



1 Corinthians 10:16-17 Our Great Heritage 8
Grace-Benson/Vail, AZ

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Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I believe that the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, is one of the most important things that is routinely misunderstood, mistreated, and under-appreciated. It has been mistaught and mishandled and treated casually. This sacrament... this sacred gift... this mystical, powerful, blessing from God, has been victimized by human reason and human emotion.

This should not surprise me—or you—since it has been that way since Christ instituted it, judging from the Apostle Paul's necessary words of correction and instruction to the Corinthian Christians. 1500 years or so down the line, Martin Luther also needed to be the voice of correction and teaching regarding the Lord's Supper.

Both Paul and Luther needed to address appropriate worship of God and specifically how to understand and approach the Lord's Supper. If you were to read Martin Luther's *The German Mass and Order of Divine Service* from January 1526, you would find an excellent walk through the order of a church service and an explanation for each part of it. The Lord's Supper was part of that, of course. God's people needed to understand what was happening in worship and why they did what they did.

The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians chapters 10 and 11, discusses different aspects of worship and he needed to address the abuse and mistreatment of the Lord's Supper by those Christians. While we are not happy that they had the spiritual struggles they had in Corinth, we are thankful for the explanations Paul gave to them because with those, he also teaches us. So this morning we look at just a little of what he wrote to them about Holy Communion. It is my prayer that it helps us to understand the sacrament better and appreciate this precious gift from our Savior. Please listen again to these words as today we **Thank God for the blessing of Holy Communion:**

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

The Communion of Bread and Body, Wine and Blood

Lutheran Christians have a different understanding than Catholics or many other Christians when it comes to what is present on the communion table and what is received by a person in Communion. Catholics believe that when the priest repeats the words of Jesus when he instituted the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine *turn into* Christ's body and blood. Bread and wine cease to be there, they say. That Catholic teaching is called Transubstantiation. Many other Christians, including Baptists and many non-denominational believers, feel that it is impossible for Jesus' body and blood to be there and that the bread and wine are all that are present. These, they say, *symbolize or represent* Jesus' body and blood.

Neither of those teachings are in line with what the Bible says. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he said quite clearly, **"This IS my body; this IS my blood."** So mere symbolism is out the window. Additionally, the Apostle Paul (who was instructed by Jesus himself) teaches us here, quite plainly, that at Communion there are four things present on the table and received by each communicant: body and blood, bread and wine. Let's take a look at how he explains it.

Just as Jesus used wine at the Passover, the Christians in Corinth used wine. Paul calls it here **"the cup of thanksgiving"** or **"the cup of blessing."** He says, *"is that cup of wine not a participation in the blood of Christ?"* The word "participation" means "a sharing in, a fellowship with." *"Are those two things—wine and blood—not intimately joined and connected?"* Paul says.

Much like you and I use a rhetorical question to highlight the obvious answer, Paul used a particular Greek word that insists on a "yes" response to the question. So to convey what Paul was after, we might say, *"Is not the blessed cup of wine in communion a sharing in the blood of Christ? Of course it is!"* He is saying, with emphasis, that wine is there and blood is there in the sacrament. He does not say the wine *turns into* blood. He does not say that the wine *represents* the blood. He says—with words and grammatical construction—that both wine and blood are there. He then speaks in an identical way about the bread and body of Jesus, insisting that they two are both there, intimately joined together.

Besides being guided by the Holy Spirit to write these exact words, Paul was repeating what Jesus said when he began this sacrament. We heard Jesus' words in the gospel today: **...Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup (of wine)... "This is my blood of the covenant... Mark 14:22-24).** Bread and body; wine and blood—all four are really present in the sacrament. This has led Lutherans to a simple name for this biblical teaching about Communion: *Real Presence*—all four things are really present.

It is important to know that we receive more than what we see with our eyes, smell with our nose, taste with our tongues, feel with our lips and hands. We are also receiving what we hear is in, with and under the bread and wine—the body and blood of our Savior, which was given and shed for us on the cross in payment for our sins. We are receiving the very things that earned our forgiveness. How this can be, I cannot tell you. That it is true, I assure you. It is the promise of Christ himself and it is explained by God's apostle. This is the first thing that makes the sacrament so special—there is a communion of body and bread, wine and blood.

