

Bible Basics Conference 2015: The church

Part 5

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[00:00:01] The topic for this session is the Lord's Table, and I'd like to start by reading the passage in 1 Corinthians 10 that speaks of the Lord's Table. Starting in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 14.

Verse 21. We'll read the other verses a little later.

[00:01:15] Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Before the break, Rusty had the session to finish on time for lunch. I think I'll have the challenge of waking you up after lunch, and I do hope you didn't have too many puddings. I'll come to the text in a moment, and we'll go through, with the Lord's help, verse by verse. I just want to start with the general thought that in the Bible, a table has a meaning. A table speaks of fellowship or communion.

Now, there are actually different tables in the Bible, and you'll find that they are associated with different sets of principles. [00:02:06] Now, before I come to this, I just want to tell you a little secret, which is I have a table as well. Not exactly me, but as a family, we have a table. And that table is also associated with a set of principles. So, one first principle is that when we are together to have a meal, then everybody is requested, please not to put the feet on the table. But that's just one of the principles. There may be different tables, like you see on this picture, but that is sort of one thing we try and maintain at home. So that's the thing we don't do. Now, there's another principle, which is that before having a meal, we pray together. And I hope it's not surprising, but you won't find this at every table, but our table is connected with these principles. [00:03:04] And actually one or two others, like we try to wait until everybody's served and not one person finish all the food before the other one has had a chance to start, and that sort of thing. The point is, a table is connected with a set of principles.

Now, in the Bible, you've got a whole range of tables. I've listed some here. There's the table of Saul. I think they had good food, but sometimes there was a spear flying. That was the principles of Saul's table. You had David's table. It was a table of grace. Solomon's table, Nehemiah's.

There was a table of the masters where the crumbs fell down and the dogs could eat. So you find

with all these tables, there are different principles connected with them. And obviously, what we want to work out together now is what are the principles connected with the Lord's table? [00:04:05] Well, to find the answer, we need to look at 1 Corinthians 10. And actually, the expression of the Lord's table occurs only in this chapter and only once.

And this verse, where it is mentioned, verse 21, speaks of the act of partaking of the Lord's table.

And this passage speaks of how we do this by eating the bread and drinking of the cup. The cup of blessing which we bless and the bread which we break.

So, some of you may ask, well, isn't that the same thing Rusty was talking about a minute ago? He was talking about the Lord's supper. And is that the same then as the Lord's table?

Well, these are not synonyms.

[00:05:01] They are not the same thing. These are different aspects or viewpoints of the same thing as I hope we will see.

On this slide, we've listed some of the differences.

The Lord's table speaks of fellowship.

So, please, whatever you take away from this session, please don't go away and say, Michael thinks the Lord's table is a wooden table. It's not what I think. The Lord's table is a sphere of fellowship.

Now, it implies responsibility.

And that is not only for when we are gathered together, but actually for the whole of the week or of our lives. Partaking of the Lord's table has implications for the entire week or, as we say today, 24-7.

[00:06:02] The Lord's supper, which Rusty was speaking about, is the meal itself.

It's taken for the remembrance of the Lord when the assembly has come together. And what Paul teaches there is how we conduct ourselves on that occasion and what it means, remembering and proclaiming his death.

So you might say, 1 Corinthians 11, the Lord's supper, specifically about what and how we do it on taking the supper on Lord's Day morning. And 1 Corinthians 10, what it means in terms of our responsibilities for the rest of the week.

Now, let's have a look at this passage. It's actually very interesting. When you look at verse 14, perhaps you would have expected a verse something like this. Beloved brethren, I now tell you about the Lord's table. [00:07:04] It's a great privilege. Instead of that, verse 14 says, wherefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. Very surprising opening.

And I don't think the Corinthians would have considered themselves idolaters. But some of them went to the idol's temple not to worship there but to eat meat. Now, Paul explains an important principle, which we come back to several times. An outward action implies close inner communion.

The other thing that strikes me in this verse is the word beloved. You might have said what the Corinthians did was really quite out of order. And Paul says, I still love you. I'm writing to you as beloved.

And because I love you, I have to tell you about this. [00:08:01] If I was indifferent, perhaps I wouldn't do that.

But he loved the Corinthians.

The other thing is, he says, I speak as to intelligent persons, judge ye what I say. I would call this the diplomacy of love.

He could have said, perhaps, hearing what you do, I think you have no idea.

He doesn't say that. He says, I write as unto intelligent people. And he doesn't say, I'm now going to judge you, or I'm now going to tell you. No, he says, I'm going to present the topic to you. And I would ask you to consider it and to judge it.

That's a very good attitude for this topic, but also in general to say, we present what we see from scripture, and we ask others to consider and to judge.

[00:09:06] Now, in verse 16, it says, the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?

Perhaps some of the younger ones think, we always do it the other way around in our meeting. We always have the bread first, and then the cup. Why is Paul speaking about the cup first?

It's not the historical order, but I'm sure he does this for a reason guided by the spirit, because the thought of the blood of Christ is designed to make us shrink from sin.

