

"Participation in the Body and Blood of Christ"

This morning's sermon is continuing our 3 week series where we have been looking at the means of grace. Last week we looked at the Word of God as we read in 1 Corinthians 1 about the power of preaching Christ crucified. This week we are looking at the sacraments, and next week we'll look at prayer. In our Sunday School this morning we examined the sacrament of Baptism, and now we will be looking at the Lord's Supper in our sermon. And after the sermon I have the privilege to administer the Supper, for my first time, to this congregation.

And as we consider how the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, let me begin by giving you a basic definition and some clarifications. When we talk about the Supper being a means of grace, we mean that it is a sign and seal of our union with Christ. As we eat and drink of the bread and wine, we *spiritually* eat and drink of Christ and his benefits. We don't do this in a physical way, as if the bread and wine actually change into Christ's body and blood - that's what the Roman Catholic Church and a few other churches teach. But we also do not believe that the Supper is merely a memorial, that it's just done to remember Christ's sacrifice, as many evangelical churches believe. Yes, we do it in remembrance of Christ, but it's more than just a memorial; the Supper is intended to actually be a blessing to us, something to be done for our own spiritual good, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:17. Our passage for today in 1 Corinthians 10, in verse 16 says that the Supper is an actual participation in the body and blood of Christ! The WSC talks about the benefits of the Supper by saying that when we partake of the Supper we partake of Christ's "body and blood, with all his benefits, to our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace".

And yet when we turn to this passage in 1 Corinthians 10, you should notice right away that this is not a doctrinal discussion on the Lord's Supper. This chapter is not laying out all the doctrinal details concerning the Supper. Actually the passage is about idolatry. Paul is urging the Corinthians to flee idolatry. But as Paul deals with this problem of idolatry among the Corinthians he points back to the Lord's Supper, showing how the Supper calls them away from idolatry and to Christ. And as Paul mentions the Supper, we learn about some of its importance for the life and ministry of the church. And so to that end, as we examine what this passage is saying with regards to the Corinthians and idolatry, we'll ultimately see what it tells us about the Lord's Supper and its importance for the church.

And so let's dig into this passage. Paul's concern about idolatry is pretty clear in this passage. In both verses 7 and 14 Paul explicitly calls the Corinthians away from idolatry. It seems likely that this concern of idolatry had to do with various pagan feasts where the Corinthians were partaking in food sacrificed to idols, and probably participating in religious rites and ceremonies attached with them. Just look at this chapter. Paul's concern of idolatry seems centered around eating and drinking. In verse 2 Paul talks about the Israelite's eating and drinking; in the examples of Israel's sins in verses 7-10 Paul alludes to various OT events, many which involved issues of eating and drinking; in verses 16-17, he talks about the Corinthians' eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper; in verse 18 he talks about the Israelites eating of the sacrifices; in verse 19 he talks about food sacrificed to idols, and ultimately relates that in verse 21 as partaking of demons, comparing that with the Lord's Supper. So this passage deals a lot with eating and drinking in connection with idolatry, and so it seems that the idolatry which Paul was concerned about was that which was associated with pagan festivals

and feasts. These pagan feasts had a lot to do with worshipping idols through eating food sacrificed to idols, and often involved other immoral activities, such as sexual immorality.

Now already in chapter 8 Paul had discussed the idea of eating food sacrificed to idols. Paul actually said in chapter 8 that technically a Christian could eat food sacrificed to idols, as long as we eat it in thanksgiving to the one true God, with the knowledge that idols are nothing, that they have no real existence. You know, what does it matter if someone else previously sacrificed our food to idols, when those idols don't really exist anyways - nothing happens to the food! So Paul affirms in chapter 8 our Christian liberty on that matter. However, Paul did say that we shouldn't eat food sacrificed to idols if it will cause others around us to stumble, if by our eating they think we are giving honor or worship to an idol. But here in chapter 10, the focus is not on whether or not a Christian in our liberty can eat food sacrificed to an idol, knowing that idols don't really exist. Here, the concern is the actual practice of idolatry. Here Paul is concerned that some Corinthian Christians, for whatever reason, are also engaging in pagan idolatry and their feasts. It's one thing to innocently eat some meat as a Christian which you know a pagan sacrificed to an idol before you bought it. It's another thing to be going out with pagans to worship their idols with them at their feasts and festivals! Paul's response to that sort of action: verse 14 - flee from idolatry!

