

Sermon 33: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22: Reasons to flee idol feasts

OUTLINE

The Lord's Supper is a participation in Christ
The Lord's Supper is a participation with the saints
The idol feasts are a participation with demons
God is jealous!

INTRODUCTION

What does the Lord's Supper mean to you? Some make too much of the Lord's Supper seeing it as part of their salvation. For the traditional Roman Catholic, the mass is a bloodless sacrifice for sin, that needs a priest to offer it, and is able to renew one's justification. The host literally becomes Jesus body and blood and can be worshipped as Jesus Himself. This is to go beyond what the Bible says about the Lord's Supper and into dangerous error. But we in the evangelical side of the church often make too little of the Lord's Supper. We do not remember that it is a commandment of Christ that we are to obey, like Baptism. It is not treated as a church ordinance to be done with God's people but has often been reduced to a personal devotional, or family devotional tool. For many it is an optional extra that is nothing more than an empty symbol through which no real blessing comes. There are many misunderstandings surrounding the Lord's Supper, and it was the same in Corinth. You will remember that the Corinthians were flirting with idolatry by eating the meat offered to idols. Paul is now going to call upon these Corinthians to stop the practice of going to the temple or the halls adjoining the temples and eating meat in those religious settings because it amounts to idolatry. What he does in this next section is use the spiritual nature of the Lord's Supper to show that there is a spiritual participation with demons when you eat their meat.

Paul has given some very strong warnings to the Corinthians in 10:1-13. He has addressed the sins of idolatry, sexual immorality, testing Christ by demanding the meat pots of Egypt and grumbling against the leaders. In this section he gives a big imperative, 'flee idolatry.' And by this he means stop your practice of going into temples and eating their meat. And then he enters into a theological discussion about the spiritual nature of these meals giving reasons for why they should flee this brand of idolatry. There are at least 4 reasons he gives. Firstly, he reminds us that the Lord's Supper is a spiritual participation with Christ, v16. Secondly, the Lord's Supper is a participation with our fellow worshippers, v17. V18 is thrown in to strengthen the participation in spiritual benefits by showing from the OT how the OT worshipper benefitted from what was offered on the altar and then eaten. Thirdly, Paul then moves from the spiritual nature of the Lord's Supper to the spiritual nature of these idol feasts showing us that it is a participation with the demonic. And after demonstrating that eating this meat in this way is not a matter of indifference he ends with his final warnings, God is jealous and will not tolerate idolatry. By lifting their view of the supper and seeing its true nature, he is able to highlight the spiritual danger in their foolish practices.

The Lord's Supper is a participation in Christ

V14, 'Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.' Here we can see that Paul is linking his call to flee idolatry to the warnings he gives in v1-13. You will notice

that Paul seeks to remind the Corinthians of his love for them, he does this when he is about to give some hard words. This reminds them that this comes from love. But notice his emphasis, 'flee' not 'flirt.' He calls the Corinthians to flee sexual immorality 1 Cor. 6:18 because it is a dangerous and contaminating sin. Likewise he wants the Corinthians who have been so blasé about eating meat offered to idols in idol temples to flee idolatry because it is likewise a contaminating, hateful and dangerous sin. This would be surprising to the Corinthians. The common practice in the ancient world was partaking in the worship and the meals of multiple gods. Polytheism was not seen as disloyalty to one's god, but rather a way of covering all your bases. You had a god for health, a god for journeys, a god for fertility, a god for war. It was a common practice to have multiple gods and attend multiple temples. Paul is saying a Christian who worships the one true God cannot, and cannot make light of going into those temples and eating their meals.

V15, 'I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.' Paul calls for the Corinthians to judge for themselves that they should no longer be doing what they are doing. He wants to lay down some evidence before them that makes the logical conclusion that they should stop eating idol meat in idol temples obvious. The first way he does this is by revealing the spiritual nature of the Lord's Supper.

