

4-1-1939

## Sermon Study on 1 Cor. 10:16,17

Theo. Laetsch

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Laetsch, Theo. (1939) "Sermon Study on 1 Cor. 10:16,17," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 10 , Article 28.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol10/iss1/28>

This Homiletical Help is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

to the clear Word of God, must not be treated as a heresy, but in patient instruction it must be shown to be untenable, be refuted, opposed, and criticized. On the other hand, however, if a church has exhausted all means of bringing such an erring brother to the acknowledgment of the truth and his adherence to the respective error evidently is not due to insufficient intellectual understanding of Scripture-teaching, and hence through this non-fundamental error it becomes manifest that he consciously, stubbornly, and obstinately contradicts the divine Word and that accordingly through his error he subverts the organic foundation of faith [the Scriptures], then such an erring person, like all others that persevere in mortal sins, must no longer be borne with, but fraternal relations with him must be terminated. The same thing applies to a whole church-body which errs in a non-fundamental doctrine. It is very true that in this life absolute unity in faith and doctrine is not possible, and no higher unity than a fundamental one can be attained. This, however, by no means implies that in a church-body errors of a non-fundamental nature which become manifest and which contradict the clear Word of God must not be attacked and that a Church can be regarded as a true church and be treated as such if it either makes such non-fundamental errors a part of its confession and, with injury to the organic foundation, in spite of all admonition, stubbornly clings to these errors or in a unionistic fashion and in a spirit of indifference insists that a deviation from God's clear Word in such points need be of no concern to us.

(To be continued)

A.

---

## Sermon Study on 1 Cor. 10:16, 17

Eisenach Epistle for Maundy Thursday

In v. 14 of 1 Cor. 10 Paul had warned against idolatry, particularly against that form of idolatry which seems to have been quite the vogue with some of the Corinthian Christians, participation in idol feasts. Already in chap. 8:8-13 he had called their attention to the offense given by this custom. While the eating of any meat at home was permitted, even if that meat came from animals offered to the idols, 8:1-7; cp. 10:25-30, it was quite a different matter to sit in the temple of the idol and take part in the sacrificial meal served there. That was actually participating in the idol feast, therefore participating in idolatry. In order to warn his readers against this sin, he points out the incompatibility of partaking of the Lord's Table and that of the devil. Participation in the worship is fellowshiping with the deity worshiped at that ser-



vice or festival. This is true of Israel, v. 18; this applies also to the idolaters, vv. 19, 20. That holds good also of Christians attending the Lord's Table. There they are actually partaking of, entering into close communion with, the body and blood of their Lord and with all their fellow-communicants, and therefore "you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of the devils," v. 21. Hence flee idolatry. Do not attend the idol feasts.

We must not overlook the manner in which the apostle introduces his line of argumentation in v. 15: "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." He calls them "wise men." In 1 Cor. 4:10 (where this word is used in opposition to *μωροί*) and in 2 Cor. 11:19 (opposed to *ἄφρονες*) Paul had used this term ironically. In our passage he evidently employs the term as a permissible *captatio benevolentiae* in order to make his readers the more willing to accept his admonition and flee every form of idolatry. The wise man, *φρόνιμος*, a term used in the LXX in translation of *חָכָם*, designates a man who is able to distinguish between matters, to discern, to perceive clearly, and on the basis of this ability can sift the arguments advanced thoroughly and arrive at correct conclusions and judgments. Since the Corinthians were enriched by the grace of God through the Gospel, cp. 1 Cor. 1:4-7; since the Lord Himself had made them wise in these matters, they would be able to follow his line of argumentation, to grasp the underlying principles, to arrive at the conclusion that the course of action demanded by him was the only correct and proper one, the only one in keeping with the Word and the will of God.

We need the wisdom from above whenever we read or study the Word of God. We need that wisdom particularly in studying that doctrine to which the apostle calls the attention of his readers in the passage before us, the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. May He enable us to judge properly, to understand correctly, and to accept as heavenly wisdom what the apostle says in these words!

