

Cornerstone Baptist Church

*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?
(1 Corinthians 10:16 ESV)*

The Cup Of The Lord (And The Cup Of Demons)

October 11th, 2020

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Well good morning church! I'd love for you to open your Bibles, if you have one with you, to 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. We are going to take a little break from our series in 1 John because today is a very special day. It is the first time we've been back at the table as a church in just over 7 months. That is by far the longest absence from the Lord's Supper in the history of this church.

So today is a big day and I thought it might be appropriate for us to look at one of the passages in the New Testament that teach us about the meaning of communion.

Most of us are very familiar with the Apostle Paul's teaching on communion from 1 Corinthians 11, but we've looked at that several times and I don't believe we have ever yet looked together at what Paul says here in chapter 10. In chapter 10 Paul is coming to the end of a 3-chapter long answer to the question:

“Can we as Christians participate in the feasts and festivals associated with pagan worship?”

And I'm sure you can have some sympathy with those who were asking that question. Imagine for example that you as a Canadian Christian converted to a new religion. At some point you would probably write to your new priest or shaman or whatever and you would ask: “Can I still celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving with my family? I really like turkey and we don't ever eat turkey except at these quasi-Christian festivals. Can I do that without offending my new god?”

You can imagine that can't you?

Well that is exactly what is going on here.

And the issue, apparently, was creating division in the church. The "more mature" Christians were saying that because pagan gods don't really exist, then there is really no problem with us participating in these pagan feasts. But the younger believers, the more recent converts, they hadn't quite got there, and so they felt like they were doing something spiritually damaging.

So in chapter 8 Paul concedes a fair bit of the argument being made by these "more mature" Christians. "Yes, you are quite right that there is no pagan god behind these silly festivals. However, you have failed to consider the spiritual health and well-being of the weaker brother."

That's the climax of the first part of Paul's argument. You can see that in 1 Corinthians 8:13:

"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." (1 Corinthians 8:13 ESV)

"I am perfectly happy to never eat turkey again", we would say using our modern-day example, "if eating turkey would cause my new brothers and sisters to stumble in our common faith."

That should be the attitude of the truly mature believer. The mature believer ought to be willing to forego all manner of pleasures and privileges in order to support and encourage his younger brothers and sisters in the faith.

That's chapter 8.

Then in chapter 9 Paul illustrates that from his own life as an apostle. He has been willing to forego all manner of privileges in order to reach as many people as possible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's Olympic level faith – he says in verses 24-25:

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do

it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.” (1 Corinthians 9:24–25 ESV)

“I am competing for an eternal gold medal! I want to stand on the podium and receive commendation from Jesus – therefore I am not about to hinder my own ministry so that I can eat turkey.”

Then in chapter 10 he further illustrates from the history of Israel. He says that the Old Testament church had to think their way through this as well – and some people made poor decisions. Some people ate the spiritual bread and drank the spiritual drink but then also thought it would be fun to participate in some of the feasts of the Moabites and 24,000 people were killed BY GOD in a single day.

That’s the lead up to the THEREFORE that begins the passage that we’re going to take a look at today. So hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 14:

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹ 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. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:14–22 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

In this clinching argument in this 3-chapter long answer to their original question, Paul reminds the Corinthians of what they already KNOW about communion – and then he says, since we all agree that this is true, how could any of you even ask the question as to whether it is wise for us to be going to pagan festivals. It is not. So let’s not go there. Let us rather FLEE from idolatry.

For our purposes this morning, I am more interested in WHAT PAUL SAID than in WHY HE ACTUALLY SAID IT. I don't suspect that there are a ton of people in here thinking about going to some pagan festivals this weekend. Because of COVID19 you aren't even allowed to go to the CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS that are happening this weekend – but I do see a room full of people who have come for the Lord's Supper this morning and who may profit from a reminder of what Paul says that all Christians ought to know about the Table.

So let's take a look together at what he assumes is common knowledge in the church of Jesus Christ.