I think that if there is one thing that can make us run away from sin and from the wrong sort of fellowship, it is the thought that the blood of Christ was shed for us. [00:10:02] And that's why this is so prominent in this passage.

But drinking of the cup, it says here, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? So by drinking of the cup, we express communion with the blood of Christ.

We say, basically, Christ has died for me, and he has rights over me. And again you see this principle, outward action implies close communion. This time the outward action is taking of the cup, and the communion is with the blood of Christ. Similarly, in verse 16b, the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? Eating of the bread also implies communion.

He gave his body, and we say, look, this means it is for me that he died.

And again it is true, the outward action of breaking the bread and eating of it, expresses inner communion. [00:11:06] I have communion with the body of Christ given for me. Now verse 15, we've already quoted this morning, just come back to it briefly. Because we, being many, are one loaf, one body, for we all partake of that one loaf.

Now the bread, or the loaf, has two meanings. We found in verse 16, that the bread there speaks of the physical body of Christ nailed to the cross given to us. In verse 17, the bread speaks of the body of Christ, but in the sense of the church.

Why? Well, because it says, we, being many, are one loaf, one body.

So this body is composed of believers. Now this is a key verse.

[00:12:05] The basis on which we break bread, this is the inclusive side of that basis, is the unity of the body of Christ.

In other words, we break bread as members of his body, not as members of this church or that.

If I can make a little confession here, when I first broke bread, I think I must have been about 18, I thought I understood what it means, but I don't think I did.

And it was only a few years later, actually in England, you'll be pleased to know, that I came to see this. It was not as a member of an assembly, it was as a member of the body of Christ that we break bread.

[00:13:05] Now, the apostle includes himself, so the body of Christ here is not the church in one locality, it is the worldwide church. And by eating of the bread, we express that we see all believers in that bread worldwide, the body of Christ.

Now this is really important, because it expresses that we break bread as members of his body, but also that it's not an individual matter, but it is a matter of fellowship.

Let's just come back to this thought of membership a little bit. It says, for we all partake of the one loaf. Now obviously, we would phrase this differently today, it doesn't mean that because we break bread we are part of the body, it means we are part of the body and therefore we break bread.

[00:14:02] In other words, the fact that we break bread expresses the truth that we are part of that one body. So that means no other membership is required.

And actually I'll go a little bit further, it's not only that no other membership is required, but being a member of a denomination really flies in the face of the truth of the body of Christ. Now, I'm not here to judge brethren who have not heard this teaching, or who don't know about this, and who perhaps take part in this meal in some church and are a member there, and that's the best they've learned so far, and I'm not here to judge anyone. We're here to see what the scriptures say. But the scriptures say we're not breaking bread as members of this or that church, we are breaking bread as members of the body of Christ. [00:15:02] But that raises another question.

Brother Robert showed this map of the church in Birmingham and showed us the dispersion, according to Mr. Google, and some things that were called church and weren't church. So in that situation, how can we possibly show the unity of the body of Christ? Now, one idea is let's do it by forming some sort of alliance between all the different denominations and say, you know, we'll just work together. Well, that would be a cooperation of sects. Well, that's not the body of Christ. The next idea is, well, obviously we've got to start something new then. You know, forget everything that's there and go back to the beginning just to start a new church and do it right. Well, that's another red

cross crossed out.

[00:16:03] How about the next option by bringing together all believers into one place, into one whole, so you could see, you know, they're all there. Well, first of all, if you want to do that, you are very brave. You can try.

Should you be successful and, say, bring all believers of Catford into one whole in Catford on a Sunday morning, you still wouldn't be able to see the body of Christ because that's just those in Catford. So even if that was possible, that wouldn't do it.

But there is another way, and thanks to the Lord that is still open to us today. It is by breaking bread on the grounds of the one body of Christ.

There are, of course, many other things we do that should and need to be in conformity with the principle of the one body of Christ. [00:17:04] But this act of breaking the bread on that basis is the deepest expression of that truth.

And it's really great that this is open to us, you know, even in the 21st century and with all that's gone wrong, that is still possible. Now, in verse 18, Paul gives an example. He says, see, Israel according to the flesh are not they who eat the sacrifices in communion with the altar.

He takes this example and he says the Israelites, when they ate of the meat offering, that wasn't just having a meal. It was a lot more.

It actually meant being in direct fellowship with the altar.

Again, this example demonstrates the same principle. [00:18:02] Outward action implies close communion.

God had said the altar was most holy, Exodus 29. And eating the sacrifices, therefore, implies a high responsibility. And only those who were clean were allowed to eat. Now, we shouldn't misunderstand this. Very recently, a Christian magazine published a text starting with the word undoubtedly. And there we always need to be a bit careful because sometimes those things are to be doubted. And it says the view of the Lord's table given here embraces the whole Christian company at all times. And not only when gathered together, for the analogy referred to is as to Israel after the flesh, eating of the sacrifices. It is no doubt the peace offering of which all Israel partook. In so doing, they were in fellowship with the altar and so also as to the cup and the bread at the Lord's table. [00:19:03] All true Christians are contemplated as participating. Now, we need to be careful with what we read. Not all that is printed is good. If you check this, actually, you find it's not true. In Leviticus 7, verse 19, it says, and all those who are pure may eat of the flesh.

