



We are a people of The Open Table

Churches of Christ Sunday, October 3, 2010

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Contents

Introduction	Page 5
- Craig Brown (Churches of Christ in Australia)	
An Open Table: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow	Page 7
- Andrew Menzies (Churches of Christ Theological College)	
Our Distinct and Gracious Way	Page 11
- Kerrie Handasyde (Historical Society)	
The Open Table of Justice	Page 15
- Mark Riessen (Blackwood Church of Christ)	
How Open is our Table?	Page 17
- Edwina Blair (Women's Ministry Leader in NSW and Associate Pastor at The Coast Community Church)	
Bible Studies	
- Craig Brown (Churches of Christ in Australia)	
1. Remembering the Past	Page 21
2. Engaging in the Present	Page 25
3. Looking Forward to a Future Meal	Page 27
4. Who Shares the Meal with Us?	Page 29

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Introduction

-- Craig Brown
Federal Coordinator, Churches of Christ in Australia

Churches of Christ Sunday October 3, 2010, on the theme 'The Open Table'

This booklet is a resource to assist in celebrating and exploring this important theme.

Why are we choosing to have a "Churches of Christ Sunday"?

A key reason is the acknowledgment that many in our churches have *not* grown up with a Church of Christ background. Some have, but have not been introduced (for various reasons) to what it means to have Church of Christ values or characteristics. They are happy to be members and participants in their local church and its mission and ministry. And as a collection of interdependent churches, no one has a problem with that.

So, what makes us Churches of Christ?

It is not how our Sunday services are structured. They are vastly different. We have no creeds, no slogans that denote that you have now entered Church of Christ "sacred space". We have no uniforms for our ordained ministers. Our marriage and funeral services vary in their language, their feel and their content.

Let me suggest that what keeps us together is a set of shared values. Values like having an open table, the priesthood of all believers, baptism, unity and a belief that the local church should operate unhindered by hierarchical structures from denominational bodies.

We believe that these values are important, not just as theological statements or to construct a profile of who we are - these values are

important because they lay behind much of what happens in our churches. Have you ever wondered why a range of people lead the talk before communion? Preach? Why there is an emphasis on baptism? Why we have ordained and (technically) unordained people in ministry positions? All of these questions can be traced back to our values as a group of people infused with God's Spirit.

I trust that as you work through this booklet on being a people of the open table, you will learn more about what it means to be Churches of Christ and how this can help us reach out to the communities we live, love and work in. Some of the articles here show how the value of the open table actually reaches out beyond the Lord's Supper. Some of the reflections help us to understand the biblical basis of the open table, but above all they are reflections from real people about what it means to be invited by Christ to share a meal with Him.

As we did last year, we have quoted a range of Church of Christ voices from the past (in particular, E L Williams), as well as some more recent and wise voices (such as Gordon Stirling). Our hope in including there voices is that they will remind us that the past is not stagnant, but can be a fertile ground from which our future can sprout and mature.

May it help you to understand Churches of Christ, but more importantly the One we are named after, and who we follow.

An Open Table: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

-- Andrew Menzies
Principal, Churches of Christ Theological College

When we gather around the table of our Lord, there is nothing that we can do or say to add to or subtract from what is going on. The Lord's Table is a meal that we are simply to receive. Period. Simply by fronting up and participating in the Lord's Table we are doing three things. We are remembering, proclaiming and participating in the deep reconciling work of God in Christ for the world. There is nothing that we can do to add to what happens in the Lord's Table. For above all else, the Lord's Table reminds us that what matters is already done.

Eugene Peterson in *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (2005) reminds us: "The Eucharist stands as a bulwark against reducing our participation in salvation to the exercise of devotional practices before God or being recruited to run errands for God. It is hard to get through our heads, but the fact is that we are not in charge of salvation and we can add nothing to it."

The repetition of Jesus' words "Do this" regarding our participation in both the bread and the wine bring rhythm and familiarity to us. These two simple words remind us that all we can do is partake in the elements because all else that matters is already done. There is nothing more that can be done.

