

Reception at the Lord's Table

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Opinions vary widely on the issue of who should be allowed to share in the Breaking of Bread at the Lord's Table. While our **judgment** may differ in individual cases, the **principles** involved are not matters of human opinion or ecclesiastical persuasion. The Word of God is fairly specific on the issue.

The Assembly or "Church" was formed from a nucleus of about 120 believers. (*Acts 1:15.*) They were all baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost following the Lord's resurrection. (*Acts 21-4.*) That same day about 3,000 onlookers were converted, baptized and "Added to the church." (*Acts 2:41,42.*) This group "Continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (*Acts 2:42.*) They Broke Bread from house to house, apparently during their regular meals. (*Acts 2:46.*) Although the Christian "Sacrament" of Baptism was practiced, there is no thought of any ritualistic mode of "Receiving." The initial pattern was simply that Christians were accepted at the Lord's Table when it was felt that they were truly saved.

The newly formed Bride of Christ was an ecstatic fellowship of devoted Christians living in harmony with the Lord and each other. They willingly shared their material as well as their spiritual means together, (*Acts 2:44, 4:32-35,*) and everyone "Kept feeling a sense of awe." (*Acts 2:43.*) The saved were automatically accepted into the group, and those that were not saved didn't "Dare to associate with them." (*Acts 5:13.*) But the honeymoon didn't last forever. The hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira (*Acts 5:1-11*) and the ethnic squabbling between the Judean and Greek elements in the church manifested the old human nature that gets in the way of everything spiritual. Simon, who appeared to be a brilliant convert from the very doors of hell, was found to be questionable, at best. (*Acts 8:9-24.*) The degeneration of the church is briefly prophesied in the apocalyptic letters to the seven churches. (*Revelation 2 & 3.*)

The exemplary kinds of judgement that the Apostle Peter pronounced on both Ananias and Sapphira and Simon the necromancer did not continue beyond the pristine stage of the Church. But we are not left in the dark about how to deal with evildoers in the assembly of the Lord's people. More adherence to the admonition, "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning," (*I Timothy 5:20,*) might curb much sin before the need for further discipline. But where willful sin persists, the general principle is:

Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

I Corinthians 5:13.

Examples of the types of sin which the assembly must so judge are catalogued in I Corinthians chapter five. Whatever the reason, the wicked person is removed from fellowship with the rest of the assembly, not just prohibited from Breaking Bread with them.

It is obvious that those who promote doctrinal evil should also be removed from the fellowship

of the Christian assembly. The Apostle Paul treated doctrinal evil the same as moral evil:

He warned that **"A little leaven leavens the whole lump:"**

Morally: *I Corinthians 5:6*

Doctrinally: *Galatians 5:9*

He admonished that the guilty be rebuked:

Morally: *I Timothy 5:20*

Doctrinally: *Titus 1:10-13*

He delivered the perpetrators over to Satan:

Morally: *I Corinthians 5:5*

Doctrinally: *I Timothy 1:19,20 & II Timothy 2:17,18*

Surely being delivered over to Satan involved excommunication!

Evil associations may also exclude people from the Lord's table:

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. *II John 10,11*

Those who purposely align themselves with the proponents of unholy doctrines that deny the very basis of Christianity are considered partakers of their evil deeds. But those who simply happen to be in some organization where such people are tolerated are not necessarily aligning themselves with the evil, unless the evil is an integral part of the organization. A misapplication of II Timothy 2:16-22 has confused the issue:

If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. *II Timothy 2:21*

The "These" to be separated from are the evildoers and their deeds, not everyone who happens to be in the same ecclesiastical organization as they are.

The necessity of excluding sin from the assembly does not change the basic principle that all who are felt to be real Christians are to be accepted at the Lord's table unless they should be excluded because of sin. The Book of Romans, addressed to "All who are beloved of God in Rome," leaves no room for options:

Now accept the one who is weak in the faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgement on his opinions. *Romans 14:1*

Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. *Romans 15:7*

Christians are to be accepted into the fellowship of the rest of the Body of Christ because He has accepted them as part of the body. There is no Scriptural support for the concept of a godly person who can mingle with the Lord's people but not Break Bread.

Godly Christians may differ in judgement as to the salvation of an individual, the guilt of those accused of sin, or the extent of an individual's association with evil. An earnest desire to glorify the Lord, and a patient dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit can help them attain unified judgement on each case.