Paul makes his appeal to the Corinthians to flee idolatry by pointing to the nation of Israel as an example. Paul references specifically those Israelites led by Moses out of Egypt, who wandered in the desert for 40 years. In verse 1 Paul relates these Israelites to the Corinthians by referring to them as "our fathers". Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, find their spiritual lineage in the nation of Israel. Consequently, the Israelites are our forefathers in the faith and their history is our history. That means that the spiritual lessons that they learned should be helpful for us as well. Paul says in verse 11 that this is why Scripture has even recorded these events, so that we can learn from them and, in this case, from their mistakes. For Paul says in verse 5 that God was not pleased with most of those Israelites in that generation and so he allowed them to die in the wilderness during that 40 year wandering. In verses 6-10 Paul alludes to several different events during this sinful generation, including references to the Israelites grumbling about the food and water provided miraculously by God (Numbers 11, 21), the incident of the golden calf idolatry (Exodus 32), and their sexual immorality by participating in Canaanite fertility rites (Numbers 25). In verses 6 and 11, Paul says that these sinful Israelites should serve as an example to the Corinthians, and by extension, to us. God was displeased with that sinful generation, and so Scripture records various ways in which God judged them. Verse 18 describes these sinful Israelites properly when Paul calls them "Israel according to the flesh"; the Israelites during the wilderness wandering who persisted in their sin and rebellion, showed that they were only Israelites externally, by their ethnic heritage, but they were not truly Israelites internally, for we see in the NT that the true Israel is made up of all God's chosen people, all who, by his grace, have remained faithful to his covenant.

And so this sinful generation of Israel during the wilderness wandering served as an example of those who appeared to be God's people, but through their sinful rebellion, showed that they were not. The result was their judgment and condemnation by God. Paul makes their rebellion all the more inexcusable when he elaborates on all the spiritual benefits that they had received. Here's where we see how the Corinthians and us have a great unity with our Jewish forefathers in the faith. In verses 2-4, Paul says that the Israelites were all baptized into Moses and that they had a spiritual food and drink that spiritually came from

Christ! That's an amazing revelation. In a real way, these Israelites who lived many years before the coming of Christ, had a baptism and had a sort of supper of Christ, much like us! Verse 9 even says that they "tested Christ". Verse 18 says that the Israelites were participants - partakers in the NKJV - that's a key word in this passage - participants in the sacrifices on the altar. Realize that these are the very sacrifices which looked forward to the sacrifice of Christ! And so these Israelites, in some real way, had the benefits of Christ available to them, just like us!

And so let me make sure my point here is clear. The Israelites and the Corinthians, and us as well, have a lot in common. The Israelites tasted of Christ and his spiritual benefits in ways similar to the Corinthians and us. Though the Israelites tasted these benefits in more of a seed form, they were still there. There's a fundamental unity in Christ between the Old Testament church and the New Testament church. And so because of the spiritual benefits of Christ that were held out to the Israelites, this make their idolatry and rebellion inexcusable and appalling.

And of course this rebuke applies to the Corinthians as well. In verse 15, Paul turns this back onto the Corinthians. Listen to what he says in verses 15-17 (I'll be reading from the ESV here): "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?"

This language of "participation" is the same language which Paul used in verse 18 when he talks about the Israelites participating in the sacrifices on the altar, and so this is an important concept here (note: *κοινωνία* vs. *κοινωνός* but it seems parallel meaning here; one is "participation" and the other "participant"). It serves to further connect the Israelites and the Corinthians. The NKJV translates the Greek in verses 16-17 as "communion" but it's the same word. The word in Greek is actually *koinonia*, which you might have heard that word before. It's often translated as "fellowship". The translation of "communion" is close to that. One lexicon defines this word as "close association", "an association involving close mutual relations and involvement." And so the translation of "participation" is generally preferred here among Bible versions because it brings out a little of the intimacy and unity being described here.

Now stop for a moment and think about what Paul is now saying when he confronts the Corinthians with the fact that they partake in the Lord's Supper. Why is he mentioning this here? Why is the fact that the Corinthians receive the Lord's Supper even important to this subject on idolatry? We'll I'll hopefully be making that clear to you throughout the remainder of this sermon. But appreciate first the full significance here of Paul telling the Corinthians that they *participate* in the body and blood of Christ when they partake in the Lord's Supper. Paul says that eating the bread in the Supper is *participating* in Christ's body. Paul says that drinking the wine in the Supper is *participating* in Christ's blood. Participating. As I mentioned at the start of the sermon, the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of our union with Christ. This union includes union with Christ crucified, with the Christ who died on the cross and rose again. As we unite with the risen Christ, we participate in both his death and his resurrection.

