

Communion - True Fellowship

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] With your Bibles, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 10. I can always remember John saying to me, the elder John, elder as in spiritual elder, not elder as in older, though he's both.

John McIntyre, just to clarify with no exception, John McIntyre said that when we come to communion, it would be good to have a message on communion that precedes what communion is.

I think that's very wise advice. I think it's good counsel. The thing is, though, that the early church had communion every week, which I think is something that is sadly missing from the church today, where the idea came from that we can have it every so often and periodically.

I'm not entirely sure. I'm sure if I've read a little bit of church history, you can see it creeping in. But it would have been possible to be able to do a series of messages followed by communion.

God deals with us in communion in a way that you can't possibly imagine. In fact, someone once said, a very wise and godly minister, that the moment the church makes the transition to do communion every single week, it is a clearinghouse.

[1 : 41] It is the very moment where God really does deal with his church. And suddenly, you know, it's one of those things, are you ready for the whirlwind? So if we ever make that transition in the future, it is a spiritual whirlwind from many ministers who will agree to that fact and one who spoke wisely on it.

Our reading, then, is from 1 Corinthians 10, verse 14 to 22. We're going to be focusing on a few verses in particular, well, mainly 16 and 17, but I'd like to read just these few verses, just so you know what's being said.

So Paul is addressing the church in Corinth, and I know you know a little bit about Corinth and Corinthians because Francis did a series on Corinthians, which was a benefit to all.

So verse 14 of chapter 10. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak to you as sensible people. Judge for yourselves what I say.

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?

[3 : 00] Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body. For we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel are not those who eat the sacrifice participants at the altar.

What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, is anything, or that an idol is anything. No, I imply that pagans sacrifice, they offer to demons and not to God.

I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake at the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? Well, I mean, it's strong words from Paul.

Paul often had strong words to say to the Corinthian church, but this is what he's saying in a nutshell, at least in this few verses, that the Lord's table is a table of fellowship.

[4 : 11] No, rather, the Lord's table is a table of true fellowship. If you excuse yourself from the Lord's table, you are excusing yourself from the people of God, it would be like taking yourself out of the membership of the church and said, I want nothing more to do with that.

That's how significant this table is because this table speaks about the people who drink the bread, sorry, who eat the bread and drink the cup.

It is a table of true fellowship. And so everyone who participates in the bread and the wine should know this. You should understand this.

And the question that is being asked at the Lord's table is a very simple one, and it never goes away. And the question is, why are you here? Now, your answer should be, so that we don't forget who we are in Christ.

It's been said a hundred times before, and it will probably be, say, a hundred times more in the future. You would never put a church together with the people that you have in it.

[5 : 30] And only God can take a group of people that on the surface have nothing in common and go to such a deep level that he can bring them all together. And the only way he can do that is in Christ.

We may not have anything else in common other than the fact that we all belong to Jesus Christ. Then you can eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

This table is a table of fellowship, and it's not going to be found at any other table. I've sat around many tables with believers and unbelievers. It's been a good table to sit at.

You can drink the same drink. You can eat the same food. You can even talk about the same things. But not so with the Lord's table. If you're not one of the Lords, you don't belong at this table.

You have no place to sit and eat and drink. In other words, you're not allowed to participate. Because the one factor needed to come to this table asking you the question, why are you here?

[6 : 39] Well, I'm here because I belong to Jesus. That's something to be taken quite seriously. That I come to the table knowing that I'm granted to the table because Christ died a death that I could never die.

And he lived a life that I could never live. And he's risen from the dead to life. That's the only reason why I can come and eat at this table and receive the spiritual blessing that God has for me from it and for you.

So the table speaks so much about the people who come. The table tells us why we can come. Because it reminds me of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

That's what it's doing. That as you eat of the bread and drink of the wine, you're being reminded why you're able to come to this table as you're participating. You're remembering his death and you're remembering it until he comes.

And so Paul says here in 1 Corinthians 10 before he gets into 1 Corinthians 11 that the act of communion is an act of participation because we do it together.

[7 : 51] Whether we like it or not, we belong to Jesus Christ. It is something to enjoy. And so we come as a fellowship. So what is true fellowship?

Well, believe it or not, true fellowship almost has nothing to do, at least to begin with, of how you behave to the person sat next to you. True fellowship is not really to do with your behavior towards a fellow believer.