V16, '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?' I agree with Richard Barcellos when he writes, 'This may be the most important text on the *nature* of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace in the New Testament.'¹ Paul is building on a deeper understanding of meals than we do today. Today you have TV meals; you have fast-food and drive thru meals; food is often viewed as fuel where families will have their own selective and different meals not even sitting down to eat at the same time. Paul in the ancient world is drawing on a richer culture around eating. Meals were a social contract and bond where a host who offered hospitality offered protection from enemies. Meals were sacrosanct and enemies could sit down and be safe if eating a meal together. Meals had a community element that united people and identified people as a group. Meals had a ceremonial aspect. Meals also were very religious and all the religions had meals as a sign of communion with their gods. Christianity has a long history of covenantal meals. In Ex. 24 when God confirms the covenant with Israel and they are consecrated with blood, the leaders then sit down to a covenantal meal signing their new unity with one another. The Passover is another important meal in the Bible which speaks of God's deliverance, our identity, and our duty to be holy. Sacrificial meals like the peace offering were made where those who brought the sacrifice would then also be able to eat it in God's presence signifying God's presence and goodness to them.

Paul in this verse refers to the cup of blessing that we bless, 2 major ideas would likely have occurred to the first century mind were 1. The cup of blessing is a cup of thanksgiving and blessing towards God. This understanding seems to find support in the fact that Jesus Himself gave thanks for the cup at the Last Supper, Matt. 26:27, 'And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you.'" 2. The language also carries the

¹ — The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace by Richard C. Barcellos
<https://a.co/8v29x8i>

connotations of consecration, when something is blessed, it is set apart for religious use, in other words separated for exclusive religious use towards God.

Paul then writes, '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?' Here is where the spiritual nature of the meal comes up. The two questions we want to answer are, what is meant by 'participation'? And, how do we participate in the body and blood of Christ? That word 'participation' is the Greek word 'koinonia.' It has a broad semantic domain. It can mean something purely external like loosely affiliated with, being identified with, outwardly associated with. Social clubs, political groups, these have a type of fellowship or union that is purely external. But Paul means something internal and spiritual. He uses the same word in 1 Cor. 1:9, 'God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.' What sort of fellowship do we have with Jesus, we have been called by the power of the Spirit to become one by the Spirit with our head, Jesus Christ. We are in Him, one with Him, by the Holy Spirit. Another way we know that Paul means something spiritual and internal is because he is comparing our participation with Christ to how those who are idolaters participate with demons. It is no mere external association but a deep contact with the spiritual realities behind those actions that he is concerned with. The Corinthians had reduced their eating meat offered to idols to the physical act of eating, Paul is highlighting the spiritual realities concerned.

So when we partake of the Lord's Supper we have fellowship/communion/participation with Christ. But what does Paul mean when he says that we participate in the blood and body of Christ? Here a little church history is necessary. The first 1500 years of the church believed in what we call a 'real presence' view. They believed that the literal body and the literal blood of Jesus was present at communion. The early church had a view we call transelementation. There was a variety of views that all affirmed that Jesus was literally present and that the bread and wine somehow become the body and blood of Jesus. There were some attempts to explain it but it was more a mystery to be adored than explained. Then during the medieval era things began to concretize in a more philosophical direction. And through the influence of Thomas Aquinas there arose the view of transubstantiation. This view borrowing heavily from Aristotle taught that the external elements of the bread and wine remain unchanged, but that the internal substance of the bread and wine are miraculously changed into the literal body and blood of Jesus. So you taste the element of bread but partake of the literal substance of Christ's body. This became dogma in the Roman Catholic Church. Martin Luther in the 1500s disagreed with this sophistry yet still held to a real presence view. In his ingenuity he came up with what is now called consubstantiation. Luther taught that the human nature of Christ took on divine properties, so that the human body of Jesus could now be everywhere present, omnipresent. In this way Luther maintained that bread and wine are not changed but the omnipresent human nature of Jesus ensured that His body and blood were present with every observance of communion. Luther could not get past a literal reading of Christ's words 'this is my body,' and insisted on finding a way for the literal body and blood of Christ to be present. Luther had a famous opponent in the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli too rejected the view of transubstantiation but also denied any real engagement with the body and blood of Christ. His view has been dubbed the memorial view because he stressed that the meal remembered a past event, that it symbolized something that was not there, the body and blood of Christ. We hold to the view of the spiritual presence of Christ

in the Lord's Supper and view held and taught by Calvin and is taught in all the Reformed confessions.