And Paul, in our verse, he says, those who ate.

The verse doesn't say they all ate. It says those who ate. So you find that with such a seemingly small mistake, you can arrive at a wrong conclusion.

And you're made to believe here all true Christians are viewed as participating. All true Christians are viewed in the one bread. But they do not all participate. Now, verse 19 says, what then do I say?

[00:20:02] That what is sacrificed to an idol is anything? Or that an idol is anything?

Now, basically, the Corinthians were very clever.

The Corinthians were, I would say, intellectual.

They said, idols are made of stone. Stone is dead.

Therefore, an idol can't do anything to me. An idol can be neither good nor bad.

We don't believe this. It doesn't matter.

Well, actually, Paul says, I know that as well. I know that an idol is nothing.

And I know that you don't believe in idols. The problem is the other people do. Verse 20, what the nations sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.

That's the problem.

The heathens believed in the idols, and behind the idols there were demons. [00:21:07] Now, Paul says in verse 20, now, I do not wish you to be in communion with demons. I think at this point the Corinthians must have been quite shocked. They probably had no idea that that is what they implied by going to this place.

And it was something they didn't want. But the truth is this outward action implied close inner communion, and in this case with demons. Now, some of you may know that I work for a company called PWC. And some will know that our offices in London are bang opposite the opposite of Ernest & Young. And Ernest & Young are one of our chief competitors.

And we're literally 10 meters apart.

Now, the doors at Ernest & Young are open, and I could just walk in there into the entrance lobby. [00:22:05] I could even sit down and have a read. And I would say, you know, I'm not here to hunt for a job. I'm just here because they have a nice sofa. But I've never done that.

If my boss or a colleague passed by and they said, you know, I saw Michael in the lunch break. He was sitting at Ernest & Young in the reception. It wouldn't go down too well.

So we need to be careful what we associate with.

And by going to a place, we basically consent to what is going on.

In verse 21, Paul comes to the conclusion. He says, you cannot drink the Lord's cup and the cup of demons.

Basically, he says, these are two actions, drinking of the Lord's cup and drinking of the demon's cup. [00:23:02] Each action implies a sort of communion.

And those two communions don't fit together. You know, every time I say something, you get a little bit of math. Here you have a little Venn diagram and the two circles that don't overlap. They are mutually exclusive sets. And these are mutually exclusive fellowships. Paul says, if you are part of the one, you can't be part of the other. So really, we've had four examples, and each of them demonstrated the same thing. Something is done outwardly, some partaking, and what is expressed is an inner, close communion.

Now why are they mutually exclusive? Well, we're taking back to the cross, really. We're taking back to the blood of Christ. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons. It is a moral impossibility. [00:24:01] If we do one on Lord's Day morning, we can't do the other on Sunday. What we do on Lord's Day morning has implications for the rest of the week. And basically, this reminds us of another important principle, which is that not only evil defiles, but association with evil defiles as well. And that's not just, it's also, but it's not just a picture from the Old Testament, like with leprosy or touching a dead body. But it is a truth that is stated several times in the New Testament, 2 Timothy 2, 2 John 9, 1 Corinthians 15, evil communications, corrupt good manners.

Revelation 2, verse 14 are just some examples.

So how then can we partake of the Lord's table? Where can we find it today?

Somebody has asked, you know, who has the Lord's table today? [00:25:04] Well, I've got a simple answer for that.

It's the Lord.

The Lord has the table.

It is his table.

But the Lord has told us what the principles are behind his table, or connected with his table.

And I think we discovered three. The first one is the unity of the body of Christ.

No other membership, no sects, no national churches, the unity of the body of Christ. We are one loaf, one body.

The second principle, separation from evil, including associations, because it said you cannot.

And the third principle is the authority of the Lord Jesus. So if you ask me where can I find the Lord's table in London, [00:26:03] I'm not going to give you an address. I'm going to give you these three principles, and I say go and look. Find where believers gather together on the grounds of the unity of the body of Christ and separation from evil, recognizing his authority. And when you've found it, stay.

That's a good place to be.

Now, many very helpful things have been written on this subject. And if you are interested in the subject, I would really urge you to get hold of some of these very good articles by brothers like C.H. McIntosh, Darby, Kelly, Rossier. By the way, a little booklet. I'm sure Simon will be pleased if I

announce this, which has just been republished by Chapter 2.

Available at the back. Thank you. C.J. Davies, Bible Treasury, Dennett, Trench, Hocking, F.B. Hull, Hamilton Smith.

[00:27:06] And to make it a little easier for you to find these things, we've just uploaded a page a couple of days ago on Bible Center where you find the relevant passages from all of these texts. So if you want to follow up a little bit more, see what these teachers have taught on the subject, please do. And I hope this will be helpful.

And my overall request and wish for all of us is it can look complicated. A Christian testimony looks a bit like a spaghetti junction sometimes. There's so many ways to go. How can you get to the right place? I'm sure if we pray the prayer of Psalm 86, verse 11, the Lord will help and guide.

Teach me thy way, O Lord, I will walk in thy truth.