

THANKSGIVING - ON COMMUNION

INTRODUCTION

- A. History of US holiday *Thanksgiving*
1. It originated as a harvest festival first celebrated by the Pilgrims after their first harvest in the New World, Oct. 1621.
 2. President Abraham Lincoln was credited for making it a national holiday in 1863, during the American Civil War.
 3. He called it a national day of *Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens*.
 4. Thanksgiving is a wonderful time for reflection. It should be time to remember the many blessings we have.
 5. Our nation has provided us with many opportunities not available to most people. We have personal freedoms and financial blessings. Most importantly, we have had religious freedom.
 6. In the midst of upcoming holiday activities, let's not forget to give thanks for our spiritual blessings.
- B. History of the Christian concept of Thanksgiving
1. I believe the best picture of Christian thanksgiving is not a turkey with dressing but Jesus' body and blood.
 2. Luke 22:19-20, *And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*
 3. Jesus' instituted one of the best ways to give thanks, Eucharist, a Greek word which means to give thanks.
 5. This activity is also called communion or the Lord's Supper.
 6. Giving thanks for a Christian is like a two-sided coin. One side is contemplation or reflection and the other is action.

CONTEMPLATION

- A. Take time to contemplate the things for which you are thankful.
1. For Christians, we can contemplate the attributes of God, especially how faithful He has been to each of us.
 2. The apostle Paul like to focus on what God had done for him.
 - a. He proclaimed in 2 Corinthians 9:15, *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*
 - b. He described the gift in 2 Corinthians 8:9, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*
 - c. The indescribable gift is God's gift of His Son which is received by God's grace through faith in Christ alone.
- B. Make an effort this month to give thanks for what the indescribable gift means to you.
1. I encourage you to contemplate some theological terms that should help you grasp to a small degree, the indescribable gift of God's grace.
 2. Terms for consideration
 - a. Foreknowledge
 - 1) It is tied to election.
 - 2) Augustine clearly stated, *God elected believers in order that they might believe, not because they already believed....It is only by an act of great compassion that He saves anyone. The condemned receive just what they deserve. The elect receive more than they deserve."*
 - 3) What a gift of grace. Give thanks!
 - b. Adoption
 - 1) It is the act of God which places believers in His family.
 - 2) We who were separated from God because of sin are now part of His family.
 - 3) What a gift of grace. Give thanks!
 - c. Justification
 - 1) It is the act of God whereby we who were dead in sins are declared righteous.
 - 2) Jesus Christ became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. What a gift of grace. Give thanks!
 - d. Sanctification
 - 1) It is the work of God whereby we who are justified are being conformed to the image of Christ.
 - 2) What we believe becomes more and more what we do.
 - 3) What a gift of grace. Give thanks!

e. Glorification

- 1) It is the work of God whereby we who are justified and being sanctified will be fully conformed to the image of Christ.
 - 2) Oh, to be like Him.
 - 3) What a gift of grace. Give thanks!
3. These words are worthy of contemplation and should bring us to the point of giving thanks. He called us; He places us in His family; He gives us right standing; He enables us to live for Him; He is sufficient to bring us blameless into His presence. What a gift of grace!

<i>ACTION</i>

A. How can a Christians turn contemplation to action?

1. I believe one of the best ways to actively give thanks is through communion.
2. It is probably the most controversial event in Christianity. Wars have been fought over it, people have been tortured, even murdered because of their beliefs concerning communion.
3. Theologian Geoffrey Bromiley states, *Perhaps one of the keenest reminders of our Christian fallibility is that of the Lord's Supper, instituted as a simple act promoting fellowship, has become the subject of complicated debate and blatant division.*

B. Why has there been so much controversy?

1. Debate has centered primarily on the elements.
2. Some defend transubstantiation, the bread and the wine are changed into the very body and blood of Christ.
3. Others hold to consubstantiation, the bread and the wine become the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ while keeping the appearance of bread and wine.
4. I hold to the memorial position, the bread and wine signify Christ's redemptive work received by faith yet acknowledging the presence of Christ in our midst.

C. Early church comments on communion

1. *Didache* (2nd century instruction manual), *On the Lord's own day come together and break bread and give thanks...Whoever is holy, let him come; whoever is not, let him repent.*
2. Irenaeus (2nd century bishop), *The partakers now engage in a spiritual service and enter by communion into the presence of God while the elements remain as they were...The souls of believers are nourished because God superintends the service and by His grace feeds and blesses His own.*
3. Augustine (4th century theologian), *What is seen is the bread and the cup which the eyes renounce; but what faith demands is that the bread is the body of Christ and the cup is His blood.*
4. John Wycliffe (14th century Bible translator and theologian), *Nobody on earth is able to see Christ in the consecrated Host with the bodily eye, but by faith.*

D. Why is communion so important?

1. It is a community event,
 - a. It was instituted by our Lord - it is not an option or luxury.
 - b. Jesus Christ is host at His own table- we are his guests.
 - c. It is not a useless ceremony - it has purpose.
 - 1) It is a time of fellowship
 - a) 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*
 - b) It pictures the unity of the Body of Christ - an expression of fellowship, with God and each other through Christ.
 - c) Since we are reconciled to God, we can and must be reconciled to each other.
 - 2) It is a time of remembrance
 - a) 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, *and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*
 - b) He died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay the penalty for our sins and to provide a place in Heaven for us.

- c) He is: the infinite God - Man
 - d) He instituted communion in a Passover setting.
 - 1] As the Passover reenacts the meal on the eve of redemption out of Egypt, so the Lord's Supper reenacts the meal on the eve of liberation from sin and death.
 - 2] The Passover lamb is the Lamb of God.
 - e) He emphasizes our need to receive nourishment from Him - Jesus is our means of spiritual growth.
- 3) A time of proclamation
- a) 1 Corinthians 11:26, *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*
 - b) It looks to the past.
 - 1] It is a declaration of the Gospel.
 - 2] Augustine called it a *visible word* of substitutionary atonement, a feast of liberation.
 - c) It looks to the future.
 - 1] It is a reminder of our certain hope.
 - 2] Our fellowship will be perfect when Christ returns.
 - 3] Geoffrey Bromiley, "He has given us this table, insignificant and even pointless in the eyes of secular man, but eloquent to believers as a sign of things past and ...things to come.
- 3) It is a time of self-examination
- a) 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*
 - b) Do I have saving faith - have I placed my faith in Christ alone for eternal life? If not, do so now.
 - c) Do I have proper motivation - am I at this table trying to gain favor with God instead of thanking Him for the full favor I have in Christ? If not, release yourself to His grace.
 - d) Am I carrying a burden of unconfessed sins? If so, lay them at the cross.

CONCLUSION

- A. It is good to contemplate n things worthy of thanksgiving.
- B. It is good to take communion in a worthy manner, giving thanks in community.
- C. Jesus Christ is worthy to be praised at Thanksgiving and every other time of the year.