*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? V. 16.* The apostle does not follow the order of institution, nor does he mention all the details of the institution or all the blessed fruits of the Sacrament. He singles out only such facts as are relevant to the point under discussion, since he knows that his readers are well acquainted with the doctrine and the history of the institution of the Holy Supper. It was not his purpose to show just at which point the communion of the bread and body, the wine and the blood, takes place. His only object was to stress the fact of such a communion in the Sacrament. Note that the apostle makes mention of all the sacramental elements and of the three sacramental acts: the blessing, or consecrat-



ing, v. 16 a; the breaking, or distribution, v. 16 b; the partaking of the elements, eating bread and drinking wine, v. 17. He is, however, here not speaking of the effects of each individual act but of the administration of the Sacrament in its entirety, as originally instituted by Christ. He does not mean to teach that the cup becomes the communion of the blood at the moment of the blessing or consecration and that the bread becomes the communion of the body of Christ at the moment of its being broken. While speaking only of the blessing of the cup and only of the breaking and partaking of the bread, it is evident that the cup must not only be blessed but also distributed and drunk and the bread not only broken and eaten but blessed as well prior to such distribution. Omitting the distribution and drinking of the blessed cup and the blessing of the bread, we would not be celebrating the Lord's Supper; for we would not be doing what the Lord did when He instituted the Sacrament and what He told us to do, "This do!" Only when we do what the Lord told us to do, only when we eat the bread that was blessed and drink the cup that was blessed, only then can we be sure that this bread is indeed the communion of the body, this wine the communion of the blood, of Christ.

The apostle begins his line of argument with a reference to the communion existing between the cup and the blood of Christ, "because he intends to elaborate the statement regarding the sacramental bread" (Lenski). "The cup," of course, stands metaphorically for the contents of the cup, fruit of the vine, wine, Matt. 26:29; for Christ did not ask His disciples to partake of the cup, the metal container, but of its contents—"Drink ye all of it."

This cup is called "the cup of blessing." This expression occurs only here in the New Testament. Various translations have been proposed by commentators. It may mean the cup which is being blessed by the congregation. We do not see the need of the repetition "which we bless" in this case. It is better to refer the blessing to the first blessing pronounced over the cup by Christ Himself. Many commentators hold that Paul had adopted this expression from the ritual of the Passover. *Expositor's Greek Testament* offers the following comment: "The prevalent interpretation of τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας makes the phrase a rendering of *Kos Habb'arakah*, the third cup of the Passover meal, over which a special blessing was pronounced (often identified with that of the Eucharist), or, as Edward thinks (referring to Luke 22:20), the fourth, which closed the meal and was attended with the singing of the Hallel. Such a technical Hebraism would scarcely be obvious to the Corinthians, and the genitive so construed is artificial in point of Greek idiom." Yet this term was well known to Paul, and he may well have used it since it so aptly described the cup of the Eucharist,



over which Christ Himself had pronounced the blessing. Of course, the blessing spoken over the Passover cup could not have constituted that cup a communion of the blood of Christ. That required a special blessing, essentially different from that spoken over the third Passover cup.

While Paul mentions the blessing only when speaking of the cup, Matthew and Mark use the term blessing only in connection with the bread, Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22. According to them a *thanksgiving* was pronounced over the cup, while Luke merely mentions a *thanksgiving* in reference to the bread. There can be no doubt that Christ spoke words of *thanksgiving* and words of *blessing* at the first institution.

