

Thank God for Holy Communion

✠ **Common-union in the Sacrament (v.16)**

✠ **Common-union in the body (v.17)**

In the name of Jesus, our ever living, ever loving, ever present Savior, dear fellow believers:

“Backwards Sacraments” has become the norm among American churches. Roman Catholics do not recognize the validity of Eastern Orthodox baptisms and visa versa. Most Lutheran churches will not baptize children of non-members. All this in spite of the fact that the Lord of the church commands His followers to literally, “Disciple all ethnic groups by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Nothing in Christ’s Great Commission suggests the need for membership first. In fact, Baptism is given as the entry point by which infants and children are also adopted into God’s family in the Holy Spirit’s born again, renewing bath. (Titus 3:5) Since the Bible says Baptism is valid with water and the Word, we recognize every Baptism in the Name of the Triune God.

Strangely, their legalism about Baptism runs off the other side of the road for Lord’s Supper. Until the ecumenical movement of the 1950’s and ‘60’s, you had to be a member of a church body to partake in their Communion. Now most want to ignore differences in doctrine instead of dealing with them in the light of God’s Word. They commit the great omission in Christ’s Great Commission by deleting one little word. Jesus commands us to “disciple all ethnic groups by baptizing...and by teaching them to [literally] guard and treasure *everything* I have commanded.” Imagine your eyelids flipping open as the surgeon says, “We got it all – except we omitted that growth on your liver. Gotta go! See ya later!” Not the Great Physician of our Souls! Today, let’s **Thank God for Holy Communion** – first...

✠ **Common-union in the Sacrament (v.16)**

If you were a pastor or teacher, doctor, lawyer, HR person or even a politician, you would have to admire Paul’s candor and tact as he deals with mega problems in the Christian congregation at Corinth. But what else would you expect? As an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul is inspired by God the Holy Spirit to use the “*sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.*” (Ephesians 6:17) He cuts with the scalpel of the Law and heals with the balm of the Gospel. By the time we reach this tenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, the skillful physician has cut out growths of foolish divisions, intra-congregational lawsuits, unrepentant sin, lack of marriage commitment, Christian freedom running wild, and now a broken Communion practice.

In our text the Lord’s Apostle Paul is correcting something a bit strange. Apparently, some members thought that since idols are nothing at all, they could party in pagan temples with unbelieving friends worshiping idols. Can you understand their logic if you twist your head around backwards and pull sideways on your ear? Actually, Paul is much more tactful in the previous verses. Don’t you love this? “*Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.*” Partaking of Christ’s Holy Supper excludes pagan feasts. Unknowingly buying leftover pagan sacrifices in the market was different. But even there Christian love would care for weak consciences. “*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*” (10:14f,31)

We certainly have every reason to glorify God for this miracle of **Common-union in the Sacrament** of the Altar. Paul’s Greek grammar and the context call for a solid “Yes!” answer to this question: “*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?*” The Holy Spirit’s original Greek κοινωνία, could also be translated *fellowship*, *communion*, even better *common-union*. No one can explain how this can be and it surely is one of those Bible teachings where human reason can’t keep up with God’s ways and thoughts that are much higher than ours. But we have to answer,

“Yes!” The *cup of thanksgiving* with which our Lord Jesus instituted His Holy Supper came from the Jewish Passover which Jesus Christ fulfilled as *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29) In Christ’s Holy Supper, the wine is *in common-union with the blood of Christ*, and *the bread which we break* truly is, “Yes, according to God’s Word,” *in common-union with the body of Christ*.

One of our professors quoted a very frustrated Baptist preacher: “No matter how many times I tell the people it only *represents* Christ’s body and blood, they keep believing it *is!*” Could this be just one more example that Jesus is the Truth? (John 14:6) He says, *“The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me....My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”* (John 10:25-28 NIV)

It truly is one of our Lord’s greatest miracles that He convinces our hearts against human logic of His real presence in His Holy Supper. His holy **Common-union in the Sacrament** gives us in, with and under the bread and wine, Christ’s very own body and blood. We don’t have to settle for a representation like a picture of your sweetheart on your cell phone. What good is that if you never get to be with each other? I’m glad to hear my wife’s voice on the phone when she’s away visiting relatives. But having her back home truly present will be so much better. As the Bride of Christ, His holy Church, it is so wonderful when He comes intimately to our hearts with all His grace and forgiveness of sins. He lives in the cells of our minds and bodies. Don’t doubt God’s Word. Believe your Savior when He says, *“This is my body....This is my blood.”* **Thank God** for His miraculous **Common-union in the Sacrament**. And **Thank God** for another miracle that He works among us through the same powerful Word:

† **Common-union in the body (v.17)**

Years ago an elderly member stopped in my office with that look of discovery on his face. He had been unchurched for thirty-five years before he took our Bible Information Class and joined New Life. Now he wanted to tell me something very special: “Pastor, I used to take Communion all the time. But it really didn’t mean much. No one explained it. Now that I’m here, I have to tell you, it’s one of the most wonderful experiences of my life.” Can you relate?

Most of you don’t realize that like half our congregation, my family joined this close-communication fellowship of the WELS when I was in about seventh grade. I remember my parents checking out what this church body stands for before they were ready to stand together at the Lord’s Table. My father was so concerned as a former Lutheran pastor, that he made me take his Catechism Class back-to-back with the WELS pastor. That was like three classes at once because my father had twice as many Bible passages. But what a great way to find out that the Wisconsin Synod stands solidly on the Holy Scriptures of the Bible. And all my years of study since at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and pastors’ conferences show the WELS is willing to discipline themselves rather than give up God’s Word. It’s not that the WELS thinks they’re always right, just that God is always right. We want to stand with Him.

True confession: I appreciate Christ’s **Common-union in the body** more now than twenty-three years ago when the Holy Spirit called me through the Minnesota DMB to ring doorbells and gather this flock. I’ve been deeply impressed over the years at Christ’s miracle in His Holy Supper: *“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”* (1 Corinthians 10:17 NIV)

Sometimes we get a lesson in reality with how *“many”* we are in background, culture and opinion. As one architect told us, “If you want to see the cracks in a congregation, just start a building project.” But how are these differences resolved? We are gifted with a true, common-faith, confessional unity in Christ before we stand together at Holy Communion. With Word and sacrament God the Holy Spirit keeps changing our hearts from the inside out. We love more deeply, forgive more freely, and agree more completely as the Holy Spirit cleanses us of our sins and helps us live as the *“new creation”* in Christ Jesus. We are by God’s grace *“one body”* with Christ as our Head. Yes, Lord Jesus, make us better always by your grace. Bless us with **Common-union in the body** of believers as you give us **Common-union** with you in your **Sacrament**. Glorify your holy Name in your Holy Supper! Amen.