

One Bread – One Body

Come to God's Table

Taste of His Mercy – Savor His Love

Text: *1 Corinthians 10:1-24*

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.”

Introduction:

This morning we have observed a wonderful gift the Lord has given to His people – an invitation to come and participate in a meal prepared lovingly and intentionally by His own hands! We call this meal communion. Admittedly, when we observe it with a small container of grape juice and a tiny unleavened wafer it may not seem like much of a meal, much less a feast.

When you and I think of a feast – we think of a table filled to overflowing with an abundance of food and drink – all available to us so that we can eat and drink as much as we want and our heart desires. We also think of feasts as joyful times filled with laughter and fellowship with other people who also have been invited to the feast.

Because of how we have become accustomed to celebrating communion in our own day and age, we often lose the impact I believe God intended this wonderful gift to have in our lives. For example, think of the words we use to describe our participation: “we observe it; we take communion; we partake of it.” Or think of how we observe communion – often it is a ten-minute add-on to a normal service or it is a spiritual rite or ritual we need to make sure we do because it is part of what God told His church to do from time to time.

However, when Jesus introduced communion to His followers, he did so at one of the most sacred and joy-filled feasts of the Jewish year—Passover! Furthermore, when Paul elaborated and regulated this important celebration for the Church at Corinth, he described it as a feast that was to be marked by *joyful thanksgiving*/blessing (1 Cor 10:16a), *relational unity* (1 Cor 10:17), *genuine affectionate love* (Jude 12), *covenant loyalty* (1 Cor 11:23-26), and *devoted purity* to God (1 Cor 11:27-29).

This morning, as we celebrate this wonderful meal together, I want to look at Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians's 10 to help us come to this table for the right purpose, in the right way, and with the right heart toward God and toward each other.

To help us do this, I want to look at the background and context to this important celebration and then make four observations from this text.

Religious Feasts at Corinth

- Corinth, like Ephesus, was filled with temples. Each temple represented the dwelling place of a particular god that was important to the prosperity and protection of the city and its inhabitants.
- Pagans were very conscious of their gods and were careful to invoke their presence, appeal to their favor, and honor their names in every area of their private and public lives.
- Most major life events were observed under the favor of a particular god who was honored by a prayer, a sacrifice, and a feast. In the normal course of daily living, one could expect to receive regular invitations to come to a particular temple to participate in a feast marking some important life event for a family member, business associate, or friend.
- However, as you ate the food dedicated to that deity, you were doing several things: 1) you were honoring that god; 2) you were acknowledging that god's power for good or evil in the life of the host; 3) you were acknowledging before everyone your solidarity or partnership with everyone else at that temple feast and with that deity.

- Furthermore, in joining a feast like this you were expected to participate in all the pagan revelry that was part of this feast – which almost always involved sensuality that often led to immorality.
- Moreover, failure to attend a feast that you were invited to was viewed as a major breach not just with that group but with the whole community of which you were a part. Therefore, for Christians the cost for not participating could be extraordinarily great.
- However, for a Christian, the cost of participating was even greater than a breach with their community because Paul makes clear that such participation creates a massive breach with God and His people, and places one in danger of the wrath of Someone much greater and real than any of the pagan gods of the city (1 Cor 10:18-22).
- Thus, for these early Christians, invitations to such feasts were not a source of joy; and participation was spiritually damaging because it always involved disloyalty to God through the sin of idolatry, and to carnality because such feasts often led to immorality.
- However, for these new Christians there was another kind of feast that led to real joy, great benefit, and true blessing. This feast had its roots in the feasts God had given his people in the OT.

Religious Feasts in the Old Testament (Leviticus 23)

- Seven divinely appointed feasts were designed to help Israel celebrate God's presence, protection, and provision as a nation.
- They were divided into three major periods: ***Spring Feasts***: Passover, unleavened bread, first-fruits; ***Summer Feast***: Feast of Weeks/Passover; ***Fall Feasts***: Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Booths.
- They were to be observed together (the entire nation), at a central location (temple in Jerusalem), at specific times (three pilgrimages), commemorating God's redemptive history for the nation.
- These feasts were ***marked by four important characteristics***:
 1. Joyful celebration to be in God's presence
 2. Grateful thanksgiving for God's provision

3. Relational Corporate Unity – one nation comprised of 12 distinct tribes called to love God and enjoy fellowship with one another.
4. Covenant Renewal – confession, cleansing, and renewed commitment to the Covenant God had graciously given at Sinai.

So, when Paul speaks to the Corinthians (and us) about the Lord's table – he has in mind the feasts of the Lord as the general background and the feast of Passover (one of the most sacred and joyful feasts of the year) as the specific background. No wonder he is concerned over how the Corinthians are approaching this important celebration.

I. The Beautiful Picture: Relational Unity and Corporate Solidarity

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.”*

The communion meal presents a beautiful picture of God's people to God's people! The word that summarizes that picture is unity (koinonia) – commonality or solidarity with God and with one another!

The reality pictured by the table is that of a family where every member has a ***full share in the family identity***, is a ***full partner in the family's mission***, and has been granted a ***full stake in the family's future inheritance***.

A. They share a common spiritual identity – united to God.

B. They share a common spiritual heritage – united with God's OT people –with all the rights and privileges because they now have common spiritual ancestors (Moses and the OT Israelites 10:1).

C. They share a common Spiritual community – united to one another.

- God is the ***source of this unity*** – He is the one who called and redeemed Israel through the Exodus deliverance.

