

Terms of Communion and the Six Terms.

(What and Why are Terms of Communion?)

I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. (Song 1:9)

Question. — *What are terms of communion?*

Answer. — The terms of communion contain an abstract of the church's profession and engagements held forth, 1 Tim. 3:15. In them are published the grounds of faith and the rule of duty, as a standard, duly subordinated to the Scriptures and founded upon the same, Neh. 9:38. They are to show to the world in what sense the doctrines and laws of the Bible are received, Neh. 8:2, 3; and also to operate as a bond of union, promoting harmony amongst the church members, 2 Cor. 13:11. Thus, they must comprehend even those controverted points of religion in their true connection, Acts 8:37.

The church of Christ is compared to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots, Song 1:9. What distinguished these horses from all others was their discipline and work, all of which demonstrated that they were trained to bear the harness willingly and in harmonious action, 2 Cor. 6:14-16. In this, the church appears, in the face of a hostile world, as an army marching under one banner of truth, Song 6:4. Terms of communion are a basic profession of holding all things in common, whether in faith or practice, Acts 4:32; they are a demonstration of a fundamental shared understanding and judgment, 1 Cor. 1:10.

Question. — *Why are terms of communion necessary to the congregation?*

Answer. — Terms of communions are necessary to the ecclesial fellowship as providing an enacting of the owning of the principles and practices of the church upon individual members, 1 Thess. 4:1, 2.

The church is to be a measured temple, both its altar and the worshippers at it, Rev. 11:1. This measured temple has, through all generations, been accounted, and is in fact, a distinct corporate body, or moral person, in covenant with God, in the dispensation of the covenant of grace, Ps. 122:3, 4. The entrance into this holy assembly should be in a way of praise and thanksgiving and not in the cause of dissention and discord, Ps. 100:4.

These terms of communion are made necessary by the presumed unity of the body of Christ, 1 Cor. 12:12. This unity stands in constant danger of disunity and faction, 1 Cor. 11:18, 19. On the one side, there are false apostles, men intent on erecting new churches out of old, who are causing confusion, 2 Cor. 11:2-4, 13-15. On the other side, there are members that must be put out for their impenitence, 1 Cor. 5:11-13. In contrast, terms of communion present an objective point of presumed engagement to the body wherein men might learn to discern rightly the body, 1 Cor. 11:29. They make plain the course whereby men may endeavor

to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Eph. 4:3; for the opposite of unity is discord and disunity, 1 Cor. 3:3.

Again, terms of communion provide the rule for withdrawing of fellowship, or communion, from those who walk disorderly, which is defined by a failure to abide in the *traditioned* instruction (παράδοσιν), 2 Thess. 3:6. They give notice to potential offenders of those boundaries of discipline which will result in their exclusion, Matt. 16:19.

Terms of communion are implied in the extension of the right hand of fellowship, Gal. 2:9; which draws a line of demarcation against the false brethren, Gal. 2:4; 2 Cor. 11:26.

Question. – *Why are terms of communion necessary to the church?*

Answer. – The church is not merely a local association, 1 Cor. 1:2; but includes Christians afar off, Rom. 12:5; even scattered throughout various regions, 1 Pet. 1:1, 2. It behooves the local churches to have the means to give suitable warning to others concerning the presence of dangerous teachings and practices, Rev. 2:6, 15; but especially to take care to avoid those who embrace these teachings and practices, 2 John 10. Church discipline depends, in part, on the ability of the churches to uphold it throughout its various jurisdictions, 1 Cor. 5:4-13. This is necessary for the keeping of peace in the churches, 1 Cor. 14:33.

It is part of this concern that led the churches very early to the use of letters of commendation for extended fellowship amongst the various congregations, 2 Cor. 3:1. These letters were written so that the bearers would be entitled to close reception into the communion of another local assembly, Acts 18:27. They demonstrated an acceptance, or approval, of standing in a local congregation that formed the basis for intercommunion between local congregations, 1 Cor. 16:3.

It was because of shared terms of communion that the churches could speak of a brotherhood in the world, not simply limited to a local assembly, 1 Pet. 5:9. The highest display of this intercommunion is in the Lord's supper, or Eucharist, 1 Cor. 10:16-18. Common terms of communion remove those stumbling blocks which inhibited partaking of the same altar, Matt. 5:23, 24.

Question. – *Who should set the terms of communion?*

Answer. – The setting of terms of communion belongs ministerially to the church governors who are charged with making proper discriminations, Jer. 15:19. It is unto them that the people of God are to submit as those that watch for their souls, Heb. 13:17. They are forbidden to admit to the highest privileges of the fellowship any that refuse to be reconciled to the truth doctrinally or practically, Matt. 7:6. The keys of the kingdom, including the right hand of fellowship together with its privileges, belong to them to administer, Matt. 18:17-19. Failure to yield submission to and obedience to the common terms of communion of the church is enough to exclude someone from close fellowship in her well-ordered assemblies, 2 Thess. 3:14, 15.