

Communion with Christ

***“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”
—I Corinthians 10:16***

AFTER SUNDOWN ON

March 24th of this year, congregations of the Lord’s people will gather together to observe the memorial of Jesus’ death. The time will coincide with a similar event which took place almost two thousand years ago in an upper room in Jerusalem, when Jesus and his chosen apostles sat down together for the last time. The Luke account tells us: “When the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in

remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”—Luke 22:14-20

For centuries the nation of Israel has faithfully observed the Passover feast. To them it is a memorial, instituted by God, which recalls the saving of their firstborn from the avenging angel that slew the firstborn of Egypt. (Exod. 12:14,15) As a consequence of that event, Israel was freed from Egyptian bondage. However, they have been unaware of the deeper significance of the Passover supper, which was a picture, or type—a type fulfilled by the death of Jesus. “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.”—I Cor. 5:7

MEMORIAL INSTITUTED

Jesus, knowing that he would fulfill the type, instituted a memorial—a remembrance—of his death, using symbols of unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine to represent his perfect body and life. When Jesus took the unleavened bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take, eat; this is my body” (Matt. 26:26), it was to indicate that the unleavened bread represented his sinless, perfect body, which was sacrificed willingly so that we, and all Adam’s children, might live. Likewise, the cup and the fruit of the vine symbolized Jesus’ suffering and death. The fruit of the vine was symbolic of blood, which in turn represented life. (Deut. 12:23) Jesus’ life, his being, his soul, was poured out unto death (Isa. 53:12), in perfect obedience to the Heavenly Father’s will.

To comply with Jesus’ instruction, “This do in remembrance of me,” the various Christian church

denominations throughout the world have established rituals involving these emblems. There are many variations in these rituals, but nearly all refer to them as the “taking of Holy Communion.” This expression, no doubt, has its basis in our theme text—I Corinthians 10:16. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines “Holy Communion” as “a Christian rite in which bread and wine are consecrated and received as the body and blood of Jesus, or as symbols of them.” *Webster’s Dictionary* also defines our normal usage of the ordinary word “communion” as: a) the act of sharing, b) possession in common, c) participation. These definitions of communion are what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote the words of our text to the brethren at Corinth. It is most likely that communion as a word was a condensation of two other words, “common” and “union.” The basic thought in communion is a sharing of something by several individuals (having it in common). Furthermore, these individuals are drawn closer together (in union) because of this sharing.

WHAT IS OUR COMMUNION?

What is this “something” which is shared by several individuals, spoken of by Paul? It is the privilege, in which all the consecrated followers of Christ share together, of becoming a part of the family of God. This shared privilege is ours because of our faith in, and appropriation of, the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice—his broken body and poured out blood—represented by the symbolic unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, the cup. These benefits have, by our complete faith in them, caused us to

be considered as justified in God's sight. Thus, we also have the privilege of walking in the footsteps of Jesus, sharing in his experiences and in those of our fellow-brethren.

We note in the several biblical accounts of that last supper, when Jesus instituted the memorial of his death, that he never used the expression "communion" in speaking of the bread and wine. This is because it was not yet the "due time" for the further thought of "communion" to be understood. Jesus simply wanted the apostles to know that these two symbols which he instituted represented the fact that he was about to die as the antitypical Passover lamb. Later, the Apostle Paul used the expression "communion" when speaking of these memorial symbols in our theme text. Now, Jesus had died, had been resurrected from the dead, and had ascended to the right hand of the throne of God. Paul appreciated the fact that because these things had taken place, a new and living way had been opened up for Jesus' footstep followers. This was a way in which each one would have a "common" or "shared" standing, because all were made acceptable based on what Jesus had faithfully accomplished by the giving up of his perfect human life. To put it simply, the followers of Christ have the privilege of "communion" with one another and with their Lord because he was their "passover."—I Cor. 5:7