This word "participating" is a great word here because it sets an important balance between two extremes when we understand the Supper. On the one extreme, clearly this word implies more than just a remembrance of Christ and his death. And on the other extreme, to say that we are actually eating and drinking, physically, in a carnal way, the actual body and blood of Jesus, seems completely foreign to this

text. But the word "participation" shows a balance between these two extremes. It shows us that there is something real and amazing going on in the Lord's Supper. We have participation with the risen Lord Jesus when we partake of the Supper. Participation - close intimate fellowship, communion, and union, yes in a *spiritual* sense, yes by faith, but really and truly. And this fellowship and communion extends not only between us individually with Christ, but according to verse 17, even with one another, with fellow believers, even with all who are truly Israel, as we all eat from the one bread, which is Christ! And so we call the Lord's Supper a fellowship meal, as we unite vertically with Christ, and horizontally with one another, as one church under Christ.

And so as we think about how amazing this Supper is for the Corinthians and for us, you can begin to see why Paul mentions the Lord's Supper here in this chapter. Like the Israelites, the Corinthians were those who partake of Christ and his benefits. And if because of this the Israelites were without excuse for their idolatry, how much more are the Corinthians without excuse, who have not tasted of Christ only from afar off, in types and shadows, but they have tasted of the Christ who has already come, who has already died on the cross and risen again and is now ascended into heaven. How much more without excuse are the Corinthians, who have been given the formal institution of the Lord's Supper to participate in the body and blood of Christ? How much more are they without excuse for their idolatry? How much more are we without excuse when we ourselves sin and rebel from God when we have tasted of the gracious benefits and blessings of the Lord's Supper?

But Paul doesn't stop there. He has mentioned the significance of the Lord's Supper for more than just to tell the Corinthians that they are without excuse. He has mentioned it to contrast the Lord's Supper with idolatry. We'll see this as we look further at what Paul is saying about the Israelites and their idolatry. Look with me again at verses 18-20. It says, "Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? 19 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. It's unfortunate that several translations add a word to verse 20 that isn't actually in the Greek text. In the NKJV which I just read, it says "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice". The ESV replaces the word "Gentiles" with the word "pagans". Actually neither word is in the text. There is no subject listed in the Greek, which means you have to infer the subject from the context. The most literal translation of verse 20 is this: "Rather, that the things which they sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God." In other words, the subject of verse 20 is not supplied and you have to understand from context what the subject is. The English translations have attempted to do that, assuming that Paul must have been talking about people in general who engage in idolatry, who sacrifice food to idols, assuming that verse 19 must have in mind either pagans or Gentiles. But is that the best option? What about verse 18? What about "Israel according to the flesh"? I'd like to propose to you that the subject in verse 20 at least includes "Israel according to the flesh". Otherwise, why would Paul mention them briefly in verse 18? Clearly verses 19 and 20 are connected with verse 18, because Paul asks us to consider in verse 19 what he is implying by mentioning that Israel according to the flesh *participated* in the OT sacrifices.

You can be further convinced that Paul still has in mind "Israel according to the flesh" in verse 20 when you observe that this verse actually alludes to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. We read part of that Song earlier in the service. This is a reference to Deut 32:17, which is talking about the rebellious Israelites during the 40 year wilderness wandering when it says, quote, "They sacrificed to

demons, not to God." This interpretation of course ties together the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 10.

And so in verse 20, it seems that Paul is still talking about the same idolatrous Israelites that he was talking about at the beginning of this chapter. And do you see what he is saying about them? He is saying that their idolatry was participation with demons. Verse 19 says that the problem is not inherently about eating food sacrificed to idols - because we know that idols don't really exist. The problem is that when someone participates in idolatrous feasts, worshipping these idols through their feasting, they are actually making sacrifices to demons. And so Paul says that idolatry is demonic. He even goes as far to say that when we engage in idolatry, we become "participants" with demons. Did you catch that? That same key concept, "participation", is here used again by Paul, to describe what happens when we engage in idolatry; it's participation with demons; it's communion and fellowship with demons! The same language that Paul used about the Lord's Supper, he uses to describe idolatry. Paul says there is a similarity between the way we relate to Christ when we partake in the Lord's Supper with how we relate to demons when we engage in idolatry!

Do you see the contrast here between the Lord's Supper and idolatry? One is a holy sacrament where we participate with the body and blood of Christ. The other is a sinful abomination where we participate with demons! That is scary to think about! Do you see now why Paul has mentioned the Lord's Supper here when he is warning the Corinthians to flee from idolatry? He is telling the Corinthians that their idolatry is participation with demons, and he tells them that this is in conflict with their partaking of the Lord's Supper. In the Supper they partake of Christ. In their idolatrous feasts they partake of demons. These two things cannot go together. Verse 21 makes this clear. Paul says that the Corinthians cannot drink both the cup of Lord and the cup of demons, lest we provoke the Lord to jealousy and suffer the same fate that the rebellious Israelites did. Would the Corinthians show themselves to be like these rebellious Israelites, who had been given the opportunity to partake of Christ and instead partook in demons through their idolatry? Would they show themselves to be hypocrites like these Israelites and thus suffer judgment like them? Or would they show themselves to be part of the true Israel, not the Israel who is merely Israel according to the flesh, but the Israel according to the heart. Would they show themselves to be those who truly partake of Christ, participating in his body and blood through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? Would they seek the benefits of Christ offered to them in the Supper or would they lust after the idolatrous feasts of pagans?