However, to speak about what is done is not to say that this is a meal that is just about looking backwards. To do that is to miss much of the point of the meaning of The Lord's Table because what lies inside this celebration is profoundly eschatological. Taking the bread and the wine reminds us that we are moving towards the culmination and fulfilment of world history. Perhaps we look backwards too much when we celebrate The Lord's Table. After all, most times I participate in this feast it is

sober, solemn and silent. Arriving at this sort of practice is completely understandable as we approach the holy subject of our Lord's last supper and the events that occurred after that meal.

Perhaps an analogy of driving a car might help me make my point. When we drive a car we have a large windscreen in front of us through which we survey the road ahead.

We also have a small rear-vision mirror which gives us perspective, and helps us avoid any surprises that may jump at us from behind. If we don't spend most of our focus on looking ahead, we crash. If we don't take the occasional glance behind us we are in danger too.

I suspect that our current practice of celebrating around the Lord's Table encourages us to spend too much time looking backwards at the cost of receiving hope for the journey ahead. This is why we Protestants use the symbol of the Cross without a crucified Christ still on it (a crucifix). We need to recapture the meaning of an Open Table that our founders intended. Listen to one of the founders of the movement that in Australia became the Churches of Christ, Alexander Campbell who said in *The Christian System* (1839), "All Christians are members of the house or family of God, are called and constituted a holy and royal priesthood, and may, therefore bless God for the Lord's table, its loaf, and cup – approach it without fear and partake of it with joy as often as they please, in remembrance of their Lord and Saviour."

Campbell went on to rebuke Protestant Christians in general for their joyless celebration. He described their celebration of the Lord's Table like, "mourners in a house of sorrows". He reminded them that, "The Lord's House is his banqueting table, and the Lord's Day is his weekly festival."

Celebrating this meal takes us to Calvary but it does not keep us there. We are launched forwards into the future purposes of God and importantly others are invited to join us in that destination. The Lord's

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Table reminds us that we are each uniquely called to participate in God's ministry of reconciliation in the world. We no longer need a priest because each of us now participate as priests. We can each now welcome others by opening our table to them as a sign and foretaste of the advance of Christ's Kingdom and the unity of his church. As John Mark Hicks says in 'The Lord's Supper as Eschatological Table', in *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement (Vol 2): Engaging Basic Christian Doctrine* (2006), "The table is a place where sinners can not only experience the gracious message of the gospel through eating with the community of faith. The community of faith, just as Israel in the past, receives aliens at its table."

Our celebration around the Lord's Table is not meant to keep us at death of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It points us forward to the promises of what is yet to be fulfilled in this world because of what was achieved at Calvary. It points us forward to participate in what the Triune God is up to and bringing to completion. A future that is only possible precisely because of Calvary. Ours is a hope that assures us that when the human project is at its darkest, God is still God and is good and is our future.

This is why a pre-Crucifixion supper presenting only brutal possibilities filled with betrayal and despair brings us such genuine hope. This is the 'Spirit of renewal' that comes amongst us with possibilities of healing, restoration and unity. This is not a romantic pipe dream. This is a real encounter with the Risen Lord earthed in the most hopeless of beginnings. It starts with followers of Christ unifying around the Lord's Table with nothing but bread and wine and points to a future filled with destiny, hope and promise.

Our Distinct and Gracious Way

-- Kerrie Handasyde
Editor 'Historical Digest', Australian
Church of Christ Historical Society

We invite all who follow Jesus to join us at the Lord's Table.

But it hasn't always been that way. As a movement of faithful people we have earnestly tried to balance two concerns: Unity and Restoration, or the need for the church to be united around the world and the need to restore the ways of the New Testament church. The degree to which the Lord's Table in our churches has been 'open' or 'closed' has reflected the sometimes conflicting priorities of Unity and Restoration.

In a time when churches were torn with divisions over doctrine, Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) graciously served the Lord's Supper to Christians from the other side of a doctrinal divide. It was a gesture toward Unity which set us on our way as a movement of people and it led to the writing of the Declaration and Address.

Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) followed his father in ministry. He thought deeply about the Lord's Table: its simplicity, the importance of the apostle's example to the churches, how it was open to all Christians. But *who* is a Christian? Alexander Campbell believed it was only those baptised by immersion. In the spirit of graciousness he would take communion alongside the 'unimmersed', but he did not think that inner conviction or baptism by other means was sufficient to make them Christians. The Campbells believed the Restoration of the New Testament church was the path to Unity.

For others, Unity came *before* Restoration. Barton Warren Stone (1772-1844) believed that Christ was the host at the Lord's Table

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and, as God granted the gift of faith to believers, the church may 'neither invite nor debar' people from joining in communion. Here indeed was an open table. But when Stone's church joined with the Campbells' in 1832, the Campbells strongly encouraged ceasing the practice of the open table, arguing that offering communion to the 'unimmersed' undermined the apostolic injunction of baptism by immersion. A generation later, some American leaders allowed individual conscience to decide who may come to the Lord's Table.

British Churches of Christ came together as a movement after reading the writings of the Campbells. They took a hard line in requiring baptism by immersion before partaking communion. Like many churches of the time, including our churches in America and Australia, they also took a hard line on insisting people were morally and spiritually fit to come to the Lord's Table. Controlling access to communion has long been a way to set the boundaries of churches, to define who is with us and who is against. For our British churches, a closed communion table meant they could identify themselves distinctly: separate from otherwise similar English Baptists with their open table and from the state church. For British Churches of Christ, Restoration was the priority - sometimes at the expense of Unity.

In colonial Australia (from 1847) we followed the British model, relying on their journals for reprints of Campbell's writing. But we gradually made our own way. During the 1860s and 70s, when our Temperance campaigners worked to have alcohol banned, we stopped using alcohol for communion wine and adopted grape juice or other substitutes. The connection was made between sanitation and the spread of disease in the late 1800s and so, as diphtheria and other contagious illnesses came to a district, our churches packed up their chalice and bought individual glasses. Restoration of New Testament ways remained fundamental to our call but certain details of practice seemed unimportant in the light of moral and health concerns.

In the early 1900s Australian Churches of Christ became more outward looking. We became involved in social services, welcomed converts from other denominations (who came with their theology and practices) and

the worldwide ecumenical movement began. Unity was on the rise. In the first few decades of the 20th century many of our churches resolved that whoever presided over the Lord's Table could invite all who follow Jesus or only the baptised, according to conscience. The symbolic Unity

So when precisely did we become a people of the open table? Certainly by the 1960s and 70s Churches of Christ welcomed other denominations to share with us at the Lord's Table.

we had lost when we stopped sharing the one cup was gradually replaced by the Unity of participation.

This was a step toward open table, but on some Sundays the unimmersed may have found themselves excluded – and then there was a physical reminder at the front of the church. The presence and placement of the communion table had an impact on the

issue of access. In Australia and around the world, Churches of Christ placed their table at the top of the centre aisle, on the platform directly in front of the baptistery. A visual connection was made between believer's baptism and communion. Individual lay people presiding over communion may have chosen to invite Christians to partake according to their own consciences, yet the baptistery stood behind in the centre front of the church, a silent reminder and unmistakable link between the two sacraments.

So when precisely did we become a people of the open table? Certainly by the 1960s and 70s Churches of Christ welcomed other denominations to share with us at the Lord's Table. And by then, women were presiding in many churches too. But we didn't invite our children until a decade or more later, arguing that giving them communion before baptism would undermine the impetus to be baptised. For people with mental impairments, those who could never make an 'adult' decision to be baptised, the story has been different again – and sometimes a source of regret. It's impossible to say precisely when open table became practice Australian Churches of Christ, because it grew congregation by congregation, unfurling across our movement.

Today we can say we are a people of the open table. We stay true to the spirit of Restoration of New Testament practice and rejoice in the spirit

of Unity symbolised by our radical sharing of the Lord's Table. It is our distinct and gracious way.