4 Things We All Ought To Know About Communion:

The first thing he expects us to know is that:

1. The cup that we bless is a participation in the blood of Christ

“I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:15–16 ESV)

These are RHETORICAL questions, obviously with each of them expecting the answer YES. Yes, the cup of blessing that we bless IS a participation in the blood of Christ. Every Christian ought to know that – so let's make sure that we do.

As always in the New Testament a fair bit of familiarity with the Old Testament is assumed. Christianity is the fulfillment of the promises made in the Old Testament. So the fruit can never be understood apart from the ROOT.

So it is here.

The Lord's Supper is the fulfillment of the Passover. It is what the Passover POINTED FORWARD TO – and Paul assumes that we understand that connection when he refers to “the cup of blessing that we bless”.

The Pillar New Testament Commentary says here:

“The Lord’s Supper, like the Last Supper, was based upon the Passover *Seder* and Paul’s comments here should be understood in the light of that context. The final cup of the Passover meal (and the Last Supper) was called the “cup of blessing.” Just as participation in the Passover celebration entailed participation in the benefits of the Passover sacrifice, so participation in the Lord’s Supper entails participation in the benefits of his sacrificial death on the cross.”¹

Alright, so just as you had to take the blood of the lamb and put it on the doorposts of your house if you wanted to participate in the redemption that God was working for the Israelites in the Old Testament – and just as you later came to commemorate that in a prayer spoken over the cup of blessing in the Passover ritual, so here. When we give thanks over the cup and when you take that cup and drink it – you are applying the blood of Christ to the doorposts of your heart.

Do you understand that?

When you drink the cup you are coating your heart in the Blood of the Lamb.

Not as some kind of magic PAINT – but as a gesture of faith. Leon Morris says here:

“Those who receive the cup rightly receive Christ.”²

So this is a real thing if done in faith. The cup that we bless IS a participation in the blood of Christ. Every Christian ought to know that, and in parallel with that, every Christian ought to know that:

2. The bread that we break is a participation in the body of Christ

John Calvin certainly expected his people to know that. He said:

¹Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 474.

²Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Acordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 143.

“You understand the efficacy of the sacred Supper: in it we are ingrafted into the Lord’s body.”³

So communion makes us ONE FLESH with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – the closest analogy for that is the relationship between a husband and wife. Paul makes that connection explicitly in Ephesians 5. He says:

“In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, **just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.**” (Ephesians 5:28–30 ESV)

So a husband should ASSUME care over his wife’s body because she has been made one flesh with him through the covenant of marriage. This is a reflection of the GREATER TRUTH that Jesus assumes care for us as people because we have been made members of HIS BODY.

We are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

Thus, communion is a sort of wedding ceremony. Each time we take it we are renewing our wedding vows and reaffirming our one flesh union with Jesus Christ.

Now, the body and the blood of Jesus are OVERLAPPING realities and concepts. To say that you participate in the blood of Christ is to identify particularly with the death of Christ. To say that you participate in the body of Christ is to identify particularly with his life and his provision. Jesus loves his body by nourishing it and cherishing it.

So when you drink the cup you are coating the doorposts of your heart with the blood of the Lamb. You are identifying with God’s work of redemption through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. And when you eat the bread you are joining yourself in holy union with Jesus. You are saying: I give myself to you. Take care of me. Feed me. Lead me. Love me. Protect me.

Taking communion is a statement of trust and devotion.

³John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 83399. Colon added by me as it appears in my paper copy by Baker Books, page 334.

Paul also expects them to know that:

3. The bread that we eat is one because the people of God are one

Look at verse 17:

“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:17 ESV)

Matthew Henry provides his own amplified translation of this verse which I like very much. He says:

“By partaking of one broken loaf, the emblem of our Saviour’s broken body, who is the only true bread that came down from heaven, we coalesce into one body, become members of him and one another.”⁴

Do you know that phrase: “Blood is thicker than water”? Well this verse is saying that blood and bread is thicker than any other bond in human life and society.

Do you understand that?