The words *thanksgiving* and *blessing* are not synonymous terms. *Εὐχαριστέω* and its noun and adjective in the New Testament invariably refer to the giving of thanks, and according to Bauer, *Woerterbuch zum N. T.*, the object, expressed or implied, with the one exception of Rom. 16:4, is always God. *Εὐλογέω* and its noun and adjective denote a speaking well, speaking good things. Used with God as its object, it signifies praise; and therefore it very closely approaches the meaning of *thanksgiving*, as in 1 Cor. 14:16, 17, where the prayer is one of grateful praise, or praising gratitude, combining both praise and *thanksgiving*. With other objects it usually denotes a *blessing*, a *benediction*, wishing well, or speaking good things concerning a person or thing. Christ indeed spoke good things concerning the cup of the Eucharist. By virtue of the words spoken by Christ on that occasion this cup became indeed a cup of *blessing*, a *blessed cup*, a cup honored in a manner in which no other cup had been honored before; it was separated from all other cups and placed into a class by itself. It was made a cup which was to convey to the disciples assembled there the blood of their Savior, with which blood the cup, while being given to the Twelve, was by the word of Christ Himself placed into intimate communion and fellowship, so that they drank not the wine alone, but with it they drank the very blood of the Son of God to be shed for them for the remission of their sin. Thereby this cup, *blessed* and honored in itself, became the source of *blessing* to the disciples. When God *blessed* Abraham, He told him, "I will *bless* thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a *blessing*," Gen. 12:2. Jesus assures His believers that the waters of life which He gives in the word of the Gospel shall not only in them become a well of water springing up into eternal life, John 4:14, it shall flow out from them in rivers of living water, bringing life and *blessing* also to others, John 7:38. In like manner the *blessing* pronounced upon the sacramental cup did not only *bless* and honor this cup and make its name great, by effecting a communion



of the cup with the blood of Christ, but streams of blessing flowed from this cup into the hearts and lives of the disciples who drank of this cup.

We do not know the exact words which Christ used when He gave thanks to God on that memorable evening. In keeping with the occasion He surely thanked God, His heavenly Father, whose will He had come to fulfil, that now, in accordance with this divine will, His Holy Supper was about to be instituted as an abiding ordinance, as one of the Sacraments of the New Covenant to be established by His blood. Neither are the exact words of His blessing recorded nor the words with which the first Church blessed the elements. Again we need not to be at a loss as to the content of this blessing. Once before Christ had blessed bread, and lo, in a miraculous manner this bread multiplied so as to feed large multitudes, Mark 6:41. The words of blessing must have expressed in some form the intention which Christ had. Now again He blessed bread, and, lo, again miraculous power was given to this bread. Through the omnipotence of Him to whom all power is given, Matt. 28:18; 11:27, it became a means to give to His disciples His own body to eat, or, as Paul expresses it, it became the communion of the body of Christ. Surely, then, the words of blessing pronounced over the bread and the cup brought out in some manner this blessing, the effect of which He announced later, at the distribution, in those majestic words "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you." These words were the words of the Son of God and therefore, like all His words, not idle promises, vain wishes, but spirit and life, John 6:63, realities, actualities, Ps. 33:9. And since this Supper was to be celebrated not only once; since Christ Himself charged His Church to do what He had done, in remembrance of Him; since this is to be an abiding ordinance, a Sacrament of the New Covenant, in which the death of the Lord is to be shown forth until He come, this blessing of Him who is in the midst of all who are assembled in His name, is valid and efficacious even unto the end of the world. 1 Chron. 17:27. Cp. Formula of Concord, VII, §§ 75-78; *Trigl.*, p. 999 f.

The apostle adds "which we bless." Is this blessing merely an ancient custom, a liturgical act, an apostolic ordinance, which may be omitted? Nothing could be farther removed from the truth than this. This blessing is one of the essential sacramental acts, comprehended in the command of Jesus "This do." We are to do as He did on that memorable evening. And He took not unblest bread but bread over which He had pronounced a blessing. Nor are we to take unblest bread if we would celebrate the Lord's Supper. To omit the blessing would invalidate the Sacrament; we would not be administering the Sacrament Christ



instituted. But how are we to bless the elements? What are the words we must use? We have seen that the words spoken by the Lord during the distribution merely repeated, although perhaps in different phrases, the blessing which He had spoken over the bread and the cup. Now, in the words of the institution as recorded by the evangelists we have also a record of the very words spoken by Christ when He gave to His disciples that bread and wine which He had blessed: "Take, eat; this is My body," etc. Why change these words, which are the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, which bring out so well the content of the blessing He Himself had pronounced upon the sacramental bread and wine prior to the distribution? Why change them and bring the element of doubt into this Sacrament? And these words of Jesus are placed in their proper setting by repeating the account of the institution of the Supper as recorded by the evangelists and Paul. Hence the Formula of Concord correctly says: "In the administration of the Holy Supper the words of institution are to be publicly spoken or sung before the congregation, distinctly and clearly, and should in no way be omitted," and in proof of this statement refers to Christ's command "This do" and to 1 Cor. 10:16. (Formula of Concord, VII, §§ 79-82; *Trigl.*, p. 1001.)