The Open Table of Justice

-- Mark Riessen

Minister, Blackwood Church of Christ, South Australia

A new member to our church approached me one day with a question, 'Why don't we interview people before they are allowed to take communion? Why do we allow anyone who walks through our doors to share with us in celebrating the Lord's Supper?' The short answer to those questions is, that this is the Lord's Supper *not* ours: you come to the table on Christ's invitation and it is not for us to exclude people.

Having said that, the open table is where we proclaim the Lord Jesus' life, death and resurrection, is a table where reconciliation is possible, where social justice can be experienced and where grace can be understood. Because of this, it is a table of inclusion at every level.

When I visited the USA in 2007 I was invited to speak at a Disciples of Christ Church in Seattle. This church was categorised as an 'open and inclusive church'. I found it odd at first because it was my understanding that *all* churches were to be open and inclusive. Then I discovered through conversation that it was more a label given to them by faith communities who *didn't* understand them. They wore the label with pride as it gave definition to their mission to always present an invitation to the open table.

They were labelled 'open and inclusive' because the homosexual members of the congregation outnumbered the heterosexual. When I entered the building I received the warmest reception. It wasn't because I was a visiting speaker, it was because we shared something in common – we were all human beings wrestling with our place in the world, gathering ourselves back to a common place where we knew we would all be accepted and acceptable with our flaws and brokenness, back to the open table to experience grace and forgiveness. As I sat in the pew waiting for the service to start, I looked around and saw people from all walks of life, some had different coloured skin to me, others were well

dressed while some looked like they had been sleeping on the streets, yet there was a sense of belonging as they greeted one another with handshakes, smiles and warm embraces.

I sat next to the minister's partner. As communion was served, I realised in that moment what was happening as I shared the bread and the cup with my neighbour. I was sharing in the Lord's Supper with one of the most oppressed people groups in modern day western culture – she is female and gay! Yet in the context of the open table where we remember the company Jesus kept at the table, our world's meet in common space where both of us are accepted equally as children of God and in my participation, sharing communion with my neighbour who may not experience the freedoms in this world I do, there in that space social justice is experienced.

Our experience of Christ at the open table must transform our fear and prejudice so that we become 'people of the open table' in the way we extend hospitality to the stranger

I was invited to the church hall after the service to share in a meal. It was discovered during the service that there were homeless people among us. They had been camping out on the steps of the entrance to the church building. After the service - without hesitation - they had at least half a dozen people serving them, inviting them into conversation and offering them hospitality. They too were invited to the lunch table. I watched as members of the church went without so these two homeless people could eat and take food with them, one member even offered their home for a night so they could wash and get a good nights sleep.

The point of the open table is that it remains open to all people, even beyond our ritualistic gathering. Our experience of Christ at the open table must transform our fear and prejudice so that we become 'people of the open table' in the way we extend hospitality to the stranger and dare to reform social structures so all people may experience the same grace, love, hope and life we all do when we gather around the open table.

How Open is our Table?

-- Edwina Blair

Women's Ministry Leader in NSW
and Associate Pastor at The Coast Community Church

The image of communion as an Open Table is one that brings to mind images of friendships, intimacy and relationship. It reminds me of those occasions when all are welcome and gather to feast and celebrate that which unites people in a particular moment in time.

For some this occurs regularly at home, for others it comes at a Christmas lunch or a much anticipated family wedding. The invitations go out, the table is set, the meal is prepared and then the moment of feast comes, culminating at the table where nourishment, relationships and memories are created, shared and restored.

Communion has similar elements and could be considered a simple feast. It consists of a piece of bread and a miniature glass of juice yet it is so much more than that. It too is a culmination of a relationship (with our ever-available Savior) and also a moment to remember.

I could hazard a guess at the number of times I have taken communion so far in my 40 years but all that would do is communicate my age and the lifetime I have spent in the church. Over the years I have experienced many settings of the Open Table and all of them were significant at the time, but it was the time the Open Table was closed to me, the time I was denied access, that I most remember.

It was the day when I was not welcome at the table.