Because if you understand that then you understand that the people you take communion with today ARE your ultimate family. This is your family.

In Mark’s Gospel Jesus was teaching a large crowd that had gathered to hear him and someone broke through the crowd to give him a message. He said:

“Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.”³³ And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”³⁴ And looking about at **those who sat around him**, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” (Mark 3:32–34 ESV)

Do you understand that?

⁴Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged)*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 39906.

The people gathered around the table – the people participating in the body and blood of Jesus this morning ARE YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR BROTHERS. That is a constituent element of the Christian faith – do you understand that? Or better yet, do you accept that, because if you don't accept that, then you cannot be a disciple of the Lord. Jesus said that. He said:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26 ESV)

I quoted that verse in last week's sermon and one of our young people – a teenager – sent me a text that afternoon asking me to explain further what this verse was saying. He wanted to understand. He wanted to be a DOER of God's Word and not a HEARER only – so he asked for clarification, because this VERSE is SEEMINGLY asking the impossible. Part of the difficulty of course, has to do with the word “hate”. Surely Jesus doesn't want us to hate our moms and dads. James Edwards is helpful here. He says:

“Hate” in v. 26 should not be understood in terms of emotion or malice, but rather in its Hebraic sense, signifying the thing rejected in a choice between two important claims, e.g., “I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated” (Mal 1:2–3; Rom 9:13).⁵

So “hate” means to make a choice. It means to turn away from something in order to CHOOSE something else and Jesus says if you can't turn away from your family in order to embrace me and to become part of this family, then you cannot be my disciple.

So again this doctrine that Paul expects everyone to know, is not NEXT LEVEL Christianity – it is not something only for those who are extra committed – it is ENTRY LEVEL Christianity. If you can't do this – if you won't do this – then you cannot be his disciple.

Paul expects everyone to know that that this is part of what is going on at the Lord's Supper. When you take the bread – your piece of the common loaf – you are saying – this is my family now. Here are my mothers, my brothers and my sisters.

⁵James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 426.

Think that through before you take that bread and put it in your mouth.

Then fourthly and lastly, Paul expects them to understand that:

4. Sitting at this table requires exclusive loyalty and commitment

Look at verse 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.” (1 Corinthians 10:21 ESV)

This is the 1st century version of the saying: “You cannot have your cake and eat it too.” You cannot be a hokey pokey Christian, with your one foot in and your one foot out and you do the hokey pokey and you drive the Spirit out.

That’s what Paul is saying.

Christians today spend far too little time contemplating the danger of grieving the Spirit – but Paul was always reminding his people of that danger. He said to the Ephesians:

“do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Ephesians 4:30 ESV)

Towards that end he told them earlier in the same passage:

“you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do” (Ephesians 4:17 ESV)

That’s the issue. Even if there are no actual pagan gods behind all these festivals and celebrations – the goal – the demonic goal behind it all - is to get you living like a pagan. So if you don’t believe in the pagan gods but you still end up acting in accordance with demonic suggestion, then you have by definition committed the sin of idolatry. That’s what Paul said earlier on in 1 Corinthians 10. He said:

Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.”⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did (1 Corinthians 10:7–8 ESV)

You can’t take communion – you can’t unite yourself to the body and blood of the Lord – and then go out and act like a pagan. Paul has been hammering this point throughout the letter. He said in chapter 6:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.”¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality.” (1 Corinthians 6:15–18 ESV)

So again – Paul expects them to know this – and they do know this, they just haven’t wrestled with the implications of knowing this. You KNOW that when you take communion you are becoming one body with Jesus Christ. Communion is like your wedding ceremony. So who goes out from their wedding ceremony to have sex with a prostitute? That’s insane. You can’t do that. You can’t become ONE FLESH WITH HER – if you are going to be ONE FLESH WITH JESUS.

So you need to decide. If you are going to come to Christ at the table today then you need to flee from sexual immorality.

