The Conservative Baptist movement is a back-to-the-Bible movement, and because it is a back-to-the-Bible-movement, Conservative Baptists are faced with re-thinking in the light of the Scriptures some of the church practices which they have inherited. One of these practices which has been inherited is open communion. Historically Baptists have practiced various forms of close communion, and it has only been in the last two generations that open communion was ever heard of among Baptists. Many of the brethren are fearful of any discussion on the subject of close or open communion lest such discussion would divide us, but if such a discussion is kept on strictly a Bible study basis with a spirit of love being the constant guide, we need have no fear of a study of the Word.

Close communion may be defined as a communion service open only to those who are immersed believers and members in good standing of a New Testament type of church. This does not mean that only members of a particular local church can partake of communion in that local church, nor would it limit communion to those folk who are members of churches with the name Baptist, nor would it include all folk who are members of so-called Baptist churches. This Bible study is set forth on this basis, of an immersed believer and a member in good standing of a local New Testament type of church.

Now first, let me give two arguments for open communion as I have heard them, understood them, and used them. One argument I have heard for open communion runs like this: If a mother, who has not been immersed but has lived a fine Christian life, comes to visit in our church on communion Sunday, would close communion mean that she could not partake with us? Would it mean that we must close the door to the “communion service to those who have received Christ as Saviour but have not seen baptism as we have seen it? After all, it is the Lord’s table, not our table. So runs the argument, and it sounds very logical. And when any one begins to think in terms of loved ones not being able to partake of communion because they have not been immersed or are not members of a church, immediately our minds become very sympathetic toward open communion. Certainly we would agree that the table is the Lord’s table, and if it is the Lord’s table, then it behooves us to go to the Scripture and see the invitation that the Lord gives to the table.

A second argument commonly used for open communion is based on 1 Corinthians 11:28: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. “There was a time in my ministry when I used this Scripture as a basis for open communion, not realizing that I w...

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