

**THE UNION IN COMMUNION**

**N**ot long ago I read about a Baptist minister who was arraigned on charges of arson. He had set fire to his own church. He told the judge that the reason he set the church on fire was because his congregation was having some problems with division and he thought they needed a project to unite them.

The Lord's Supper is a uniting service. It was instituted by our Lord on the night He was betrayed by one disciple and would be denied by yet another. Of all things, a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be the greatest (Luke 22:24). John does not mention the Lord's Supper but at this point he does include the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. The disciples needed a project to unite them.

Communion (*koinonia*) is a beautiful word. It means, "a having in common (*koinos*), partnership, fellowship." W. E. Vine defines it as a "sharing in the realization of the effects of the blood (i.e., the death) of Christ and the body of Christ, as set forth by the emblems in the Lord's Supper, (1 Cor 10:16)." The passage cited by Vine reads, "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? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Cor 10:16, 17 NKJV).

I never feel closer to the Lord and to His worldwide Body than I do when I am partaking of these richly symbolic emblems of the Lord's Supper. I sense a holy oneness there that I do not feel anywhere else. Everyone who lifts the bread and cup to his or her lips is confessing that Christ died for sinners everywhere. We come to the table on the legs of the lame; we leave on wings of eagles. What is it that has made us one? "Christ Jesus, it is He."

The special union that we enjoy in Communion is that marvelous union we have in Christ. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26-28 NKJV). In Christ, we are one. We are

not two or two hundred. "There is one body." As the body of Christ we partake together, we pray together, we praise God together.

Division in the body of Christ makes a shambles of the Supper. There is a searing scene in the movie *Avalon*. The Krichinsky family, immigrants from Poland, has come to America and has done well for themselves. Every Thanksgiving they come together for a great family feast. Each year they have to wait for one of the older brothers to come. And then one year they get tired of waiting and

proceed to cut the turkey. When the brother finally arrives and finds that they the meal has started without him, he is outraged. "You cut the 'toikey' without me? How could you do that!" A big argument ensues and the day is ruined. Families leave early. Never again will they assemble as one big happy family. No more *koinonia* for the

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Krichinskys.

Sometimes, sadly, there is not much union in Communion. Two hundred years ago an Irish immigrant, Thomas Campbell, lamented the lack of union in Communion that he found in American churches. In his *Declaration and Address* he wrote, "What awful and distressing effects have those sad divisions produced! ...How seldom do many in these circumstances enjoy the dispensation of the Lord's Supper, that great ordinance of unity and love!" Many denominations offered Communion only to members of their own branch or sect. We have said, "The Table is the Lord's; we neither invite nor debar."

If there is no visible and heartfelt union in our Communion then we have failed to discern the Lord's body. "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" "This is My body, given for you." "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." "There is one body." "There should be no schism in the body." We have been reconciled to God in one body through the cross. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Calvary covers it all. His redeeming blood has made us one. There we will find true union in Communion.

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