

The Meaning Of Communion

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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It might seem strange to refer to the story of Adam and Eve in Eden for a subject on a Communion Sabbath, but there is a valuable lesson for us to consider in this event. We read, "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Genesis 2:21-24.

The phrase on which we want to focus in this passage is "they shall become one flesh," which has meaning as we consider the burden of Christ's prayer recorded in John 17:21 and 23. "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. 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."

This prayer was offered Thursday evening before His arrest and crucifixion. For about three years the twelve disciples had walked with the Master, but there were still flagrant character defects which prevented their complete unity. Self-serving and ambition had brought division among them, and sorrow and sadness to the heart of the Savior. Just before the dinner that we call the Lord's Supper, there had arisen among them a dispute as to who was the greatest.

How could they become the mighty force to change the world when they were splintered by selfishness? How could they represent the agape love of God to the world when disunited by a spirit of self-interest? Christ prayed for them that they would become "one."

Was His prayer answered? Did the Gospel impact the world? Yes! The apostles "turned the world upside down." The light of the Gospel spread to the far reaches of the globe. How did this happen? How was it that a small group of followers, a dozen-less-one, became the force that changed the world?

After Christ's resurrection we read, "He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" John 20:22. "After His ascension He said, "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." Luke 24:49. Then He said, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8. "Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:1-4.

What had happened to make the difference? They had put aside their pet ideas, hadn't they. They were no longer parts, but a whole. They had relinquished the desires for being first and foremost. They had repented of their aim of self-glorification. Now they were "one." Now they could be used by God and entrusted with His powerful Spirit. God had determined that they should not work alone, as separate pieces. The Church was to be a "family." They were to experience a "oneness" similar to that of Adam and Eve. Was this to be a "oneness" that eliminated individuality? No. In the Garden, Adam was Adam, and Eve was Eve. They were "one," and yet they were two distinct persons. The "oneness" in the Church would be similar. Peter would still be Peter, and John would still be John. The members of the Church family wouldn't lose their individuality, but their individuality would be preserved in a unity that superseded personal concerns. Through the Spirit, the Church members would be welded together for a common goal and purpose. They would become "one" in the sense that Christ's prayer anticipated.

In those few days between the ascension of Christ and Pentecost, they were transformed. To this end, Christ had instituted the service which is called Communion. In our language, compound words are constructed for the purpose of emphasis. Prefixes usually underscore the concept of the root of the word. The root of the word "communion," as you can easily see, is "union." In this compound form, it stresses the root idea even more. The service in which we participate today has as its goal the formation of the "oneness" toward which Christ prayed. We are to be completely in unity, entirely one as a Church body. This oneness, this being "of one accord" is essential for the Church to fulfill her mission, for Christ said, "That they may be one so that the world will believe; that they may be perfect in one, that the world may know."

This means that, as the family of God, we put everything said or done by another member in the best possible light. We apply the principles of agape love in our relationships one with another as given by Paul in I Corinthians 13. We are willing to lay aside any personal agenda for the sake of the body. In sport's parlance, we "play for the name on the front of the uniform, not the back."

So the question for us is, Are we willing that Christ's prayer be fulfilled in us, so that His mission can be fulfilled in and through us? Are we willing to set aside our individual differences, overlook our cosmetic variances and let His Spirit mold us into the oneness that Christ desired and prayed for? Are we willing to plead with earnestness to be filled, individually and as a Church, with His Spirit and go forth to share His love with a dying world?