

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 9 May 2004

No. T0316

Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Jesus is Lord: The Lord's Table

The title for today's talk occurs in 1 Corinthians 10:21 towards the end of a large section of Paul's letter to the church, in which he answers their question about a social problem concerning the eating of meats offered to idols, see 8:1-11:1.

The Corinthians were over-stepping the mark by regarding casually the numerous idols in the city's temples as no more than lifeless idols (12:2). In their self-confidence they were using these temples as eating places, and the animals their fellow citizens were sacrificing to the idols as food! However in 10:14, Paul directs them to "flee from idolatry", a command as powerful as "flee sexual immorality", 6:18. 6:19-20 explain that Christians must always run away from such behaviour because their bodies are, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, to be maintained in holiness. Here in chapter 10 we learn that we must also keep clear of all idolatry because believers share in Christian fellowship especially that of eating the bread and drinking the wine at the communion service, verse 16. (The word for fellowship is emphasised in New King James Version by the words communion in verse 16, partake or partakers in verses 17, 18, and 21, as well as the word fellowship itself in verse 20.) From verse 21 we learn that the Lord's Table is the place of Christian fellowship. It's a spiritual place, or sphere, where Christians enjoy the things of the Lord Jesus Christ and, most of all, the benefits and blessings which are derived from His death. It's also a fellowship which is mutually exclusive to the two other fellowships mentioned in verses 18 and 20. They're, Israel's fellowship, centred on the altar of sacrifice, and the Gentiles' fellowship with idol sacrifices, centred on the table of demons. In all of these communions or societies, the fellowship is expressed by the social activities of eating and drinking.

In 10:6-11 we're informed that the Old Testament history of the nation of Israel is provided to instruct Christians. The prophecies of Ezekiel and Malachi both describe the physical altar of the Temple systems of worship as "the table of the LORD, i.e. of Jehovah" (Ezekiel 44:16 and Malachi 1:7 and 12). The Showbread Table was in the original Tabernacle. On it twelve loaves were placed each Sabbath to represent each of the tribes of Israel in God's presence, Leviticus 24:5-9. This helps us to see that the Lord's Table speaks of Christians' acceptance before God, and their response to Him.

Another illustration is found in 2 Samuel 9. It's the story about Mephibosheth, King Saul's grandson, who was shown the "kindness of God" by King David. He was brought from Lo Debar into the king's presence, where he fell on his face before David. "Don't fear", David said to him, "I'll surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake – you'll eat bread at my table continually!" Mephibosheth was amazed! "What's your servant that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?" He realised that it was a great privilege to be included in the family, which his grandfather had sought to destroy. David instructed "he shall [always] eat at my table like one of [my] sons". The story concludes in 2 Samuel 9:13: "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet." The recurring phrase "at the king's table continually" means that he was always a member of that privileged circle of people who were in close fellowship with the great king, David. In the same way, Christians are always at the Lord's Table – they have unbroken fellowship with Him! And like Mephibosheth, we don't deserve to be there. We're there only because we've been saved by God's grace!

We turn to another king, Solomon, to discover the splendour of the king's table: "...Solomon's provision for one day was thirty kors of fine flour, sixty kors of meal, ten fatted oxen, twenty oxen from the pastures, and one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roe-bucks, and fatted fowl...food [provided] for King Solomon and for all who came to [his] table. There was no lack in their supply", 1 Kings 4:22-23 and 27. When the queen of Sheba saw "the food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cupbearers and their apparel, and his entryway by which he went up to the house of the LORD", the abundance, which included gold drinking vessels, overwhelmed her. She exclaimed "...the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told me. You exceed the fame of which I heard. Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom!" 2 Chronicles 9:1-8. From Solomon's table we learn that the Lord's Table is the wonderful profusion of the spiritual blessings that Christians always enjoy and of the way the Lord administers them to us: "I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with cakes of raisins, Refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick." Song of Solomon 2:3-5