Communion of the Sinner and Christ

The second type of blessed “communion” that exists here is that we are united with Christ in a most intimate way. Just as bread and body are linked and wine and blood are joined, so the sinner is connected with his or her Savior when receiving the holy supper.

Those of you who receive the Lord's Supper know how special this is. Christ has given us this unique opportunity that involves every human sense. We see the earthly elements, we smell the wine, we taste the bread and wine, we touch with our hands and our lips, we hear the pastor repeat Christ's words of institution and explain what Scripture tells us happens here—that we find forgiveness of sins and strength of faith in this simple meal.

There is nothing else like this incredible gift! It is touching and awesome and humbling. It inspires gratitude and love and change in our lives. The sins that we bring forward with us are left here and we take away from this meal a desire to sin no more. This intimate connection with our Lord and Savior, who gave his life into death on the cross and offers it to us here, necessarily changes us. It is one of the most significant things we participate in and God's power is at work here.

This is why God also warns people not to take this lightly. He warns that anyone who receives the sacrament without recognizing the body and blood of Christ takes the sacrament to their judgment. If you ever wondered why your church has the practice of Member Communion, this is part of the reason. What responsible church, what responsible pastor, would ever knowingly allow someone to take Holy Communion to their judgment? Members of our congregation and our church body have been instructed in the truths of Scripture; they know that body and blood, bread and wine are really present here. They know what is happening in the sacrament. We simply don't know that about a guest in worship who is new to us. And in some circumstances we *know* that they believe something different, something that DOES conflict with what God says. If we truly care about souls, we will *not* permit everyone to receive Communion in worship. It is a practice of love and care for souls.

Paul provides another reason why our church and our church body does not have an “open communion” policy where anyone and everyone may commune. The word “communion” is quite applicable here as well! There is a communion—a togetherness, a closeness, an intimacy, a bond—of bread and body, blood and wine. There is a

communion of Christ and the sinner. AND there is a communion of the individual person at communion with the others who are receiving it. Paul explains: **Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.**

He wrote to a congregation of Christians, a group of believers, just like us. We—who are many—are one body, he says. And why? Because **we all share the one loaf!** Do you hear what Paul is saying? Communing together makes us one body of believers! Communing together expresses that we are one, that we are united, that we are “in communion,” ... in fellowship...together with...each other.

That is hardly the case if we don't believe the same things, right? Communing together is an expression of our believing the same things about God and his Word. There are many, many, many passages that speak of our Savior's desire that we be united in following everything he taught, that we not gloss over doctrinal differences but ultimately separate from those who won't hold to correct teaching. In fact, several weeks back we considered that subject. That doctrine of fellowship finds application here at communion as we express our unity and have full confidence that all who stand here with us believe the same about Jesus and his Word and about what is present in communion and what happens here. We who are many share the one loaf because we are “in communion” with one another. This also is a blessing of the sacrament!

Today we **Thank God for the blessing of Holy Communion**, but as we have done that, we have perhaps been confronted with some weaknesses in us. Perhaps our sins regarding the sacrament have been exposed to our consciences. Maybe we have had to face the fact that we have not fully understood this great sacrament—even though we have been Christians for some time! Were we reminded of those times that we have spoken poorly of our pastors' careful care for souls as they have carried out our practice of member communion? Did we think of how afraid we have been to explain this to a family member or friend? Or how we haven't known enough to be able to? Maybe our sins were of a different kind—we have been guilty of treating Holy Communion too casually. It's just been something I've done whenever it comes up on a Sunday but I haven't thought too deeply about what happens...or been too thoughtful of my many sins...or been truly repentant, actually wanting to stop sinning and intending to do so.

It is terrible that we, God's people, have been guilty of what I said at the beginning—of misunderstanding, mistreating, under-appreciating the Lord's Supper. It is not only others who have victimized this sacred act of Jesus with human reason and human emotion. It is not only the people of Luther's day that needed correction or the Christians in Corinth who have required instruction about what goes on in Holy Communion and how we are to treat it. WE have sinned. But here is the most beautiful thing—it is the gift of Christ and the message of Holy Communion: your sins are forgiven. They are gone and you have the promise of eternal life by faith in Jesus. You may go in peace today. **Thank God for the blessing of Holy Communion. Amen.**

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.