Contemporary Application:

Now, as I said, our primary interest today was in seeing what Paul expected every Christian to KNOW about the Table of the Lord. But as always, we’re expected to make appropriate application of the THINGS WE KNOW to the WAY WE LIVE. The Apostle John was reminding his people of that in the passage we looked at last week, and the Apostle Paul is expecting his people to do the same thing in the passage we are looking at today. We are never supposed to merely UNDERSTAND the FACTS of Christian doctrine. We are always supposed to be asking: SO WHAT? So let’s end by doing that. How should these FACTS, how should these DOCTRINES AFFECT how or if we come to the table today?

The first implication I think is fairly obvious – it is in fact the implication that Paul is hammering out in this passage. He is saying:

1. We shouldn't come to the Table if we are divided in our loyalty to Christ

If you are CURRENTLY indulging in sexual immorality; if you are CURRENTLY in a settled arrangement of sexual immorality then obviously you shouldn't come to the Table of Jesus Christ until you have RENOUNCED THAT and RE-ORDERED YOUR LIFE appropriately. Or:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 6:15 ESV)

You can't come to Christ while you are joined to immorality. If you do that – if you express a divided loyalty at the table today, you risk provoking the Lord to anger – Paul says that in verse 22:

Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:22 ESV)

Are you up for this fight? Only a fool picks a fight with God, so if you are coming to the Table today make sure HE KNOWS whose side you are on. Make sure that your lifestyle choices LOOK LIKE the lifestyle choices of a child of God – that's what we're saying here. Spend some time thinking about that – because the failure to think about that is the reason that some of you are sick and that some of you have died – that's not my opinion, that's what Paul says in the next chapter. He says:

That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. (1 Corinthians 11:30–31 ESV)

So judge yourselves. Find the sin, renounce the sin and go to the cross for forgiveness – and only then should you take of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The second implication for us today is this:

2. We should only come to the Table if we are willing to be integrated into the Body of Christ

Again, Jesus said:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26 ESV)

He goes on in that passage to say:

“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:28 ESV)

Count the cost, brothers and sisters. Ask yourself the question: if I have to let go of my immediate family in order to hold on to Jesus and my ULTIMATE FAMILY – the family gathered today around the table of Christ – am I willing to do that?

Ask yourself that question before you come to the Body and Blood of Christ.

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body (1 Corinthians 10:17 ESV)

So this is it. This is your ACTUAL FAMILY – so if you don’t like them – or if you won’t think of them as your mothers and your brothers and your sisters – then don’t come. Only come if you can look at the people around you and RECEIVE THEM as your true family in Christ.

Then thirdly, and lastly:

3. We should only come to the Table if we are desperate for the life and benefits of Christ

This is not a magic table and this is not magic bread. The sacraments of the Lord only work if they are received by a heart of faith. The same is true of baptism, by the way. In 1 Peter 3:21 Peter says:

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21 ESV)

So baptism SAVES YOU not as a removal of dirt from the body – not as a mere ritual, not as a bath in magic water. That ISN'T HOW baptism saves you. Baptism saves you only if it is an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Only if you KNOWINGLY and WHOLEHEARTEDLY AFFIRM the meaning behind the ritual does it have any real and lasting effect.

Otherwise – it is just a bathtub full of water folks. There is nothing magical in there!

Same thing for the table. There is nothing magical about these elements. If you don't have faith then this is just a tiny cup of juice and little piece of gluten free bread.

And I don't even like juice – and I really don't like gluten free bread. So this truly is NOTHING if it is not received in faith.

But if it is then it is everything. If you come today with a spiritual hunger and a real faith reaching out toward this table – TOWARD CHRIST - then this bread and this cup is EVERYTHING.

It is the blood of the Lamb on the doorposts of your heart.

It is integration into the Body of Christ and the assurance of his care and provision.

It is 100 mothers. 100 brothers. 100 sisters. 100 houses in the family of God through Christ.

By the grace of God this table is EVERYTHING for those who come in faith. So let us prepare now to GIVE THANKS for the Body and the Blood of the Lord. Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.