The apostle says, "We bless." It is not the administrator, the pastor, who does the blessing as his exclusive privilege. No, the administrator is merely the spokesman, the representative, of the congregation, through whom the congregation blesses the elements. Very beautifully Luther writes: "Our pastor steps before the altar, . . . in the hearing of all he very distinctly chants the words of Christ's institution of the Holy Supper, . . . and we, especially those among us who would commune, kneel (during the consecration) alongside of, behind, and around him, . . . all of us real holy priests together with him, sanctified by the blood of Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit, consecrated in Baptism. . . . We do not let our pastor speak the words of Christ for himself, as though he were speaking them for his own person, but he is our mouthpiece, and we all from our very hearts speak the words with him. . . . If he should make a mistake or become confused or forget whether he have spoken the words, we are there, hear what he says, hold fast to the words, and are sure that they have been spoken; therefore we cannot be deceived." (St. L., XIX, 1279-1281.)

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" asks the apostle. The answer of course must be, It is. But the question arises, Just what is the meaning of the term communion, *κοινωνία*? The importance of the matter justifies a thorough study.

The word occurs 19 times in the New Testament. It is an



abstract noun derived from the stem κοιν, related to ζῆν, with. The adjective κοινός means common, belonging to several, no one having the object for his exclusive use, but sharing its possession with others. The noun κοινωνός designates a partner, an associate, comrade, or a partaker, sharer; cp. 1 Cor. 10:18, 20; Luke 5:10. Κοινωνία denotes fellowship, communion, association, a union of one with another or others. A close study of the 17 passages in which the word occurs besides our text will teach us several facts which have an important bearing on the interpretation of our passage. In the first place, the relation denoted by *koinonia* is never a merely outward relation or connection, as that of an ink-bottle and the writing-desk or of two strangers sitting next to each other. It invariably implies a relation of intimacy, a close connection, an actual fellowship, the partners being bound together by sincere interest in, and activity towards, mutual welfare, the objects united by a close, intimate relation. They are inseparably united for the period of their communion. In the second place, the word denotes a union in which each of the parties retains its individuality. There is no mixing and mingling of one with the other, nor is there a change of one into the other or of the two into something altogether new and essentially different from its constituent parts. Read all the 17 passages, and you will be convinced that both the intimacy of the relation and the retention of individuality on the part of the constituents of the communion are quite evident.

Meyer, in a footnote to 1 Cor. 10:16, insists that κοινωνία in the New Testament never means communication, apportioning, and refers to his notes on Rom. 15:26 in proof of his position. Yet in his notes on our passage he says: "This is aptly explained by Grotius (after Melancthon and others): 'Κοινωνίαν vocat id, per quod fit ipsa communio.' (*Koinonian* he calls that whereby the communion itself takes place.) The cup, i. e., its contents as these are presented and partaken of, is the *medium* of this fellowship; it is realized in the partaking." He later defines this communion as an inward union of the believer with Christ. Yet by approving of Grotius's explanation of *koinonia*, Meyer practically refutes his claim that the word never means communication. If the cup is the medium of the fellowship, that whereby the communion itself takes place, then the cup must indeed be the communication of Christ, or rather His blood. Kittel's *Theologisches Woerterbuch* registers three usages of the word, having communion, giving communion, communion in an absolute sense. It lists our passage under the first usage. "Brot und Wein sind dem Paulus Traeger der Gegenwart Christi, so wie der juedische Altar die Gegenwart Gottes verbuergt. Das Geniessen von Brot und Wein ist Zusammenschluss (Anteilschaft) mit dem himmlischen Christus." The Vulgate translates "com-



*municatio sanguinis,* "participatio corporis," *participatio* having the sense of communication, giving communion. Luther, the Confessions, Chemnitz, and other Lutheran theologians take it in the sense of "giving communion," "communicating." (See Luther, XX:237, 1082. *Triglotta*, 246, 990, 992, 1000.)