1 Corinthians 10:16 identifies the primary items on the Lord's Table: "the cup of blessing" and "the bread which we break". Although Christians have a spiritual system of worship, they do use these physical elements, in the way 11:23-26 prescribes, at the communion (or Breaking of Bread) service. However, using a rhetorical question, Paul explains their spiritual significance: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" Christian fellowship is about the Person of Christ and His sacrifice. In the communion service the bread is taken first, but in 10:16 the cup of wine is mentioned first because the blood of Christ is the basis of our salvation and fellowship. "...truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ...we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin", 1 John 1:3 and 7. Each Christian enters the Christian fellowship by personal faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore they equally share in His blood and in His body and have the fundamental right to participate in the communion service. When I take of the broken loaf and eat it, and then drink from the cup of wine, I not only remember the Lord Jesus, but I also express my fellowship with every true Christian believer. 10:17 explains Christian fellowship in this second way: "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." The one loaf signifies the unity of the universal Body of Christ, to which every believer belongs. The Body was formed by the act of the Holy Spirit, 12:13. Therefore, when I break bread I express **Christian** fellowship, not any other kind of fellowship, nor anything less than this true fellowship of the one true Church of God. It's an all inclusive fellowship, where there are no man-made barriers!

But we must return to verse 16 for Paul says that the cup is "the cup of blessing which we bless". This means that we speak well of it, we eulogise it. The communion service is a thanksgiving service where we give thanks to the Lord for giving His body and shedding His blood for us. It's also a worship service in which we worship God the Father. We tell Him about the value of the blood of the Lord Jesus, and express our appreciation for all the benefits that we gain from that blood.

Tables in our homes are focal points for family fellowship. They're full of things to eat and to drink. In a similar way, the table of the Lord contains spiritual items for Christian fellowship. There's the cup, which symbolises the blood of Christ that brought us spiritual life. There's the bread, which symbolises the body of Christ given for us. We're sustained in spiritual life by feeding on the Bread of Life, see John 6:48 and 57. In addition, there are the many spiritual blessings for we are "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ", Ephesians 1:3. In Genesis 14:18-19 we find Melchizedek, a wonderful picture of Christ. He gave Abram bread and wine and blessed him.

Friends are often invited to share a meal with us in our homes. In my home, because I'm the head of my family, I'm the host and I take my guests into our dining room to sit at the family table. The Lord Jesus Christ is the host at the Lord's Table. In fact, it's not the table or the things on it which Paul highlights in these verses, but the Person who presides at it! Like King David He has the prerogative to invite. Like King Solomon, He supplies all the bounty. Like Jehovah in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, He not only directs all the proceedings, but He also dictates the standards, as we shall discuss shortly. Christian fellowship is all about fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ! As one hymn aptly states:

*"As we are gathered,
Jesus is here,
One with each other,
Jesus is here;
Joined by the Spirit,
Washed in His Blood,
Part of the Body,
The Church of God."*

He is spiritually present at the communion service, which is why it's called "the Lord's Supper" in 11:20. John's Gospel 12:1-3 provides a beautiful picture of this church meeting when it describes the supper made for Jesus in the house in Bethany. There Martha served, Lazarus **sat at table** with Him and Mary worshipped Him. However, John records in chapter 13 the amazing actions with the basin of water and the towel, as well as the words and commands of Jesus, the Host, at the Last Supper. There John himself reclined **at the table** with the Lord!

In 1 Corinthians 10:18, Paul refers again to the example of Israel: "Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" The illusion is to the law of the peace, or fellowship offering, when the offerer, his friends and his family, together with the priestly family, each had portions of the offering to eat. Their eating connected them to the altar, and therefore to Jehovah. They were enjoined to be holy because He is holy. See Leviticus 7:11-28 and 11:45.

The moral importance of being directly connected to the Lord by taking part at His table is brought out in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20. It wasn't either the idols or the offerings made to them that concerned Paul. They were nothing, but behind

them was a virulent system of demon worship, which is forbidden for Christians. That system, with its libations, is starkly contrasted with the true worship of the living God: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's Table and of the table of demons", verse 21. This moral significance is repeated in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God." It was morally impossible for the Corinthian to go to idol temples and eat of the sacrifices, although they were actually doing so. Paul didn't want them to have fellowship with demons because they were thereby provoking the Lord to jealousy, verse 22. They were abusing their privileges as participants at the Lord's Table and incurring His wrath. Treachery and disloyalty aren't trivial matters!

