

Brother Watch

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Intimate Fellowship with God and Man

[This special issue of BrotherWatch is supplemental to New Life Fellowship's 2009 Men's Retreat. – Ed]

This afternoon we are participating in a sacred ceremony, or sacrament, that is known as the Lord's Supper (1Cor. 11:20-21), Communion (1Cor. 10:16), and the Eucharist (1Cor. 11:23-24). This ceremony is a remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice and a reminder of His future return. But it is much more than that. Just as the apostolic church devoted itself to and identified itself with the *crucified* and *resurrected* Jesus, so too do we as we participate in this unparalleled ritual.

The implications of what we are called to identify with are staggering. The essence of the Christian experience is found in this simple, and simply profound, ceremony – one which should fill us with awe and celebration at the glory of God and His grace.

Body & Blood

The basic elements of Communion are simple (bread and wine), yet profound (symbolizing the body and blood of Jesus). Presaging His Passion, Jesus declared:

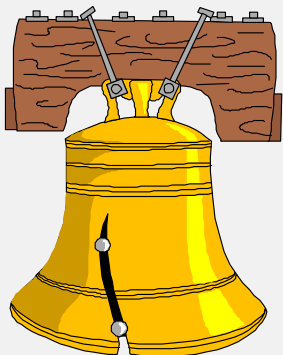
Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." – John 6:53-58

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This remarkably intimate declaration foretells the deepest intent and reality of the ceremony we will be participating in shortly. But more than that, it speaks to the essence of the Christian experience.

At this point, let's worship God with a new song, "A Thousand Hallelujahs," which envisions this incredible relationship in which we are invited to participate. This song is lively, enthusiastic, ecstatic. As we sing, let the words and the spirit of the song saturate our souls. Let us acknowledge and desire God's engagement in every aspect of our humanity even as He indwells within us His divinity.

Perfectly One

We have devoted a weekend of our lives at this Men's Retreat with the goal of knowing and experiencing the heart of God as He continues to transform our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. From before the beginning of time, the triune God existed in a harmonious, loving relationship among one another. As theologian Michael Jenkins puts it, "the three persons of the Trinity interpenetrate one another and co-inhere with one another in the eternal act of mutual love, emptying each one into the other in the supreme act of divine self-giving that is fully revealed in Jesus Christ)."¹

Before time began, God determined to share His incomprehensible love with us. In His prayer for us, Jesus revealed the very heart of God:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (John 17:20-23).

Throughout His earthly life, Jesus perfectly kept the law on our behalf, actually *fulfilling* the law (Mt. 5:17). Jesus so totally identified with our humanity that He took on Himself all the sin and shame of every single human being, ultimately to be forsaken by the Father for us. Jenkins writes, "When the Word became flesh, God poured out his very life into creation while also simultaneously taking into his own triune being our humanity in the supreme act of self-abnegation for the sake of others."²

A Thousand Hallelujahs

by Mark Roach

Lord of all that lives and breathes,
Creator of all glorious things,
You never cease to manifest Your grace.
Friend of every sinful man and
Savior to this fallen land,
You promise us Your Presence in this place.

So I stand and implore You,
Lord, adorn me with Your grace,
And I lift my voice and I say:

Chorus

Dance with me, sing with me, O Lord,
And I will sing a thousand hallelujahs!
Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Laugh with me, cry with me, O Lord,
And I will sing a thousand hallelujahs!
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

Lord of all that lives and breathes,
Creator of all glorious things,
You never cease to manifest Your grace.
Friend of every sinful man and
Savior to this fallen land,
You promise us Your Presence in this place.

So I stand and implore You,
Lord, adorn me with Your grace,
And I lift my voice and I say:

Chorus

Sing with me, dance with me,
Laugh with me, cry with me, Lord.
Be with me, walk with me,
Run with me, fly with me, Lord.
Rescue me, comfort me,
Shelter me, 'cause You died for me.
So call on me, count on me.
Lead me, Lord, and I will live for You.

Chorus (2x)

Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Hallelujah!

Now Jesus entreats us to enter into His life of perfect obedience and selfless love, to identify with His divinity. Again, Jenkins observes, "the Son of God

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became the Son of Man so that we children of humanity might become children of God.”³ Indeed, “*Christ became what we are*, Irenaeus tells us, *so that Christ might bring us to be even what he is.*”⁴

This deeply profound spiritual reality is perfectly expressed by the symbols and ceremony of the Communion service. Jinkins adds: “Jesus Christ not only reveals God to us, he also reveals to us our humanity as God intended it to be, as (indeed) it truly is in Jesus Christ in the very heart of God, a humanity that fully reflects the image of the Trinity.”⁵

In Christ, we are who we were meant to be. As Jinkins puts it, “Christ identifies so completely with our humanity that we come to discover our true identity only in and through him.”⁶ He expands upon the enormity of this truth:

*In Christ ... we have repented and turned to God. In Christ we have died and our sins are nailed to the cross. In Christ we have descended into hell, and we have left there our disobedience and distrust, our independence and inauthenticity, our brokenness, our alienation, guilt and disgrace, this accursed living-death we have vainly tried to live apart from God. In Christ we are raised again to new life, and now we stand in Christ in the very presence of God the Father almighty. The birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are a seamless garment, a single divine-human reality, in the church’s teaching.*⁷

Jesus’ Sacrifice

With His birth, life, death, and resurrection, Jesus experienced the entire gamut of human life. The entirety of that 33 1/3-year period as the Son of Man encompassed the *whole of human experience*. Born a Babe, Jesus matured into adulthood, attended synagogue, worked and played, laughed and cried, suffered the physical and emotional stresses of everyday life, was tempted as we all are – yet without sin – and died an ignominious death. For us.