In our opinion the sense of the passage is not in the least altered, and it is therefore of little importance whether the one or the other translation is adopted. In both translations it is evident that two distinct objects are united and distributed. If one prefers the translation "a communion," a fellowship with the blood, then naturally the union between the two is stressed without denying that the cup communicates the blood with which it forms a union. In fact, the latter thought is implied. If one translates, "The cup is the communication of the blood," it is this communication which is stressed, involving, however, as a matter of course, a union, a fellowship, of the cup and the blood; else the cup could not communicate the blood. In the Lord's Supper we receive both wine and blood. Not wine only; but in this Supper the wine is the communion, or the communication, of the blood of Christ. We receive not blood only, as if the wine had ceased to be wine or had been changed into blood; but in union with the blood is the wine, and the blood is communicated to us by means of the wine. In connection herewith the words of the Apology (*Trigl.*, p. 247), quoted approvingly by the Formula of Concord (*Sol. Decl.*, VII, § 7), bear repeating. "Since Paul says: 'The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ,' etc., it would follow, if the body of Christ were not, but only the Holy Ghost were, truly present that the bread is not a communion of the body but of the Spirit of Christ." (*Trigl.*, p. 975.)

*The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* V. 16 b. What Paul had taught concerning the cup he now repeats with reference to the bread. We note the fact that neither in the first clause of v. 16 nor here the apostle teaches that we receive *Christ*. Not once in the New Testament is this expression used in connection with the elements of the Lord's Supper. Scripture very clearly teaches that we are united with Christ by faith, Rom. 8:9; 13:14; Gal. 2:19, 20; etc., by Baptism, Rom. 6:3-11; Gal. 3:27. But not once are we told that the bread and the cup are a communion, a communication, of Christ. The interpretation of Meyer and of Kittel's *Woerterbuch*, noted above, which is in fact the interpretation of the Calvinistic-Reformed Church, has not the slightest foundation in the text. Quite evidently it is only a weak and unwarranted subterfuge when the author in Kittel's *Woerterbuch* continues: "Sowohl das griechische σῶμα wie das entsprechende aramaeische ܩܝܢܐ heissen nicht nur Leib, sondern



**Person.** (Vgl. G. Dalman, *Jesus=Jeschua* (1922), 130 f.) Paulus nennt das Blut neben dem σῶμα wohl deshalb, weil es ihm durch die ueberlieferten Abendmahlsworte dargeboten wurde." The very fact that Paul does mention the blood besides the body, and mentions it first, inverting the traditional words of institution; the very fact that body and blood are differentiated; that it is only bread that is called the communion of the body, while only the cup is called the communion of the blood; that these communions are never interchanged; the fact finally that the New Testament is written in Greek and not in Aramean, that we are bound by the Greek words, not by some supposed Aramean original, that the Corinthians could never have understood the word σῶμα in the sense of person, — all these facts make it imperative to reject this interpretation as incompatible with, and contradictory to, the clear words of the text. In spite of all efforts of unbelief, learned or unlearned, reasonable or unreasonable, to change the meaning of these words, Luther's splendid explanation in his Small Catechism is the only interpretation that does justice to the clear words of Paul and the Savior. The Lord's Supper is nothing more nor less than the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself. The mystical union with Christ is one of the effects, one of the fruits of blessings, which the eating and drinking of the body and the blood of Christ grants to all believing communicants, while the body and blood of Christ is given to, and received by, all communicants whether they believe or not. Cp. 1 Cor. 11:27, 29.