Since Jesus was the antitypical Passover lamb, and as a result his followers have partaken in the benefits of his sacrifice, one of the important privileges extended to these is that of sharing in all of the experiences of Jesus, *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) even unto sacrificial death. God has invited these to become partakers with his Son in suffering and death. This “communion” with Christ and with one another in sacrifice is not because his footstep followers have added anything to his broken body and poured out life, represented by the symbolic bread and cup. Christ’s followers “commune” together, in fellowship and in the footsteps of Jesus, their pattern, because of what he has already accomplished on their behalf. Paul emphasizes this in the verse following our theme text: “Because there is one loaf [Jesus], we, the many, are one body [have the privilege of communing together as his body members]; for we all partake of [the benefits of] the one loaf [symbolically, Jesus’ broken body sacrificed for us].”—I Cor. 10:17, *Emphatic Diaglott*

SHARING TOGETHER IN SACRIFICE

It was God’s plan that there should be a group of people called to share in the sufferings and rewards of his Son Jesus. Those who have partaken of, appropriated to themselves, the benefits of Christ’s Passover sacrifice, rejoice in the opportunity to give their lives in sacrifice as Jesus did. As a reward, if faithful, they will live and reign with him in the kingdom, assisting in the blessing of all the families of the earth. “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”—II Tim. 2:11,12

When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, he knew that eventually they would have to endure experiences similar to his. In Matthew 20:20, the

mother of James and John asked Jesus that her sons be permitted to sit on the right hand and the left of Jesus in his glory. Jesus knew that this desire was in the heart and mind of James and John, so he replied directly to them: “Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.”—vss. 22,23

When James and John replied to Jesus, “We are able,” did they really know the true significance of the cup and baptism? They could not at that time, for the completion of his baptism was yet future. In Luke 12:50, we read, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” Jesus was here speaking of the sufferings and death awaiting him on Calvary’s cross.

When Saul of Tarsus, who became the great Apostle Paul, was intercepted by the glorified Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was blinded by a brilliant light. He was brought to Damascus, where he stayed three days in this condition of complete blindness and neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9:1-9) Then the Lord appeared in a vision to Ananias, a disciple of Christ, and told him to go to Saul. When Ananias hesitated because Saul had been persecuting the Christians, the Lord explained to Ananias, “Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children

of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."—Acts 9:15,16

It was not long after his conversion that the Jews sought to kill Paul, but he escaped these attempts on his life. (vs. 29) Later, when he began his missionary tours, at Lystra, Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and persuaded the people to stone Paul, after which they dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. (Acts 14:19,20) However, he revived and continued preaching, telling the brethren that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (vs. 22) The Apostle Paul was a wonderful example of enduring great suffering under very difficult and trying circumstances. Very few of the footstep followers of Jesus in this day are required to endure the same kind of physical violence, but rather are tested along more subtle lines. Nevertheless, the attitude of mind must still be, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."—Job 13:15

GREEK WORD AND ITS USES

In order to understand the meaning of "communion" used by the Apostle Paul in our theme text, we need to look at the Greek word *koinonia* from which communion is translated, and how it is used in other New Testament scriptures. *Koinonia* has been translated as "communication" once; "communion," four times; "contribution," once; "distribution," once; "fellowship," twelve times; and "to communicate," once. The verb form of the word, *koinoneo*, has been translated "to make partaker of" once; "be partaker of," four times; "communicate," twice; and "distribute," once.

A few examples of texts containing *koinonia* are as follows:

“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (I Cor. 1:9) “Fellowship” in this text is the same word translated as “communion” in I Corinthians 10:16.

“When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.” (Gal. 2:9) “Fellowship” again is the same Greek word, *koinonia*.

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 3:8,9) Here again, “fellowship” is translated from *koinonia*.

These texts show that God had, “from the beginning of the world,” planned the inviting of a group of people to share experiences with his Son and with one another. This kindred fellowship is really the acknowledgment of those so invited, made acceptable through Jesus, their Passover sacrifice.