My husband and I are both Churches of Christ Pastors, yet one Saturday we both sat in a church pew with a few others while the rest of the church walked forward to the altar to share in communion. It was a family wedding in a Catholic Church in Ireland and we had been told before the service that we were not to participate in this part of the service. Instead,

we were to sit and watch everyone else meet at the Table and remember Christ's death on the cross because we were not Catholic. We were both visitors and family so we graciously respected the traditions of this church and our hosts. I understood why the Table was closed to us on an intellectual level, but I was not prepared for the emotional effect of my

Jesus himself welcomed them as people and He welcomed their desire to draw near to Him. Jesus does the same thing at the Table each time we draw near.

exclusion. I was not used to these feelings at the Table and it was great cause for reflection.

Communion on that day was not an Open Table for me even though the host of this meal, my Lord and Saviour, intended it to be. The traditions that existed around me at

that time determined that I was denied access to the very thing that existed to be celebrated and to remember the access that had been purchased for me at such cost. It was the first time I really appreciated what it felt like to be denied access to Jesus.

In the Gospels we often see people attempt to limit access to Jesus. It may not have been by physical means but rather by the barrier of discouragement or shame. Martha tried it when Mary wanted to sit at Jesus' feet, the disciples tried it when the sinful woman came to anoint Jesus, and the crowds tried it when the woman with the issue of blood pursued Jesus for healing. Jesus himself welcomed them as people and He welcomed their desire to draw near to Him. Jesus does the same thing at the Table each time we draw near. We, however, need to ask ourselves whether we are creating a barrier to people receiving and accepting their invitation to the Open Table?

Are our attitudes and expectations such that they communicate that the Open Table that should be open to all that believe is actually closed by other spoken (or unspoken) criteria?

We, part of Churches of Christ, pride ourselves on the Open Table...it is part of what defines us so it is important for us to take a moment and ask ourselves whether we have created any barriers to others seeing the Table as an open one.

Those in the Catholic Church that Saturday would have been certain that it was not appropriate for us to join them at their Table. In that instance I respected their decision even if I disagreed with it but it made me wonder how many people feel that exclusion in our services every Sunday because they feel for some reason that the invitation is somehow not for them?

We are the people of the Open Table. Is that what we are truly communicating?

The Open Table: Remembering the Past

Bible Study One

Key verse: *And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me (Luke 22:19).*

Quotable Quote: *"The Lord's Supper involves the past, present, and future. It is an act of remembrance in which we are reminded of the earthly life and death of our Lord." (E L Williams, Churches of Christ - An Interpretation, pg70)*

Warm Up Questions: In Churches of Christ, we emphasise the important aspect of remembering Christ when we gather around the Open Table.

1. Is this a good thing? What are the positives about remembering the person and work of Christ in the past? Are there any negatives?
2. When you gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper, what do you remember? If you remember Christ, what is it about Him that you dwell upon?

Exploring the Text: Read Luke 22:7-23

There are two key contexts to note as Jesus and his disciples gather just prior to his crucifixion. The **first** is the cross. The Last Supper takes place just hours before Jesus will be arrested, put on trial and executed. There is no escaping this fact. The shadow of the Cross hangs over the meal.

3. Given this first context, when Jesus says: *This is my body given for you (22:19) and This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (22:20)*, what comes to mind?
4. How does it relate to you?

The **second** key context is that Jesus and his disciples gathered to remember an *event in the past that still defined their identity and behaviour in the present*. That event is the **Passover** (22:7-8, 15).

What is the Passover? The Passover meal was held to remember the act of God releasing the enslaved Israelites from their exile in Egypt. This was actually a drawn out process, but the final act that allowed them to leave was the angel of the Lord striking dead the firstborn of every household in Egypt but “passing over” any Jewish house marked with the blood of a lamb: “*When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will **pass over** that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.*” (Exodus 12:23) The Passover was a celebration of the gift of life and freedom through blood.

The Passover had special significance to Jesus and the disciples. They planned to spend it together and in a fashion that reminded them of the event they were remembering.

5. What do you think they would be remembering?
6. What do you think their key emotions were as they gathered for the Passover in Jerusalem?
7. What do you remember when you recall Jesus’ death? What emotion can you identify when you do that?
8. How does remembering Jesus at the Open Table shape your ongoing discipleship?

