

# Communion is a Community Meal

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by David Schrock

***Because there is one bread,  
we who are many are one body,  
for we all partake of the one bread.  
1 Corinthians 10:17***

The Lord's Supper is a treasury of Christ-remembering, kingdom-anticipating, church-unifying, soul-stirring symbolism. As Jesus said of the bread in Luke 22, "This is my body, which is given for you" (v. 19) and of the fruit of the vine, "This cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood" (v. 20) Laden with spiritual significance, both of these statements are symbolical. The bread represents the body of Christ; the cup represents the blood of Christ. Together they form the two elements Christians "take" and "eat" (Matthew 26:26) when they remember the death of Jesus Christ.

However, these edibles do not exhaust the symbolism of the Lord's Supper. Far from it, in fact. Consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:17. Calling the Corinthians to flee from idolatry (10:13), he cautions them about their practices of eating from the Lord's table and the demons' table (v. 20). In this context, he teaches us a twofold lesson about the nature of the Lord's Supper.

## Participation in the Lord's Sacrifice

First, when we eat the bread and drink the cup we "participate" in the sacrifice of Christ. Just as Israel participated in the Lord's altar when they ate the sacrifices (v. 18), and just as the pagans participate with demons when they eat food sacrificed to them (v. 20), so Christians participate in the Lord's death when they eat from the Lord's Table.

In other words, the Lord's Table calls us to visibly express our identification with the Lord. Therefore, every time we take communion, we make a fresh act of faith confessing our singular in Jesus. In this way, our participation is not sacramental, but covenantal. We eat in faith, faith in the promises of Christ's new covenant, inaugurated by his broken body and shed blood.

This is the first "participation," but it is not the last.

## Participation with the Lord's Saints

When Jesus died on Calvary, he gave his life for his flock (John 10:11, 14), the children of God (John 11:51-52), his friends (John 15:13-14), the church of God (Acts 20:28), his bride (Ephesians 5:25), his body (Ephesians 1:23; 3:6; 5:29-30). Notice the corporate nature of these terms. Christ did not die for individuals as individuals. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:13 - 16, he died in order to unify Jews and Gentiles as "one new man in place of the two." Consider his words,

. . . In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

While Paul reminds the Ephesians of their personal salvation in Ephesians 2:1–10, he goes on to speak of their salvation in corporate terms (vv. 11 – 22). Why? Because God did not save individuals only to later collect them into a community. Rather, he saved a “people for his own possession” (Titus 2:14; cf. 1 Peter 2:9). Hell will be filled with isolated individuals. But heaven will be populated by sons and daughters, brothers and sisters who have forsaken forsake their privatized, personalized identities and have gladly “found themselves” in Christ.

This is the point Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 10:17. The one bread represents the one body. In Christ, there is only one body and hence when communion is served the one bread represents the unified nature of the meal.

## **Taking Communion in Community**

Applied today, some insist the bread must come from the same loaf. And there is certainly justification for that in this verse. However, the larger point is theological. When we take the Lord’s Supper, we do not take it as privatized individuals. In Christ we are sheep of the same flock, brothers and sisters in the same family, members of the same body. We are participants one of another, and therefore, communion is not simply vertical. It is also horizontal.

What does this mean? It means that when we take the Lord’s Supper we participate with the members of our local church. Just as we rejoice in the forgiveness we have received in Christ; we also are to rejoice in the salvation of those around us. Communion with Christ cannot be restricted to a personal experience. It is a community meal. First Corinthians 10:17 teaches us that the unity of the bread symbolizes the unity that Christ desires to work out in us.

In truth, this is why he died. So that he would make Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, strong and weak, rich and poor one in Christ. Jesus prayed for this in John 17. He gave his Spirit to effect this among his people (Ephesians 4:1 – 6). And he gave his Supper as a practical means to remind local churches of their unity in Christ.

As we approach the Lord’s Table this Sunday, may we not only prepare our hearts for taking the meal personally, but may we give thanks for the community God has given us at Occoquan Bible Church. May God be pleased to continue to strengthen our commitment to one another and may the Lord’s Table be one way he does that.

For His Glory and your joy, Pastor David