The apostle changes his phraseology as compared with 16 a. There he had spoken of the blessing of the cup; here he speaks of the breaking of the bread. The blessing of the cup did not symbolize the blessing of the blood, neither does the breaking of the bread symbolize the breaking of the body. The body was not broken, John 19:31-36. In 1 Cor. 11:24 most of the, and the best, manuscripts do not read "broken for you." Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, Ephraem Syri, omit it, reading only, "This is My body for you." To break bread means in Biblical language to prepare bread for distribution and eating; cp. Mark 8:19, "I brake the five loaves among," εἰς, unto, "five thousand." The Authorized Version therefore very properly translates the Hebrew word שָׁרַף Is. 58:7, not in exact keeping with its etymological meaning, to break, but nevertheless correctly, "to deal thy bread." If the phrase "breaking bread" is used figuratively here, "the analogy is not this, that, as bread may be considered as figuratively killed by breaking it with the hand in small pieces, so was Christ's body literally killed by piercing it with the nails and spear, but is most clearly this, that, as bread, in order to be naturally taken and eaten, must be phys-



ically communicated (to which the natural breaking was necessary), so the body of our Lord Jesus, in order to be sacramentally taken and eaten, must be supernaturally communicated." (Krauth, *Conservative Reformation*, p. 719.) There is, however, not the slightest indication anywhere that these words are to be taken figuratively. They simply state that the Lord took bread and brake it in order to give it to His disciples that they might eat. The form, or shape, of the bread, the manner of distributing it, whether by breaking it or cutting it with a knife or by baking it in a form convenient for distribution, as our wafers, are all matters of indifference as long as in some manner bread is given to the communicants to eat.

*For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread*, v. 17. Unfortunately the translation does not convey the correct sense of the words. Literally translated, the apostle writes: Because one bread, one body the many we are; for we all partake of the one bread, or, the whole number of us are partaking of the one bread. In the first clause "supply τοῖς, and all is clear," says Lenski (*Corinthians*, p. 418). The ὅτι does not prove the preceding statement but gives the reason for what follows. On this position of the ὅτι clause see Luke 19:17; John 1:50; 15:19; 20:29. The English translation makes v. 17 prove v. 16, while certainly the fact that we are one body does not prove the bread to be a communion of the body, but is one of the effects of this communion. Moreover, the rendering of the English Bible "confuses two distinct figures." (*Expositor's Greek N. T.*) "To call us Christians 'one bread' introduces a very odd figure, one wholly unnecessary, since we are called 'one body' in the very next statement." (Lenski, *l. c.*, p. 417 f.) "Because there is one bread" refers of course to the bread of which v. 16 had spoken, the bread blessed in consecration, distributed to the communicants, and partaken of by them, v. 17 b. This bread indeed is one. The apostle, of course, has not in mind a physical, material oneness. We have no longer the bread which Christ used, neither did the apostle. In fact, as far as the material, physical, side of the bread is concerned, we do not at all receive one bread, neither quantitatively nor qualitatively. Not quantitatively; for many, many loaves and wafers must be baked in many, many ovens in order to furnish the bread necessary to celebrate Holy Communion the world over. Nor is the bread one qualitatively. Some may use bread prepared from wheat flour, others may use rye or barley or maize flour. The bread may be baked of hard or soft wheat, spring or winter wheat, American or European or Asiatic grain; it may be baked with yeast or some other fermenting agent or without any kind of ferment. Hence the application of this pas-



sage frequently made, from the days of Augustine, that similarly to the bread, which is one, though composed of many kernels of grain, the Church is one, though composed of many members, is not in keeping with the thought carried out here by the apostle.