Wrestling with the Word: The Passover was celebrated once a year as part of Jewish custom. However, in (most) Churches of Christ the Lord’s Supper is celebrated each week, sometimes at every service on a Sunday. Does that impact *how* you remember? Jesus and his disciples also celebrated the Passover as a *meal*. Does the fact that so often the Lord’s Supper is “just” another part of the service impact how you remember? Would you remember differently if the Lord’s Supper was a meal? Why or why not?

Use the following quote for discussion: *"There is also the danger of thinking of remembrance as related only to the past. It is a recalling of something that has been. While it is this it is important that remembrance should also carry the meaning of reminding of something or Someone Who is living, present and relevant today as Saviour and Lord. (E L Williams, pg 71)*

For further conversation: Mark 14:12-26; Matthew 26:17-30; Exodus 11:1 - 12:50.

The Open Table: Engaging in the Present

Bible Study Two

Key Verse: “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”
(Matthew 28:20)

Quotable Quote: “*But it [the Lord’s Supper] is more than a memorial; it is also a communion with a Lord who not only lived and died, but who rose from the dead and lives as an ever available Savior... The spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper is real.*” (E L Williams, *Churches of Christ - An Interpretation* pg70)

Warm Up Questions: The reality is that we live in the present, and if Jesus doesn’t factor in our *present* experiences, then something is missing in our discipleship.

1. What can we do that helps us remember that Jesus is in the here and now?
2. If you were leading the communion at your local church, how would you emphasise the “present presence” of Jesus?
3. What is an obstacle to us remembering Jesus as being present now at the Open Table?

Exploring The Text: Read Matthew 28:18-20 and Hebrews 13:8

While strictly speaking these are not “communion” texts, they speak a great truth that the quote from E L Williams also highlights. Jesus is *ever available*, just as he was when he walked the earth 2000 years ago. Just as he is portrayed in the past in the Bible, he is available today as healer, light bearer, redeemer, liberator and Savior.

4. What is the danger of forgetting the presence of Jesus at the Open Table?

5. The fact that Jesus was the same yesterday and today and forever means that how Jesus is portrayed in the Bible reaches today. What aspect of Jesus' personality do you find most encouraging to recall in the present? The most challenging?
6. In a similar vein, what episode from Jesus' ministry do you think you most need to recall in the present?
7. In doing this, by recalling and remembering Jesus, we are taking part in the process of experiencing Jesus in the here and now. Take a moment to acknowledge his presence.
8. What can you feel?
9. What can you hear?
10. Is there something you need to do? To say? To respond to?
11. Hopefully, at this point, you have experienced something of the presence of Jesus, of having communed with Him.
12. What do we do with that?

Wrestling with the Word: Is there room in the settings where you experience the Lord's Supper to slow down like this and acknowledge the presence of the ever available Christ? Why or why not? What does this say about our priorities? Read through Luke's description of the Last Supper again...what do you think were the priorities of Jesus from this passage? Can they be transferred to the way we experience the Open Table?

Use this quote for discussion: *"As it is entirely the gift of God, the eucharist [communion] brings into the present age a new reality which transforms Christians into the image of Christ, and therefore makes them his effective witnesses."* (Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, pg 15)

For further conversation: Luke 24:13-35; 36-49; John 21:1-23

The Open Table: Looking Forward to a Future Meal

Bible Study Three

Key Verse: *"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."* (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Quotable Quote: *"Yet with all this, our 'Remembrance of Me' is not complete without recognition that the Cross of Calvary was not the end. Courage and strength towards answering the challenge of the Cross comes from the sure acceptance of the Resurrection of Jesus which ensure that his promises to us will be fulfilled because he is a living Christ..."* (L O Collyer, *Do This in Remembrance of Me* 1960)

Warm Up Questions: L O Collyer's quote calls us to remember *forward*, and many of us interpret that as remembering the Resurrection of Christ. But the Apostle Paul calls us to remember further forward, to the return of the King.

1. Why do you think that Paul calls the Corinthian church to look the future?
2. Do you think any of the reasons you may have come up with are still relevant today?
3. What do we lose if we don't - at some point - proclaim the Lord's death until he comes?