Similarly, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was a *whole sacrifice*, body and blood, for the whole of humanity. His sacrifice was a whole package serving multiple purposes. On the cross, He took on all the sin and shame of every single human being, and He took our penalty in His body and blood – to the point where the totality of human sin, suffering, and sacrilege was born by Him as He was forsaken by the Father in our place.

However, as we partake of this Lord’s Supper (1Cor. 10:16-17; 1Cor. 11:23-27), let us distinguish between the bread and the wine. Although they symbolize the same event, there are important distinctions to make between the two.

“One Flesh” With Jesus

The apostle Paul emphasized that we – Christians – *are* the body of Christ (1Cor. 6:15-20) and we are in *union* with Him just as Adam and Eve were *one flesh*! Paul underscored the unity of the people of God as one bread and one body partaking of the one bread, that is, Jesus Christ (1Cor. 10:17; 12:12-13). Paul continually highlighted the Christian reality of *being* the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 5:23-33; Rom. 12:4-5).

In Eph. 5:30-32, Paul *again* harkens back to the consummation of Adam and Eve’s union which foreshadows a *divine intimacy* between Jesus and His bride, His church, His body. Paul writes: “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” One flesh with Jesus! Hallelujah!

Jesus, the Bread of Life, commands us to eat His flesh and drink His blood. We are to be as one with Him and He is with the Father and Spirit (John 17:20-23). The Lord’s Supper reveals this sublime reality to us even as it points us to the One who makes it all possible. “The Lord’s Supper, for Calvin, communicated the living reality of our union with Christ, and when we share in this Supper, we feast on the Christ who nourishes us by faith.”⁸

Let us feast on Christ! [Blessing on the bread.]

The Blood of the Covenant

While the bread symbolizes the sacrificial body of Christ on the cross and the resurrected body of Christ in heaven, incorporating all believers everywhere throughout eternity, the blood of Jesus (signified by the wine) signed God’s signature on a new and better covenant with mankind (Heb. 9:11-17; Rev. 7:14).

Remarkably, His shed blood *forgives* our sins (Mt. 26:28), *ransoms* us (1Cor. 6:20; 1Pet. 1:18-19), *redeems* us (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12,22; 1Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9), *justifies* us (Rom. 3:23-26), *sanctifies* us

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(Heb. 13:12,23), *reconciles* us (Eph. 2:13, 1John 4:20), *purges* our consciences (Heb. 9:13-14), *cleanses* us (1John 1:7; Rev. 1:5-6;7:9), *seals* a new covenant with us (Luke 22:20; Heb. 13:20), gives us *victory* (Heb. 4:15-16; Rev. 12:10-11), *vivifies* us (John 6:53-56), and gives us *access* to the throne of God (Heb. 9:12).

Let us be washed in His blood! [Blessing on the wine.]

Knowing Jesus

Let us praise God with a song with which we are all familiar, "Knowing You." As we do, let's recall the words from the author of Hebrews: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20). The apostle Paul wrote passionately about this reality to the Corinthian church, and to us here today:

But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2Cor. 3:14-18).

If we want to know God, we must go to and through Jesus Christ, the Veil, our High Priest, our Mediator, our Advocate. We must go to and through Jesus Christ, who urges us to come to Him for His rest – resting in the sublime fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit. We must go to and through Jesus Christ, who is our Friend, our Brother, and our Betrothed.

When we see and know *Him*, we see and know the *Father*. In *Him*, we are also *in* the Father and *in* the Spirit, sharing in their mutual self-emptying and self-giving lives. Jinkins writes: "We can learn of mutuality and hospitality, openness and grace from the God who eternally empties himself into another and who in divine self-emptying is forever filled with the life and love of who is God."⁹ He adds, "it is only in community that we become all we were meant to be because we were created for communion by the God whose very being is in communion, and that it is only

in giving ourselves away that we become truly human because we were created for giving by the giving God."¹⁰

Let this closing hymn be an opening prayer to Father, Son, and Spirit for a renewed, reinvigorated, and dynamic relationship with the triune God as revealed in Jesus – and in the corporate body of Christ, the eternal manifestation of the divine community within the new creation of God's people in Christ.

Knowing You

by Graham Kendrick

All I once held dear, built my life upon,
All this world reveres, and wars to own,
All I once thought gain I have counted loss,
Spent and worthless now, compared to this.

Chorus

Knowing you, Jesus, knowing You,
There is no greater thing.
You're my all, You're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you, Lord.

Now my heart's desire is to know You more,
To be found in you, and known as yours,
To possess by faith what I could not earn,
All-surpassing gift of righteousness.

Chorus

Oh, to know the power of Your risen life,
And to know you in Your suffering.
To become like You in Your death, my Lord,
So with You to live and never die.

Chorus (2x)

Endnotes:

1. Michael Jinkins, *Invitation to Theology*, InterVarsity Press, 2001, pg. 25.
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 91.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 131.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 139.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 173.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 167.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 151.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 240.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 203.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