The bread in the Lord's Supper is one in a higher sense than that of material unity. It is one in a sense altogether unique, in a manner occurring only in the Sacrament, one in a sacramental sense, incomprehensible to human reason. The bread blessed, distributed, and eaten in the Lord's Supper according to Christ's command and promise, no matter what its material and physical nature may be, is, whenever, wherever, and by whomsoever eaten, always, at all times, and in all places wherever the Lord's Supper as instituted by Him is being celebrated *one* bread, always the same, the bread that is the communion of the body of Christ. There is not one kind of bread given to Christians, another to hypocrites, not one kind for the wise and thoroughly indoctrinated members, another for such as are children in knowledge, not one for the strong in faith, another for the weak; no, all communicants partake of one and the same bread whether they commune in a palatial church edifice or in a rude log hut, whether in civilized countries or in savage surroundings. There is *one* bread, the "fellowship of the body of Christ," mediating, offering, conveying, giving, to all communicants not bread only but together with it the body of Him who died for us that we might have eternal life through faith in Him. The same, of course, holds true of the cup, the wine, the communion of the blood of Christ. Nor does each communicant receive a different body or a different portion or parcel of the one body of Christ; no, though each one receives a different portion of bread, yet in the Sacrament there is only one bread, and that one bread is the communion not only of a part of Christ's body but of the body of Christ, which is one. How is that possible? Answer: That is not for us to ask. With God nothing is impossible, and His word and promise remains true in spite of all cavils and argumentations of human reason, which is wise in its own conceits. We are, thank God, "wise men," v. 15, taught of God, John 6:45, to cast down imaginations, etc., 2 Cor. 10:5.

*Because there is one bread, one body the many we are.* What is meant by the "body"? Again opinions differ. Some hold it to be the body of Christ, with which we are united in a mystical manner in the Lord's Supper and of which we form the members. Then the apostle would have written, His body we are, or Christ's body, or *the* body, or at least, one body with Him. But He writes "one body," without adding any further attribute. A large number of interpreters maintain that here unity of membership in the visible Church is meant. That does not seem to be the true sense



of the words. The apostle no longer speaks in a general manner, as he did in v. 16, where he makes the general statement that the cup and the bread are the communion of the blood and body of Christ. This union is altogether independent of the faith or unbelief of the participant. In v. 17 we have not only a general statement; we are not told that the bread in the Eucharist joins all participants into one body. That is true only of those whom the apostle addresses as "we." He has in mind only those who like him are believing followers of the Lord, worthy communicants, those whom he calls "my dearly beloved," v. 14, "brethren," 10:1; 11:2; who with him are followers of Christ, 11:1; wise men, 10:15; enlightened and enriched by the grace of God, 1:4, 5; who, in spite of all their failings and shortcomings, were sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, 1:2. These, and such only, receive the full benefit of the Supper. Unworthy communicants, though receiving the body and blood, eat and drink damnation, judgment, unto themselves, 11:27 ff. But when the apostle wrote v. 16, he thought of unbelievers as little as in 1 Cor. 15:20 ff. In both instances "all" refers only to all believers.

We are all partakers of that one bread. In Corinth there were divisions among the members of the congregation, 1 Cor. 11:18; cp. 1:11, 12, and therefore unjustified and unjustifiable distinctions were being made between the members attending the so-called *agapae*, and there existed a great difference in the quality and quantity of foods served on these occasions. There were some who feasted regally and excessively until they were surfeited and intoxicated, while others had little or nothing wherewith to satisfy their hunger, 11:21. The *agape* was a man-made supper, originally serving a noble purpose, that of knitting the hearts closer in brotherly love and affection. Yet the very ones who had instituted these suppers vitiated them, changed them into clannish affairs, whereby outward differences and distinctions, instead of being obliterated, were emphasized and intensified and which caused quarrelings and strifes, until they threatened to disrupt the congregation and divide it into factions warring against one another.

Altogether different is the nature of the Supper instituted by the Lord Jesus. There all are partakers of that one bread blessed by the Lord to be the communion of His body. Though John had the seat of honor, though he and Peter and James were the three disciples closest to the Lord, yet they received no better food than the humblest and least known of the Twelve. Each one was given the same bread, the same cup, and to each one was communicated by that bread the selfsame body and by that cup the selfsame blood that all the others received.

Moreover, because there was one bread and all were partakers



of that one bread, they, the many, were one body. One body they were not only externally, because they had agreed to form a society, or community, for themselves; they were one body spiritually, one in heart and mind and soul, Acts 4:32. Intimately united by the bond of a common faith in the common Savior, this unity, this fellowship, was strengthened and fostered by the one bread and the one cup in the Sacrament, communicating to them the body and the blood given for them for the remission of their sins, nourishing and strengthening their faith, increasing and intensifying their love, uniting them ever closer into one body. That is not only a sentimental ideal, not merely a beautiful vision of an idle dreamer, that is, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, an actual fact. The apostle does not here admonish to unity of spirit, he does not merely hold the ideal of unity before them as the unattained goal for which they must strive. He announces the community of saints as a reality, an accomplished fact. We, the many, are one body. And the proof? One bread there is, we are partakers of that one bread; therefore we are one body. That is God's logic. That is God's judgment. God regards His Christians, though many, as one body. He calls them so. Therefore they are in fact and in truth one body.