- The ***basis of this unity*** is our common participation in Christ – in the blood He shed for us and the His body that was broken for us.
- The ***beauty of this unity*** is seen in both its cost (the death of Christ) and its effect (creation of a New Community of Jews and Gentiles bound together by a New and better Covenant, marked by full shalom, and in full possession of massive blessings from God).
- What could mar this picture or threaten those who have received such blessing from God? Answer: Evil Cravings and Willful Sinning.
1 Corinthians 10:6, “Now these things took place as examples for us, ***that we might not desire evil as they did.***”

II. The Sober Warning: Danger of Falling Under Divine Judgement

1 Corinthians 10:12 “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

God has graciously granted His people an amazing standing and status as His New Covenant People with all the rights, privileges, and inheritance that comes with that standing.

The communion meal is a regular reminder of the immense sacrifice God made to grant us this standing and to give us the future inheritance that awaits us because of our status as His people.

What could possibly go wrong? What could possibly threaten the present benefit and future blessing of such privileged people who have been baptized to Christ and have been granted the familial right to eat and drink at this wonderful table?

In other words, why such a strong warning from Paul to people who have been given this standing to take heed lest they fall and come under God’s judgement? The danger is that we would ***defile the table God has prepared*** for us or that we would ***despise the spiritual food God has provided*** for us by ***craving what God has prohibited and despising what God has provided.***

And if you don't think the danger is real, think about another group of people who were unified into one body, who had a share in the Messiah, and who all enjoyed spiritual food and drink from heaven just as you are today who were chosen by God, redeemed by God, given promises by God, and led by God to a promised land of blessing.

These people are your spiritual ancestors – the Israelites. With most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:5). The term “overthrown” is a graphic term that means their bodies were strewn throughout the desert.

Paul states, that this graphic reminder of what happened to these people who had similar spiritual standing and privileges should warn us and teach us not do desire evil as they did (1 Cor 10:6).

III. The Biblical Example: God's Other Covenant People, Israel.

A. What they had – corporate unity, spiritual deliverance, guidance, protection, and provision from none other than Christ Himself.

1 Corinthians 10:1–4 “For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” (, ESV)

- Corporate unity seen in the 5-fold use of the term “all” as well as being unified as a new nation under Moses after being released from Egypt and rescued from Pharaoh.
- Spiritual deliverance seen in being covered by the cloud and passing through the sea
- Spiritual guidance and provision seen in the manna and water that were provided by supernatural means –the 2nd Member of the Trinity, God the Son, Who accompanied them.

B. What they did – they strongly coveted and craved evil (10:5).

- God had given them an amazing new status as His people.
- God had given them a wonderful new leader, Moses.
- God had given them provision and protection – food from heaven and water from the rock.
- But – they were discontent with their new standing, and they despised the provision God had made for them. They craved things from their former life of bondage.

C. How they did it – their evil desires soon led to sinful actions, words, and thoughts.

1 Corinthians 10:7–11 *“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.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.”*

They were discontent with God and His provision and entertained evil desires individually which led to four graphic sinful behaviors for which God judged them corporately.

1. Their discontentment with God and His laws led them to commit **Idolatry** in making and worshipping a golden calf (Ex 32).
2. Their discontentment with the prohibition of false worship led them to commit **Immorality** with pagan Moabite women (Num 25).
3. Their discontent with the supernatural food and water God provided led them to **despise** God’s provision and **to demand** He give them the food they craved instead of the food His grace had provided (Num 21:5).
4. Their discontentment with God’s appointed leaders led them to **grumble and rebel** against God and their leaders (Num 14).

What is the point of Paul bringing this up to the Corinthians who have been invited to a different table – the communion table?

Listen to Paul’s warning: *“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”* 10:11).

IV. The Divine Deliverance: Jesus Our Messiah

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

A. *A Sobering Question:*

So Paul, if God’s own covenant people who experienced such a powerful deliverance by God, were granted such exalted status before God, and enjoyed such benefits and blessings from God could not stand, *what hope do we Gentiles have of standing?*

B. *A Comforting Response:*

God who rescued you from Satan’s realm and released you from sin’s penalty will strengthen and deliver you from temptation.

- Through His Person – God is faithful
- Through His Promise – He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what He knows you are capable of resisting.
- Through His Protection – He will provide a means of escape.
- So ... what is that way of escape? *His Powerful Presence* and *His Preserving Word* both which are pictured at the table!

c. *A Powerful Provision: Spiritual Nourishment at the Table*

- It gives us comfort as we remember what Christ did
- It provides cleansing as we confess what we have done
- It gives us solidarity with Christ and each other
- It gives us confident hope for the future God has promised us
- It gives us strength as we renew our covenant commitment

Conclusion:

- So ... how did you come to the table this morning?
- More importantly ... what did you do and experience as you shared in the table and ate this wonderful spiritual food God has given us?
- Finally ... how are you leaving the table this morning?

Are you: Forgiven? Cleansed? Renewed? Strengthened? Recommitted?

- If not, you can be – if you will remember what Christ has already done for you! He has forgiven whatever sin has defeated you. He has strength for whatever temptation has assailed you. He has hope for whatever despair has come over you. He has contentment for whatever gift or providence you are struggling to accept.
- But for the table to benefit you, you must come to the table as an active participant willing to embrace your place and the responsibility that comes with this gracious privilege.