It does lead to that, but that's not what causes it. You cannot get to true fellowship by acting in a particular way, by behaving in a particular way, or even by thinking the same things that other people think.

It's not about thoughts, words, and deeds. That's not what causes true fellowship. No, Paul says that the only thing can cause true fellowship is that we have all been united with Christ in his death.

And what that means is this, that if you have been united with Christ and the person sat next to you has been united with Christ in his death, then you have been united with each other.

[8 : 59] That's the cause of true fellowship. The cause of true fellowship is that Christ died for you. That's the common denominator. That's what you all have in common.

That's why you are all allowed to come to this table and eat of the bread and drink of the wine. So it's more about a family table.

It's table fellowship. It is the true family. It is the place where, like any family, you may have different things about you.

But the one thing that ties you all together is the blood connection. The blood of Christ, that is. It's the Lord's table. So there are several things here to notice.

The first is, of course, the apparent question, why are you here? And the answer should be because I belong here. I belong here. I belong here because I belong to Christ. And if I belong to Christ, I therefore belong at this table.

[10 : 02] And others that I sit with belong with me because they also belong with Christ. And so we belong with each other. But Paul doesn't ask the question implicitly, why are you here?

And then expect you to answer. He doesn't bother with that. He asks the question and then gives you the answer. Here's the background of why it's so important.

Paul understands that in Corinth, idolatry is a big issue. Idolatry is when you put anything else in place of God. The thing that you turn to, the thing that you trust, the thing that you lean on, the person that you go to or the thing that you go to, that's idolatry.

If it's other than God, that's your act of idolatry. And what Paul is saying is, is if your life is measured in that kind of way, you can't have a seat at both tables. You can't drink from both cups.

Either you have a seat at one table and not the other, but you can't have a seat at both. Now, believers ought to only be eating at the Lord's table.

[11 : 11] What Paul challenges the people here is that they've actually gone to eat at other tables. In other words, they have gone to exchange in the wrong kind of fellowship. Table fellowship of another kind.

Idolatrous table fellowship. And then they expect that they can come back into the real fellowship of believers and then participate at the Lord's table.

And Paul says, you can't do that. It's as clear as choosing your table right from the get-go. You can't participate in both tables.

And Paul says, as he says earlier, that those who practice idolatry will often think that they have eternal life. And then he says to them back in chapter 6, I think it is, don't be deceived.

Don't be deceived. Unrighteousness will never inherit the kingdom of God. So Paul's fairly clear as to what actually constitutes true fellowship with God and true fellowship with each other.

[12 : 16] It is coming to this table and it is coming as a believer and not going to the other table, not going to the other places of fellowship if we are to participate in this table as a true believer in Christ.

So he says, it's primarily then about relationship. Your relationship with God. And what he means by this is, is if you are related to an idol or you are relating yourself to an idol, then that affects your relationship with God.

You're not turning to God. And so the reason you eat at the idol's table is because that's the one who you have the relationship with. But if you truly have a relationship with the Lord, then you come and eat at his table.

But you can't have a relationship with both people and therefore you can't eat at both tables. We eat at the Lord's table because we're defined as a people who have a relationship with God.

And so that tells us about the other people that we sit at this table with later this evening. That they too have the same relationship through the same person for exactly the same reason.

[13 : 29] This is true fellowship. These people actually want to be with one another because they recognize that they are the same in Jesus.

In other words, Paul's saying, look, your horizontal relationship is determined by your vertical relationship. Vertical is this one, horizontal is that one.

Okay? So in other words, if you're the type of person that says, you know, I'm just going to concentrate on my relationship with God, you haven't understood the gospel because the gospel is about achieving two types of relationships.

The moment you come into Christ, you are vertically in a relationship, you and God, but at the same time, you're in a horizontal relationship, you and your brother and sister in Christ.

And that can never go away. So if you want to be with God, you have to be with the other people that God has put you with. This is true fellowship because it is created by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

[14 : 36] And as the writer of Hebrews says, don't ever forsake or neglect meeting together as some of you have. Why do people neglect to meet?

Well, I'll tell you. It's because, one, they think that their relationship with God is a private matter. It's not a private matter. It is a vertical matter and a horizontal matter.

When you don't meet with God with other believers, it unfortunately has a negative effect on the fellowship. It damages the fellowship when you don't meet together as God's people because God designed church and fellowship and relationship to be both ways, not just one.