We, the many, differing so completely in so many respects that it seems impossible that people so diametrically opposite as to character, nationality, culture, in fact, all outward criteria, should ever become partners, fellows, united into one body, yet by the omnipotent grace and wisdom of God are made one through that one bread. Paul, born and reared within the Church of God, and the Corinthians, formerly aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and being without God in the world; Paul, the strict Pharisee, Acts 26:4, 5, and the Corinthians, once steeped in shame and vice, 1 Cor. 6:9-12, yet now one body because they were all partakers of that one bread. We, the many, impetuous Peter and meditative John and cautious Thomas; youthful Timothy, Acts 16:1, and aged Mnason, Acts 21:16; Grandmother Lois, 2 Tim. 1:5, and the four virgin daughters of Philip, Acts 21:8; all united into one body through the Holy Eucharist. We, the many, Mary, the well-to-do house-owner, Acts 12:12, and Rhoda, the humble doorkeeper, v. 13; unlearned and ignorant men, Acts 4:13; 1 Cor. 1:26 ff., and cultured Dionysius the Areopagite, Acts 17:34; Aquila and Priscilla, the tentmakers, Acts 18:2, and Simon, the tanner, Acts 10:6; Luke, the beloved physician, Co. 4:14, and the unnamed jailer at Philippi, Acts 16:23 ff.; Lydia, a seller of purple, Acts 16:14, and Phebe, the deaconess, Rom. 16:1; Nicodemus, the Rabbi, John 3:1, and Onesimus, the runaway slave, Philemon 10; James, the apostle,



and Joseph, the councilor, Luke 23:50, 51; many indeed opposites, yet in fact all one body. At the altar of God there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female; they are all one in Christ Jesus, for they are all partakers of that one bread. And since that one bread is still being eaten, the one cup still being drunk in the twentieth century; since the same Supper of our Lord by His command is being served until the Lord Himself will come to seat us at His heavenly table, we, the many, living in the twentieth century, and all the many that will live until the end of time and partake of the one bread and the one cup, form one body with all that have eaten of that bread and drunk of that cup in years past. The saints above and the saints below but one communion make. That congregation of just men made perfect, Heb. 12, already enjoying the inheritance of the saints in light, Col. 1:12, and we, the called saints of God, still waging the battle of faith, still running the race set before us, still keeping under our body and bringing it into subjection,—one body, one in faith, one by the Word, one by Baptism, one by the one bread of which we all have partaken or are still partaking. What a miracle of divine wisdom and power and grace!

---

In preaching on this text, the pastor may follow the apostle's line of thought and warn against the many forms of idolatry in vogue today, covetousness, belly service, worldliness, exaltation of reason, science, etc., over the Bible, etc. *Flee Idolatry*. It renders impossible the participation at the Lord's Table; it disrupts fellowship with the saints.—The doctrinal content of the passage may be brought out in various ways. *The Lord's Supper in Truth a Communion*. It communicates to us the Lord's body and blood. It unites us into one body.—*The Purpose of the Lord's Supper*. It strengthens our faith in the vicarious atonement. It increases our love to the brethren.—*Worthy Reception of Holy Communion* involves 1) worshipful gratitude toward Christ, 2) fervent love toward the brethren.—*The Confessional Character of the Lord's Supper*. We confess our faith in the vicarious atonement. We confess our fellowship with the brethren.—Just prior to the Communion we sing the *Ter Sanctus*. *The Glory of God as Manifested in the Sacrament*. Here mysteriously the body and blood are communicated to us. Here incomprehensibly we are united into one body.

TH. LAETSCH

---