APPLIED FAITH: LIVING FORWARD

Ecclesiastes 11 and 12 (pg. 478)

1. Are you letting fear hold you back from your next step in life?
2. On the other hand are you living recklessly without regard for the future?
3. Live each day as if it could be your last. Sooner or later it will be.
4. God has not left us without guidance for living boldly. Are you making use of it?
5. We all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive. – *C.S. Lewis*

**UNDERSTANDING COMMUNION**

**THE NAME:** What we call communion is also referred to as “The Last Supper” because Jesus instituted it at the last meal he had with his disciples in Matthew 26. It is also called “The Lord’s Supper” in First Corinthians 11 where Paul challenges them to take it seriously by showing unity and love. Catholics often call it “Eucharist” which is Latin for “giving thanks.” Communion, or “Holy Communion,” has become a common name for this because it refers to expressing what we have in “common” or “community.”

**MEANING:** Communion falls into the category of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. This means that it deals with the practice of the faith rather than the core meaning of the faith. Jesus’ nature and what he did for us is historical and eternal fact but the way we practice our faith is rooted in our own time and place. So communion is about *how* we worship rather than about *who* we worship. Like all things in the “doing of our faith” category there is good diversity among Christians.

**DIVERSITY:** Catholics and Orthodox believe the bread and wine actually become the real body and blood of Jesus so receiving the elements is literally receiving Christ. Lutherans teach that the real body and blood co-exists with the elements. Reformed and Presbyterians teach that it is a “means of grace” that God uses to pour out his presence and blessing. Most Protestant Evangelicals, including us, see it as a symbolic re-enactment, or memorial, to aid in remembering and respecting what Jesus did for us—which in turn strengthens our faith and returns us to our spiritual roots.

**THE ELEMENTS:** The original Lord’s Supper was actually the annual Passover Feast described in Exodus 12. This was already a ceremonial feast for the Jews so Jesus simply informed them that he was the Lamb of God referred to symbolically with the bread and wine of that feast. Since it is an act or worship, the power is in the expression of our faith in Jesus rather than in the inherent powers of the physical objects like unleavened bread or real wine. Since Jesus did not specify the procedures and make-up of the elements, we can assume he wanted us to adapt our worship style to time and place while keeping the meaning intact.

**ORDINANCE**, meaning “decree,” refers to the fact that Jesus gave both baptism and communion as specifically outwardly oriented spiritual activities for all Christians for all time—confessing our common faith. Some refer to “sacraments” and have more than two, but we focus on these two and understand the other teachings of Jesus as dealing with our relationship with God himself or to godly living in daily life rather than being specifically religious in nature.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT:** In 1 Corinthians 11 we are taught to use the Lord’s Supper for personal inventory before God. The elements point to the real Jesus offering himself for us in real time for the real problem of real sin that separates us from God. Taking communion is a confession of our faith in Jesus as well as a reminder that the things that put him on the cross should not be scorned as of no consequence. We are challenged to get right with God and with each other at whatever level and condition we are. Perfection is not the issue. Good faith effort with sincerity is.