of a person as a saint only when that person has attained to a very high and notable degree of godliness.

That's a fatal error, and it's a complete travesty of the teaching of Scripture on this particular matter. Everyone who is united to Christ in the bonds of faith is a saint. And there are two things in particular which are denoted by that title, or by that characteristic, and the first is this, that they are consecrated to God, set apart to Him, and the second is that they are pure in the sense of having been freed from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.

The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the person who is still under the dominion of sin, under the dominion of the lust of the flesh, is not a saint, because that person, in the first case, is not consecrated to God, and in the second place, he does not have that purity of character which is consonant with, and is the necessary expression of, his consecration to God. Now these two thoughts are complementary.

When we say that a person is consecrated to God, set apart to God, we cannot think of that consecration apart from the character which belongs to that particular person. If a person is consecrated to God, then that person must reflect the character of the God to whom he is consecrated, or to whom she is consecrated. God is holy.

God is just. God is good. These characteristics which belong to God must be reflected in the person who is consecrated to Him, who is brought into a unique relationship with Him.

Be holy, for I am holy, is a principle that must be applied in our interpretation of this particular matter of sainthood. Now you will bear in mind that Paul says, in this particular case, called to be saints. And that means that all that we have found already, with reference to the character of God's calling, comes to bear also upon the very fact of sainthood.

They are effectually summoned to become the saints of God. That is to say, consecrated to Him, dedicated to Him, and therefore endowed with that moral, ethical, spiritual character which reflects the very image of God Himself. Now there we are confronted with something which is very searching, because it is a criterion which is exceedingly practical.

What are our own affections? What are our alignments? What are our ambitions? What are our controlling passions and desires in reference to this whole matter of holiness? And it is there that we shall discover, perhaps with a more conclusive and practical determination, whether we ourselves are among those who are eligible to sit down at the Lord's table and eat what are the symbols of His body and blood. It is the pure in heart who will see God. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.

No man shall see even the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore have with Him that intelligent and affectionate communion. It is only the person who has that basic fundamental breach with the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life, who is competent according to the appointments of God Himself to sit down with the Lord of glory and have communion with Him, have fellowship with Him who is Himself, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. There shall not enter into the heavenly Jerusalem anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, but they who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And if that is true to absolute perfection and attainment in the new Jerusalem, in the heavenly Jerusalem, it must have its foretaste, it must have its anticipation, it must have its promise in the life that now is in the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Now the third feature of those who are in communion with Christ mentioned in this particular text, you will find in that expression which Paul uses in verse 5, obedience to the faith. Now the literal interpretation of that or translation of that is for obedience of the faith.

There is a very close connection. That is the purpose for which Paul was given grace and apostleship, that he might promote the obedience of faith among all nations on behalf of Jesus' name. And it is in connection with that definition of the purpose for which he was given grace and apostleship that he

introduces the Romans, the believers at Rome, as an example of the realization of that very purpose for which he received grace and apostleship.

You read the text again and you see the close connection. By whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience of faith among all nations, for his name, among whom are ye also, the called of Jesus Christ. What does that expression mean, the obedience of faith? You might interpret it as meaning that it is the obedience which consists in faith.

And so in that case what Paul would be saying is this, that he was given grace and apostleship for the promotion simply of faith among all nations on behalf of Jesus' name. And of course it is perfectly true that faith, after all, is an act of obedience. There is an element of obedience in all faith, even in the primary act of faith, as it is exercised towards Christ.

But it is the commandment of God that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and have eternal life. That is the will of God. When we exercise faith, there is compliance with the commandment of God.

And so you can never separate faith and obedience because faith itself is really an act of obedience to the revealed will of God. But I don't think that's what Paul means in this particular case. Or you might take it to mean that it is the obedience which is of faith.

That is to say, which is the fruit of faith. And that again is perfectly true. And this, I think, is certainly involved in the expression, the obedience of faith.

Faith works itself out through love. And love is the fulfilling of the commandments of God. And the fulfilling of the commandments of God is simply obedience.

Faith without obedience, therefore, is dead. Consequently we might say that it is obedience which is the fruit of faith. But personally I'm inclined to think that there is an emphasis here which I'm going to try to bring up.

And it is this. That faith, after all, is faith in Christ. And you cannot think of the faith of which Paul speaks here apart from the object of faith.

And so the obedience of faith is practically equivalent to saying the obedience of Christ. Faith is faith in Christ. And that faith in Christ is not a momentary or evanescent act.

It is an act of commitment to Him. And since it is an act of commitment to Him, it isn't something that can pass away. It is something that begins certainly at a certain specific point.

But it isn't something that passes away. It is something that continues and it continues in the form of commitment, of devotion. And I think that's the particular thought, not necessarily the thought to the exclusion of these other things I have mentioned, but nevertheless the central thought in this brief expression of the Apostle, the obedience of faith.

Because faith is not simply trust in Christ for salvation, but it is commitment to Him as moral. And that requires whole soul devotion to Him, so that every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. That is the expression of the Apostle in one of the Corinthian epistles, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

And I think it's the same thought here, the obedience of Christ, namely that obedience of devotion, of commitment to Christ as Lord, as King, as Sovereign. But what we have to recognize, my friends, and we have to recognize it with all the greater urgency in these days of widespread declension, oh, we have to learn it, the great lesson of the totality of Jesus' Lordship. We know a great deal today about the conception of totalitarian government.