Exploring The Text: Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 14:15-24

4. How important is the promise of Christ's return to you?
5. How does the action of taking the bread and drinking the cup proclaim the Lord's death until he comes?

6. Do you think you need reminding about the return of Jesus? Is this something you consider often?
7. In Luke, Jesus' return is pictured as being like a banquet. What is it about a meal with Jesus that helps us understand what it will be like when he returns?
8. Are there connections between the Open Table and the Jesus' banquet in Luke 14? What are they?

Wrestling with the Word: Often Christians can get caught up in the theological speculations regarding the future: When does the rapture occur? Will there be more suffering before Christ returns, or less? What nations will be involved in what wars? What do the symbolic aspects of Revelation actually mean? Do you think these questions - and their various answers - *hinder* our understanding of Jesus' return?

Use this quote for discussion: *"Not least in the Supper is its witness to the victory of Christ over death and his final victory in the culmination of history - a victory in which it is ours to hope and share..."* (E L Williams, pg 72)

For further conversation: Mark 13:32-37; Matthew 22:23-33

The Open Table: Who Shares the Meal with Us?

Bible Study Four

Key Verse: "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup." (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Quotable Quote: "Down to the present day we have studiously refused to be an examining body for those who wish to partake in the Lord's Supper in any of our churches. We have pointed out that it is the **Lord's** Supper. He himself invites his followers. Who are his followers? Let a man examine himself." (D G Hammer, *Churches of Christ...and the Lord's Supper*, 1966)

Warm Up Questions: In the earlier section of this booklet, the point has been made that the Lord's Supper is his. He invites us, he has done all the work that makes it possible. D G Hammer's quote reinforces this.

1. Who do you think can eat and drink of the Lord's Supper?
2. Do you think that sometimes churches are more "fussy" about this than Jesus himself?
3. Some ministers/presiders of communion use the phrase "this is open to all who love the Lord". Are you comfortable with this? Why or why not?
4. Describe Jesus' ministry of hospitality. Do you think this is applicable to the Lord's Supper?

Exploring The Text: Read 1 Corinthians 11:23:17 - 34

The Apostle Paul is disappointed in the way the Corinthian church has been celebrating the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians are not united. The

have little regard for one another's economic status, and some treat the meal too flippantly.

5. Paul calls the Corinthians to not eat the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (11:27). What do you think that meant to the Corinthian church? To yours?
6. Are we worthy of taking the Lord's Supper? Why or why not? Does this have any implications for who can participate in the Lord's Supper?
7. Paul also calls on the Corinthians to recognise the body of Christ (11:29). What do you think this means? How do you recognise the body of Christ at the Lord's Supper?
8. If the Lord's Supper is, indeed, the Lord's, who do you think he would invite?

Wrestling with the Word: A key Churches of Christ foundation is the idea that *we are a people of the Open Table*. In other words, in an era where communion could only be enjoyed by people who shared the same denominational beliefs, Thomas Campbell and his followers opened the Lord's Supper to *all* believers. How do these values operate today? How does the idea of an Open Table meet with the nature and mission of Jesus?

Use this quote for discussion: *"The Supper speaks of the personal revelation of God, the personal response of man, and the personal reconciliation between God and man. The observance of the Supper is the highest act of worship, and the purpose of our weekly gathering to break bread."* (E L Williams, pg 71)

For further conversation: Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 7:36-50; Romans 3:21-26

Other Resources

From the Council of Churches of Christ in Australia

The Journey of Baptism

A new Booklet for those considering baptism.

Available in electronic PDF format.

Asking the Unasked Questions

A Booklet that encourages creating healthy church environments for youth leaders to thrive in.

Available in electronic PDF format.

The D&A is part of our DNA

A Booklet examining and celebrating the origins and key themes of Churches of Christ.

Available in electronic PDF format.

These resources are also available in hard copy format but a small postage and handling fee may apply.

Contact Craig Brown on 03 9488 8800 to request any of these invaluable resources.



A Churches of Christ in Australia Resource

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