When we put it in these terms, the choice may seem obvious to us. And yet obviously this was a struggle for some Corinthians. Obviously it was a struggle for many Israelites. And though the choice may seem obvious to you as you sit here in church with God's word open before you, may you remember that this sort of temptation is common to all mankind. It is not when you sit here in church that you usually need to worry about this sort of temptation. It's when you go back out into the world, where you need to be on guard. You may not have the temptation of the same sort of idolatrous pagan feasts that the Corinthians did, but this world today is full of its own alluring idolatries. They come in packages that are socially acceptable, and very enticing. And yet at their core, any such idolatries are ultimately demonic in origin, because they turn you away from the one true God. And as a Christian, as one who partakes in the table of the Lord, you have been reminded today that you are to have nothing in common with these idolatries.

And so this message to the Corinthians to flee idolatry is a message to all of us as well. Do not be allured by the idolatries of the world. And do not take false comfort in the fact that you are visible members of God's covenant community. Just

because you are members in this church through your external profession of faith, doesn't mean that you truly have faith. Just because you externally partake of the Lord's Supper doesn't mean that you truly receive that which it signifies. When God calls us to receive members through their profession, and to administer the Supper, it is God's pledge of his faithfulness and promise, that whoever comes to him in true faith, he will surely give what this sacrament signifies. But as we saw here today, there have been those Israelites and there have been those Corinthians who appeared to be true Christians, but were not. There have been people who have been visibly in God's church, partaking of the benefits of church membership, including the sacraments, and yet, they have shown themselves ultimately to be frauds. They have shown that their faith was merely an external faith, not joined with a true genuine repentance that comes from a regenerated heart.

Paul says in verse 10 that the Destroyer of God came to unleash God's judgment on wayward Israel. That same Destroyer will come again. We must be on guard from anything that would keep us from observing all the things which Christ has commanded us. This means that we must flee from idolatry. It also means that we must flee to the Lord's Supper. Look at the language of this passage to describe our coming to the Supper. It says that we must bless, that we must break, we must partake, that we must drink. We are called to be going to the Supper. The Supper is the solution that is presented here, the alternative to pagan idolatrous feasting. We are called to be content with the feast God has provided. It may seem meager. It might seem to get old to you. It may not seem as attractive as what the world offers, but we are called to partake by faith, believing that it is far superior.

And it is far superior. A moment ago I said that we must not take false comfort when we partake in the Supper. Please don't misunderstand me, however. The Supper is only a false comfort to those who are perishing, to those who do not come to the Supper with true faith and repentance. But to us who are called, this Supper is God's great blessing to us. It should be to us who are truly Christian the greatest comfort and the greatest hope. For God's word tells us that the Lord's Supper is a participation in Christ. When we eat and drink in the Supper, we participate in Christ in a tangible way. We celebrate our union with Christ, and experience our union with Christ, through the bread and wine, through tasting and seeing, through touching and smelling. So much of our faith is in the heart and mind. So much is unseen by human eyes. And yet in the Supper, God recognizes our frailty, and gives us the blessed Supper of the Lord. This passage tells us that this is God's "spiritual food and drink" (3-4) to nourish us. This passage tells us that this meal is a meal of blessing (16) for which we should thank God for! This passage tells us that we participate with Christ in the Supper! What a privilege! What a joy!

And what a ministry which has been entrusted to us. The Great Commission demands that we as Christ's disciples keep this ordinance. We do this to remember Christ. We do this to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. We do this to participate in the risen Christ with all his benefits. It's a means of God's grace to us who come in faith and repentance. And it is a corporate activity. Verse 16 twice says that "we" partake. Verse 17 says that we all partake of one bread and so we are one body. This Supper identifies us as Christ's church and blesses us. This passage today shows us how central the Supper is to the church; so much so, that it serves as a testimony against any in the church who would profane this table through idolatry and other sinful practices, which is nothing other than fellowship with demons. So we cannot disregard this Supper. Instead, as a church, let's be faithful to keep this wonderful blessing which we have been called to.

And as we come to the table here in a few minutes, I hope that this sermon has reminded you of the significance of this table. I hope that it will tell you that if you come in an unworthy manner, that you eat and drink judgment on yourself, just as the rebellious Israelites did in the 40 year wilderness wandering. But I hope that it will tell you that if you come in true faith and repentance, that this Supper is wonderful blessing and privilege.

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