Every one of us is very familiar with that particular word, totalitarian. It has been ringing in our ears for the last, oh, the last fifteen years with such significance, such political and international significance, that every one of us has got to know what it means very well. Well, after all, what we need to learn is the totalitarian government of Christ, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

And that is the implicate of faith, because faith is commitment, and commitment is a permanent relationship. And it's the permanent relationship of recognizing His unyielding and absolute Lordship. My friends, if we are going to hold communion with Christ, and if our communion is going to be full of meaning, if it is going to be full of intelligent devotion, and if it is to bear the fruit of edification, it is because we recognize the totality of the Lordship of Christ, and we are not ashamed of Him, and we are not ashamed of any of His institutions, and we sit down at His table in simple obedience to His commandment, this doom in remembrance of Him.

All the course characteristic that I notice in this particular text, that there upon our question is that brief expression which you will find in the seventh verse of this particular chapter, Beloved of God. Beloved, what does that mean? Well, of course, Beloved of God means Beloved of God the Father, because here again, as so frequently in the epistles of Paul, that name God is the personal name of the person. Beloved of God the Father.

Now God loved His people from the foundation of the world. That's made perfectly clear in Romans 8.29, whom He foreknew, that is, whom He foreloved, He also did predestinate. Made perfectly clear in the Ephesian epistle.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with all spiritual blessing in the heavenly tomb of Christ, according as He hath chosen of Him before the foundation of the world. And He chose His people from eternity, not because they were lovely, not because they, as it were, constrained His affection by the excellent qualities which they exhibited, not at all. His love to them from eternity was an absolutely free and sovereign love, because it is a love that had respect to their affection.

Love of complacency. Not simply the love of sovereign good pleasure, but the love of complacency, which God has to His own people. Jesus said to His disciples, you remember, on one occasion, He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.

What's the meaning? He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father. And the logic of that is simply this, that the love of the Father is constrained by the love which the people of God feel. And that's the love of complacency, the love of delight, the love that God has to everything that reflects His own perfection.

God cannot but love Himself. He cannot but love Himself supremely. And that is what is basically meant when it is said that God is love.

He loves Himself supremely, and absolutely, and infinitely. And because He loves Himself, He cannot but love that which is the reflection of His own perfection since He communicates something of His own character, something of His own holiness. That is to say, something that reflects His own character and something that reflects His own holiness to His people.

He cannot but love them for that very reason. God loves with the love of complacency. He called them to be saved.

And to the obedience of faith. And because they are called to be saved, and to the obedience of faith, His own holiness and His own perfection becomes reflected in them. And then they become the object of His holy delight and complacency.

You will find, I think, that very same thought in 1 Thessalonians 1, 4. Knowing Paul says, Beloved of God, you are election. Paul doesn't seem to be talking there so much of the electing love of God because he speaks of that in connection with election. He speaks of something else when he says, Knowing, brethren, beloved by God.

I'm giving a different translation from your version. Knowing, brethren, beloved by God, you're election. And I think Paul is there reflecting upon the love which is, as it were, constrained by the character which God communicates to His own people.

Oh, how marvelous it is, how marvelous it is that the love of God should be called out by something which the people of God have come to be. There is nothing in them that is naturally good. They are utterly miserable and wretched and poor and blind and naked, utterly reprehensible.

And God, out of His own power and good pleasure, sets His love upon them. Then He placed upon them the impress of His own character, of His own holiness. And because He impressed upon them the impress of His own character and holiness, there is, as it were, the reaction of God to that which is the reproduction or the reflection of His own perfection.

Created as to the image of God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, they are beloved of God. That is the love of complacency. Oh, you say, how could God love me? Well, it's all together within the circle of His own pure and sovereign grace.

It was by an efficacious and sovereign summons that He called you into the fellowship of His Son. It was by a sovereign and efficacious summons that He called you to be saved. It was by the inscrutable and irresistible operation of His Spirit within you that He worked in you the obedience of faith.

And just because that is God's own work, God's own handiwork, and because He will not forsake the work of His hands, because He will perfect that which He began, He loves with even the love of complacency. Now, my friends, do we bear the mark of those who are in communion with Christ? This is a very, a very practical matter, and it is a matter in connection with which God Himself has provided the criteria. And I know very well, I know very well how liable we are to try to get some consolation that is below the level of God's word, because we know ourselves to be so miserably below the standard which God requires of us that we have an inherent tendency to drag down the standard to a level that is more approximate to the particular condition in which we find ourselves.

We must not do it, my friends. The only way whereby we can give any abiding comfort, the only way whereby we can derive any abiding comfort for ourselves, and the only way whereby we can give any

abiding comfort to others, is to leave the criteria at that level where God has placed them. These are the criteria of the faith whom Paul addressed at Rome, and those were the people who were in communion with Christ.

And let us leave these standards where God has placed them, and let us take to ourselves the corresponding lessons, the corresponding rebukes, and by God's grace, the corresponding counseling. O Lord, our God, do Thou grant Thy blessing unto us, that Thy word, which is ever so living and powerful and sharper than a twedged sword, may take hold of us and bring us down in that before Thy throne of grace. And blessed be Thy great and holy name, that it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and that there is a throne of grace to which we may come with confidence that we may obtain mercy and find grace to us in every time of need.

Do Thou bless us, O Lord, this night and dismiss us when we close with Thy benediction. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

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