

holy communion in the new testament

Ken Sanner, *March 25, 2005*

(All Scripture passages from the NIV unless otherwise noted.)

There are at least 5 major images of Holy Communion in the New Testament: remembrance, sacrifice, thanksgiving, fellowship, and end times.

1.

Holy Communion is remembrance, commemoration, and memorial. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). "...as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26) As early as the Emmaus experience on the day of Resurrection, (Luke 24:13-35), Christians recognized the presence of Jesus Christ in the breaking of bread. The traditional Jewish practice of taking bread, blessing and thanking God, and breaking and sharing the bread took on new meaning for them. When followers of Christ gathered in Jesus' name, the breaking of bread and sharing of the cup was a means of remembering his life, death, and resurrection. Christ is risen and is alive here and now, not just remembered for what was done in the past.

2.

Holy Communion is a type [or symbol] of sacrifice. Hebrews 9:26 makes clear that "he has appeared once for all . to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself." Christ's atoning life, death, and resurrection make divine grace available to us. We also present ourselves as sacrifice in union with Christ to be used by God in the work of redemption, reconciliation, and justice. (Romans 12:1 "I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship.")

3.

Eucharist comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving. The early Christians "broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, **praising God** and enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:46-47a). As we commune, we express joyful thanks to God. Communion conveys our gratitude for the goodness of God and God's unconditional love for us.

4.

Holy Communion is the communion of the church—the fellowship of the faithful. While deeply meaningful to the individuals participating, the sacrament is more than a personal event. I Corinthians 10:17 explains that "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The sharing and bonding experienced at the table exemplify the nature of the church and model the world as God would have it be.

5.

Holy Communion is eschatological, meaning that it has to do with the end of history, the outcome of God's purpose for the world. When we eat and drink at the table, we become

partakers of the divine nature in this life and for life eternal (John 6:47-58 Jesus said. "I am the bread of life. .."This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day..he who eats this bread will live forever.") We are anticipating the heavenly banquet celebrating God's victory over sin, evil, and death. In the midst of the personal and systemic brokenness in this world, we yearn for everlasting fellowship with Christ and ultimate fulfillment of his divine plan. We desire to be formed into the image of Christ and to be made instruments for transformation in the world.

The invitation to Communion comes from the risen and present Christ. Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Holy Communion is a gift of God to the church and an act of the community of faith. By responding to this invitation we affirm our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and our commitment to the mission of Christ.

We need to be careful to heed Paul's words of warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord."

Because Jesus Christ has promised to meet us (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), Christians approach the Communion Table with desire and expectation, with awe and humility, and with celebration and gratitude—remembering thankfully Christ's sacrifice, fellowshiping with the faithful, and yearning for his return.