Calvin studied the Bible, and he saw that in Paul's own understanding there were two key biblical ideas that many were not considering in their attempt to explain the language of participating in the body and blood of Christ. The doctrine of our union with Christ and the doctrine of the Spirit of Christ. As you read the scriptures you begin to see certain ideas like salvation being 'in Christ,' or as John puts it being grafted into the Vine who is Christ. When we get saved, every believer receives the Spirit who unites us to the body of Christ and the Head who is Christ. This is a spiritual union where those benefits that Christ has for us are ours by the Spirit through our union with Him. Let me give one example of this, Eph. 2:4-6, 'But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' Here Paul is describing how we received eternal life. We were dead in sin, incapable of any goodness or even faith itself. But then God made the first move in His sovereign grace, because no one can come to Christ but the Father draw him. God unites us to Christ, and in being made one with Christ the death that pervaded us was expelled as the life giving influence of Christ's own resurrection life resurrected us into new life. Remember the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power by which God is working in us. The Holy Spirit like plugging us into a power socket plugs us into Christ and the life that is in Christ enlivens us. The Spirit mediates that which Christ has for us and communicates it to us. But more than that this union we see denies the laws of physics. Paul tells us that we are right now seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father. How is this possible? The Holy Spirit is, forgive the phrase, like a worm hole that makes time and space irrelevant uniting us to the head of the body which is Christ. His literal body is in heaven, we don't have to make His human nature omnipresence for us to have union with Him, the Spirit unites us to Christ and we are blessed that way.

So does the believer have literal communion with the literal body and blood of Jesus? The answer is yes, but spiritually. We don't understand all the mechanics in how this works, we are given glimpses in how the Spirit does a number of impossible things that we did not realize. What this means for us is that we have a real communion by the Spirit with the resurrected Christ. This view is also the spiritual presence view for this reason. When we come to the Lord's Supper you participate in all the benefits of Christ's blood shed for His church as you are literally one with Him. That blood which cleanses us from sin, that blood which is consecrates the new covenant people of God, by faith we benefit afresh from the once shed blood of the resurrected Christ. The Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice for sins. His resurrected body, that body that we are united to by the Spirit, that body which is the head which gives life to the rest of the body pours strength into our lives by the Spirit. Where Zwingli speaks of us obtaining a blessing at the Lord's Supper through our faith only in remembering, Calvin recognizes that Paul has a deeper and mysterious teaching where we actually have communion with the living Christ and are benefitted through the supper by the Spirit. The Reformed speak of the union of the sign and the thing signified. It is not an empty symbol but a sign that by the Spirit brings us into real union with the resurrected Lord. Here is how the 1689 Baptist Confession puts it, 30:7, 'Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but

spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.’ As real as the bread and wine are to your five senses, so really is Christ present to you by the Spirit through faith. Christ is present to bless His people not absent.

So all of this to say, Paul is saying don’t get mixed up idol feasts, because we know that these spiritual meals bring us into contact with real spiritual realities.

The Lord’s Supper is a participation with the saints

V17, ‘Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.’ Here is Paul’s second argument for why you should flee idolatry by not eating meat in idol temples. Paul points to part of the symbolism of the loaf. There is a single loaf from which all the individuals in the church partake. Christ is the Bread, and we are all partakers of Him represented by our eating and being nourished by the bread. But the act of eating with other believers signals that we are co-beneficiaries, we are a single people, a single organism, signaled by our sharing of the one loaf. Eating from this one loaf is an act of solidarity, it communicates who our people are, who we are one body with in Christ. This idea of being one body is once again not a loose affiliation, but we are individually members one of another. We are a Spirit wrought entity that has a profound unity in diversity. Paul’s point is simple. If Communion communicates that we are one body, that we are attached to and belong to one another, that we are set apart as belonging to Christ; what do you think eating at idols feasts says about our identity with those who are idolaters? For this reason I do not pray with a Muslim or a Jehovah’s Witness; I do not worship with the Catholics where the Mass is being held up for adoration. Worship, prayer, and eating a religious meal is a sign of solidarity with those people.