It is impossible to concentrate on your relationship with God alone and separating yourself from the fellowship without it damaging it. Likewise, it is impossible to hide yourself within the fellowship and concentrate on serving in the church thinking that you can somehow escape your poor relationship with your father.

Now, they both go together. That's true fellowship. fellowship. It's about your relationship with God being strong and your relationship with each other being strong if you truly want a true fellowship.

[16 : 02] This is what Paul says in Galatians. He says, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And what that means is is that as we come to this table this evening, on the Lord's Day in particular, you can no longer make a distinction between employer and employee because remember on the Lord's Day there is no workers, there is no employers.

Those kind of distinctions have gone out the window. There is no hierarchy. You're all the same in Christ Jesus as you eat this bread and drink this cup because you belong to Jesus.

Now, here's the problem. Those in Corinth forgot everything I just said. Not that I said it to them, but Paul had said it to them. And they had forgotten it all.

And so Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, beginning at the very beginning, that when they actually came together, it was not actually for the better, but for the worse. Okay, verse 17.

But in the following instructions, this is 1 Corinthians 11, verse 17. But in the following instructions, I do not commend you because when you come together, it is not for the better, but for the worse.

[17 : 24] So when a church comes together and it's bad, what do you think the next thing is going to happen? People stop coming.

And we think, well, what, how can we get more people in? How can we put something on that will bring people to the fellowship? What can we do differently? You can be like Christ because that's the problem.

They were not like Christ. And so the issue in Corinth is one that's not too unfamiliar today, that the church became a place where there is possible for division even at the table.

So it's not an unfamiliar issue, but it does appear in different forms today. Jesus says that as you relate to one another, you're to do so in a Christ-like way.

Paul says, you know, that in his letters. But here, Paul was saying to this fellowship, you're not allowed to choose the fellowship that you want. And that was the Corinthian problem.

[18 : 32] They had no idea what true fellowship was, so they were choosing their own fellowship. They were participating in communion in their own little groups and thus excluding other people.

They can do it on their own, will do it on their own, and thinking that the church was a harmonious place. It's not a harmonious place at all. It becomes a place of division. It wasn't a meeting together for the better, but for the worse.

They hadn't understood what true fellowship was because they were deciding who they wanted to have fellowship with. And so all the divisions that Paul says are not there, they resurrected.

And says, no, we're not like those other people. We're going to do it this way. And so what happens is this attitude occurs. Some people think that you can get to true fellowship by longing for certain people to be absent.

and for other people to be present. Some people believe in the church that the only way you can get to true fellowship is by some kind of people rearrangement.

[19 : 44] The bad one's out and the good one's in. The bad one's out and the good one's in. What's the problem with that though? Who decides who are the bad ones?

And who decides who are the good ones? The next thing that happens is that when there is issues in the church where there's not true fellowship, someone can excuse themselves because they're not finding themselves fitting in on the assumption that they are actually going to fit in somewhere else.

But if you can't fit in in any fellowship, you can't fit in any fellowship. true fellowship because the very essence of true fellowship is that you're all one in Christ Jesus and if you haven't got that, you're not going to have it anywhere.

True fellowship is not about a rearrangement of a certain type of people. The bad one's out and the good one's in. You can't get to true fellowship that way.

The only way you can get to true fellowship is by God granting it. True fellowship is about being like Christ towards one another.

[20 : 57] Another thing to notice which is also quite important is that God is interested in the quality of the fellowship more than he is the quantity when it comes to the Lord's table. people. God's not too concerned about the growth of his church in the same way people are.

You know, the accumulation, we need more people. We need the certain type of people to take over our Sunday school. We need these type of people to do our youth work or these type of people. The church doesn't work by a rearrangement of people.

The good one's in and the bad one's out. You don't get to true fellowship that way. Now God does care about quantity but this is how he cares about it. He tells you to go ahead and tell the message about Jesus.

God does care about the quantity in fellowship by calling you to evangelism. And so if you're concerned about the declining church, how often have you spoken of Jesus to an unbeliever?

If you're truly concerned about the declining church, how often have you evangelized? Then don't speak to me or anyone else about the declining church.

[22 : 07] until we have first sought and challenged ourselves as to whether or not we are the actual cause of it by keeping our witness quiet from a world that needs a gospel-centered witness.

Now God is concerned about quality, quantity, and so he calls us to evangelism. But God is concerned about the quality and the way that he causes that is by us growing in the knowledge of him.

Here's a promise. I can guarantee this church will flourish like it's never flourished before. I'm not being prophetic. I'm the last person to be that.