The wonderful privileges of the Lord's Table carry with them commensurate responsibilities. I don't have any rights of my own to be there, but by partaking of the cup and of the bread at the communion service; I commit myself to the Lord and to His table. It's His claims over me and my life. I'm cut off from everything which is not worthy of my privileged position. These matters must be soberly assessed: "I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say", verse 15.

Once more there is plenty of evidence from the history of Israel for us to learn from. At the beginning of chapter 10, Paul identifies five privileges of the people who came out of Egypt with Moses. **All** were under the cloud of God's Presence, **all** passed through the Red Sea, **all** were baptised to Moses, **all** ate the same spiritual food and **all** drank the same spiritual drink, verses 1-4. However, most of them were gross sinners in a fivefold way. They lusted after evil things, they became idolaters, they committed sexual immorality, they tempted Christ [i.e. were dissatisfied with Him] and they complained [i.e. they attempted to return to Egypt], verses 5-11. They failed in their responsibilities as God's sanctified people!

Twenty-first century Christians may not encounter ancient Egyptian idols or Corinthian temples, in today's post-Christian Britain. But there are plenty of equivalences from which we must flee or we, too, shall fail in our responsibilities with respect to the Lord's Table. The Scriptures define idolatry in several ways:

1. All false gods: "For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens...Give to [Him] the glory due to His name...worship [Him]...Tremble before Him, all the earth", Psalm 96:5-9. Idolatry is anything we honour more than the living God. The Law prohibited Israel from having idols: "You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God", Leviticus 26:1. 1 John 5:21 instructs Christians to keep clear of idols, which means avoiding fellowships, places and events which provide "spiritual experiences" which aren't of the true, living God revealed in Christ and the Scriptures.
2. Idols are abominable to God. 1 Peter 4:3 describes our world system, which we know is dominated by the pursuit of wealth, pleasure and leisure, as being taken up with abominable idolatries. By contrast, Peter says that believers should not live in that way of life, but for the will of God, verse 2.
3. Self will. When King Saul disobeyed Samuel's instruction, the prophet told him "...stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...you have rejected the word of the LORD", 1 Samuel 15:23. We, too, mustn't deliberately ignore the direct commands of the word of God. This is a great challenge to us when the spirit of our age is "I'll do my own thing, in my own way".
4. Colossians 3:5 defines covetousness as idolatry. Materialism abounds in western society. Christians must avoid being dominated by this way of living. The Lord Jesus says to us, as He said to that church in Laodicea: "Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-...Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me", Revelation 3:17-20. The Lord promises a special personal experience of His table to those who overcome this self-sufficient attitude!

In the latter part of 1 Corinthians 10 Paul addresses the problem that almost every piece of meat either in the market places or on meal tables in Corinth would have had some history with idols. He recognises that believers live in a world system which is far away from God. But in it they have liberty from religious rules and regulations: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify". He outlines guidelines, which are consistent with the Lord's Table, for these "matters of conscience":

1. Believers are to understand that everything in the world belongs to God. Paul twice quotes Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the LORD'S and all its fullness" even in relation to the food which the Corinthian believers had available to them for their everyday use, verses 25, 26 and 28.
2. Thanksgiving for food and drink sanctifies both, verse 30.
3. The conscience of others is to be respected, verse 32. It encompasses all divisions of mankind – Jews and Greeks [i.e. non-Jews] as well as those in the church of God.

4. The aim must be the good of others: "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being", verse 24.
5. Above all, the first priority is: "...whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God", verse 31.
6. Finally, Paul advises how he lived: "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offence toward God and men", Acts 24:16. The Corinthians, and we, are exhorted to imitate him in his imitation of Christ, 10:33-11:1.

Finally when we commit ourselves to being loyal to the Lord and to live in a way which is consistent with His table, God will help us through all of the difficulties. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord", 1:9. "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it", 10:13.

Let's pray. God our Father, help us to realise that believers are always at the Lord's Table to continually enjoy all of its blessings. May we, too, appreciate the demands to live in a manner which is consistent with the Lord and His table. In His Name. Amen.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.