V18, ‘Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?’ Paul uses the OT to pull the two ideas he has put forward so far. Firstly, those who eat a religious meal are communicating in a spiritual act that brings blessings to the worshipper; and secondly, this act when shared with others affirms your common identity with them. The OT people of God, Israel telegraphed their identity and unity as God’s people by participating in the same worship and meals; and those who brought sacrifices by faith would receive the forgiveness of sins. We know that these OT sacrifices are types of Christ, and those who partook by faith would receive the salvation spoken of, the reconciliation spoken of, the forgiveness and payment of sin spoken of by these sacrifices. This close identity with the deity involved and the worshippers of that deity are an argument by Paul for why they should flee the idolatry they are engaging in.

The idol feasts are a participation with demons

V19-21, ‘What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.’ Now Paul is anticipating the objections of the Corinthians, they have argued that idols are nothing, that eating the meat offered to idols in an idols temple is not dangerous because idols do not exist.

Paul anticipates that they will want to push back at what he is saying, and he expects the accusation that he is making something of idols when they are nothing. Anticipating this he denies that idols are anything, these other so called gods do not exist. He clarifies his concern. He is not worried that these other gods are real, no he knows that the spiritual realities behind these false gods are demons. What a revelation! The real truth behind Buddhism; Islam; Hinduism; the New Age Movement; Wicca; or any other false religion you care to mention is demons. Satan and his fallen angels are deceiving this world and they stand behind the deceptions of all false religions. This means that the lying signs and wonders that many false religions claim, are they real, I believe that they often can be because of this demonic reality. Many false miracles are bogus, the devil is exploiting our naivety and gullibility there. But there are true demonic miracles too.

Does Paul fear that the Christian will get demon possessed? Christians cannot be demon possessed, though if they play with sin and these sorts of situations no doubt, like Job, satan will be allowed to oppress the believer. Paul is warning the Christians about this demonic reality not because he fears they will be possessed, but because God does not tolerate it.

God is jealous

V22, 'Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?' Ex. 20:3-4, 'You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.' Jealousy in God is righteous, it is the zeal that God has for His own glory; it is the insistence on that which is right and true with regard to our devotion to Him. He is worthy of our worship, He alone I; it is sinful to give it to another; God's justice will act against those who refuse to recognize His glory and act in truth. To toy with idolatry is to run the risk of provoking God's jealousy. Now we could do a long study on how God is impassible and how this is human language to communicate analogically something about God in the language of human emotion. But I don't want you to miss the point of this language. It is drawing on the strongest feelings we are familiar with, a husband who is jealous faithful love of his wife, and vice versa; a desire fueled by righteous anger, that will use all its power to brook no rivals. God uses the language of adultery to describe idolatry which fits right into this idea of jealousy.

How do we apply these verses today? Here are two things we can apply for ourselves. Firstly, are you provoking the jealousy of God? James 4:4-5, 'You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? You may not be toying with other religions, but is your heart dedicated to God. Do you love Him with all your mind, soul and strength? Have you grown cold to His love and are allowing your eyes and heart to dwell on those things that are not right? Secondly, and here I want to prepare us as we come again to the Lord's Supper, do you realize the blessings that are ours as we come to the table today? These

elements are symbols, they do not point to that which is absent but what is present. Christ dwells with His people to bless them, and as surely as you are nourished by the bread and cup so surely do you receive Christ's blessings by faith. We have heard the audible word of God, we have heard of Jesus who died for us to give us life, who became the guilty one to make the guilty one innocent. And here we have the visible word acting as a seal to confirm the gospel we have heard. This is not a sacrifice for Christ has been sacrificed, we do not eat Jesus literal body and flesh but we are benefitted from his resurrection life by the Spirit. We do not commune with His literal body and blood because He has been dragged out of heaven, no but we do have real communion with Christ by the Spirit being one with Him. This action reinforces visibly and physically through the act of eating and drinking what is true by the Spirit through by faith.