But I'm going to make a cast-iron promise. I can do it because the word of God backs me up or I'm backed up by the word of God. Here it is. This church will flourish like never before the moment you get true fellowship right.

It'll flourish like never before the moment you get true fellowship right. But until that time it'll ebb and flow with its sin with its unrepentance and also with the blessings in the other direction.

[23 : 32] But you'll never get to true flourishing like the church can be unless you get to the root of flourishing which is true fellowship.

So why are you here? Do you want to be with the people next to you? Because they are no different to you in Christ. They're no different.

They're not better. They're not worse. They're just like you. When we come to the Lord's table in a moment we are making the invisible visible.

And by that I mean this. In Ephesians 2 6 it says this. Here's the spiritual reality that God raised us up with him and seated us, listen to the tense, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

He has seated us with him. Where are we? Where are we right now? Well, according to God, we're in the heavenly places. Now, we can't see that because that's an invisible reality, but by meeting together and coming together at this Lord's table, we are making the invisible visible.

[24 : 48] that's what we're participating in this evening, the invisible reality of being seated together in the heavenly places. That's no small thing, that there is real spiritual benefit and necessity as we meet around the Lord's table this evening.

This isn't a small blessing, but this is a huge blessing, and so you can understand why the early church had communion weekly. because they understood the necessity of the spiritual blessing.

Well, here's the exhortation. The Lord's table is an act of participation, which means that's what you do. You do it when you take the bread, and you do it when you take the wine. And Paul says, I love this bit, you're sensible people, you're sensible people, judge for yourselves.

In other words, is the Lord's table saying anything different than what the Lord has given to us himself? So as we come to the Lord's table, it comes to us with that question that never goes away, why are you here?

And your answer should be, because I'm going to participate in the thing that I'm allowed to, because I belong to Christ, and I belong with the other people who are going to participate in it.

[26 : 12] How am I to come? I'm to come in a Christ-like manner. Why am I to come that way? So that when we meet together, it's not for the worst, but actually for the better. That's why. But how do I know, and how do you know, whether or not you truly want to make that decision?

Wednesday evening, I gave you the grounds for all good biblical decision making, the three things that are of absolute necessity whenever you make a decision. It's the only way you can tell that your decision is within the will and purposes of God.

There is no other way of telling it. Three things have to line up. Desire, opportunity, and ability. So here's the first question.

Do you this evening have the opportunity to come to the Lord's table? Well, yes, you do. It's here behind us. We're going to participate in a minute. Okay. Do you have the ability to be able to come and participate in the Lord's table?

Well, yeah, you're here. There are many who can't get here, but you are. You have the ability to come. But do you have the desire? You see, the only way we can be sure that we're ever making a biblical decision is when all three line up.

[27 : 29] It's like I said Wednesday night. Do you desire to be a missionary? Yes, I desire to be a missionary. Do you have the ability to be a missionary? Yes, I have the ability to be a missionary. Not me personally, but I'm sure someone has.

Or do you have the opportunity? No. Well, it's not enough then, is it? You see, all three have to come together for you to know whether or not it's the Lord's will. And it's the same with the table.

Do you have the opportunity to come? Yes. Do you have the ability to come? Yes. You haven't neglected it, as some have. And why have they? Because they don't have the desire.

And that's why they're not here, if they can get here. Because all three are not lining up for them. But do they line up for you as you come to participate in the bread and the wine together?

Here's the final consideration. Can I really say that if I love God, can I really say that I love God if I don't desire to be with the people here tonight?

[28 : 38] That's the question. And don't make the same mistake that the Corinthians did by choosing your own fellowship. You will never get to true fellowship by human mechanism. You will never get to true fellowship by choosing the people you want to fellowship with.

It doesn't work that way. Only God can grant true fellowship. Because true fellowship is a combination of the vertical and the horizontal in the will of God.

Do you want to flourish as a fellowship? I want us to flourish. I really want us to flourish. But I know that we're not going to unless we get this right.

Unless we truly understand the spiritual reality behind what we are participating in this evening. That this is true fellowship. Do you want to come to the table?

Do you want to participate in the table? Yes I do. Well remember the question why are you here? Remember the answer.

[29 : 45] Because I belong with these people. Because I belong to Christ. Why are we going to participate in this table together? Here's the answer. Because I belong with these people. Because I belong to Christ. Amen. Amen.