Likewise, “fellowship” in Philippians 1:5 and 2:1 is translated from *koinonia*. Philippians 3:10 says, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” This text states as directly as possible that the Apostle Paul expected to share similar experiences to those of Jesus, including suffering and death. Once again,

“fellowship” is translated from *koinonia*. Nor was this teaching exclusively that of the Apostle Paul concerning himself. The Apostle John spoke in a similar way, but expanded on the thought of fellowship, saying, “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,” and “we have fellowship one with another.” (I John 1:3,7) “Fellowship” again is here translated from *koinonia*.

In the thirteenth chapter of Hebrews, where allusion is made to the Tabernacle, *koinonia* appears again (vs. 16), but is translated “communicate”: “To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” This translation is not as clear as the *Revised Standard Version* rendering: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” This appears to be a better translation, but it leaves the impression that God is pleased with the sharing of our possessions with others, which, of course, he is. However, God is far more pleased with our sharing one with another in the sacrificial work of his Son Jesus.

The context of Hebrews 13:16 draws on the lessons from Israel’s Tabernacle, saying: “The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do

good and to communicate [share together in this work of sacrifice] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” (Heb. 13:11-16) The Apostle’s point is that, as Jesus was scorned by the world in his sacrificial life, so also we should expect the same, because we have been asked to share his experiences. Therefore, another translation of Hebrews 13:16 (*Rotherham*) uses the word “fellowship” for *koinonia*, and this appears more appropriate, because it has the connotation of sharing, one with another, in Jesus’ experiences.

There are other words with the same root meaning as *koinonia* which have been appropriately translated “companions” and “partners.” Indeed, we are companions and partners of Jesus and of each other. “Partaker,” also, has been used to translate *koinonia*. An outstanding example is in the well-known words of II Peter 1:4, which read, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” From this we note also that our communion with Jesus and with one another is not limited to the present life of sacrifice, but extends to the glory that follows. “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:17

COMMUNION WITH JESUS

The most important phase of the ministry of Jesus was that of laying down his life for his friends and all the world of mankind. This feature is symbolized by the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine at the Memorial observance. Jesus laid down

his life willingly, gladly, telling his disciples, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:13,14) We, too, must be willing to lay down our lives for our brethren and thus have communion with Jesus by sharing in his experiences. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."—I John 3:16, *RSV*

Another outstanding feature of our Lord's ministry was his preaching of the kingdom. The beginning of his ministry is described in Luke 4:16-21: "He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." From that day forward, wherever Jesus went, he preached that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. We, too, must be willing to preach the kingdom message, out of love for it, even as he

loved it, and have communion with him and others similarly so engaged.

Jesus also performed many miracles and many kindnesses. The testimony given by Peter in Acts 10:38 is explicit: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.”

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another,” Jesus sent back the answer: “Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” (Matt. 11:3-5) These miracles were samples of the kingdom work to come. Much good was done by them. They were performed by the Early Church on a limited scale to establish the church, and then they ceased. However, doing good continued to be necessary, and the Apostle Paul gave us the admonition, saying, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10) By so doing, we share in the experiences of our Lord, and commune with him.

OBEDIENCE—THE TEST OF COMMUNION

All these experiences were to develop in Jesus obedience. God, the great, supreme Creator, desired to give the divine nature to his Son. Before he could do so, however, it was necessary that Jesus be tested fully. Hence, we read, “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of

death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Heb. 2:9,10) To have communion with him, we must emulate him, being obedient, as he was. To do this, we must have his mind, or disposition, even as admonished by the Apostle Paul, “Let this disposition be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though being in God’s form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God, but divested himself, taking a bondman’s form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—Phil. 2:5-8, *Emphatic Diaglott*

We rejoice that Jesus was faithful and that as a consequence “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, . . . And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9-11) May we be faithful and obedient footstep followers of Jesus, having communion with him and with one another, so that we may share his glory and reign with him. ■

“He leads the humble in the right way and teaches them his will. With faithfulness and love he leads all who keep his covenant and obey his commands.”

—Psalm 25:9,10, Good News Bible