

The table of the Lord

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Verse 5. With many of them God was not well pleased. Verse 12. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take he lest he fall. Verse 14. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, free from idolatry. I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say. 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? For we, the many, are one bread and one body. For we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold, Israel are to the flesh. Are not they [00:01:05] which eat of the sacrifices, partakers of the altar? What say I then, that the idol is anything or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything? But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God. I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. You cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than him? Now chapter 11. Verse 17. Now in this that I declare unto you, I praise you not.

[00:02:05] If you come together, not for the better, but for the worse. Verse 20. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating, one taketh before other his own supper, and one is hungry and another is drunken. What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you. That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread. And he had given thanks, he broke it and said, Take, eat. This is my body which is broken to you. This [00:03:04] do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, and he had cup saying, This cup is in the testament in my blood. This do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do so the Lord's death till he comes. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge [00:04:04] ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, carry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home. That ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order, when I come. Now before we talk about that little passage, can we bow our heads one moment. Lord Jesus, firmly we put our confidence in thee. We ask thee to bless thy word to every heart.

Give us a consciousness of thy presence. And thus we here worshipful hearts, ask thy blessing. In

the name of the Lord, precious and worthy name. Amen. [00:05:04] I wish to speak tonight about the table of the Lord, 1st Corinthians 10.

And the supper of the Lord, 1st Corinthians 11. I've been in the meetings a long time, over 40 years. I can't remember an address specifically on this subject. Nevertheless, I think I can discern certain movements of the Spirit in the company. And my prayer is that we may be conscious of further movements tonight. It's clear we have here a subject that opens [00:06:06] to us the very greatest possibility in blessing. Likewise, it opens to us a subject of the very greatest responsibility. Chapter 10, fellowship, and the place of fellowship. Chapter 11, the highest expression of fellowship in the breaking of bread. Now in handling a deeply practical subject, I think we do well at the start to try and capture something of the atmosphere surrounding these passages. The Apostle Paul had a very deep affection for the Saints. For the Galatians he was ready to clavil again in birth for them. For the Thessalonians, [00:07:05] remember, he was willing not only imparted the gospel of God only, but also his own self. And if I may say so, I believe he had a very special affection for these Corinthians. You may remember that his entry into Corinth in the 18th of Acts was marked by no small tumult. And yet in the midst of the sorrows of this servant, the Lord encouraged him with a vision, I have much people in this city. And I make bold to say that in subsequent history he most often dwelt upon that vision to keep him going. The love of God constrained him. There was a working according to God's working, which he said worked in him mightily. And I think it's in this sort of context we can understand those words in the second epistle when he said, out of much affliction, [00:08:06] much anguish, many tears, I wrote to you. Now I think if we fail to get this antecedent to this practical passage, we'll fail to get the deep exercise behind the Apostle in bringing this passage before the Corinthians. Secondly I think we ought to know that the Apostle wrote confidently. When he took up many issues of the Corinthians, it wasn't with a view to anything else but their recovery. You remember how they were doing shockingly badly. In the fifth chapter there was a case of blatant synonymity. But of course in the second epistle it's quite apparent that they'd got to God about it. You were repentant. And it's in this epistle that the Apostle says, [00:09:05] I rejoice I've got confidence in you in all things. Now it's because of this I think again we can approach this practical matter in the assurance of the Apostle's affection and his confidence in God that there was going to be some answer to the very serious practical matter that he was going to raise in the section. So let's look a little at the table of the Lord. The scriptural references are surprisingly few. In the Old Testament I believe only four. Two of them in Ezekiel which we can quickly dispose of. In the 44th chapter and verse 16 we read there of the sons [00:10:04] of Zadok. And in a coming day they're going to have access into the sanctuary to minister at the table of the Lord. Clearly a reference to a millennial day. Likewise in chapter 41 verse 22 we come to the altar of wood. It would seem that to an earthly people there was a testimony that there was a company nearer than themselves. A heavenly company to which in wonderful grace we belong. These are two of the references in the Old Testament. Now there are two more both in the first chapter of Malachi. You may remember that the remnant that was returned from Babylon again were doing shockingly badly. And in their carelessness in the first chapter instead of [00:11:03] bringing to the Lord the very best. They were bringing to him what was blind and what was lame and what was sick. And they were saying, not in so many words of course, the table of the Lord is contemptible. They were really just giving to the Lord what was left over. And of course it brought serious consequences for the remnant in that day. Now when we come to 1st Corinthians we come I believe to the only reference in the New Testament to the table of the Lord. May I say too that in my experience the teaching that I've heard relative to the table is not only defective, not only deficient, but sometimes it's defective. And therefore we'll have to proceed carefully and [00:12:07] try and learn from the scripture what this table stands for. I think there's an Old Testament scripture which helps a great deal. You will remember concerning Mephibosheth. That man who was lame upon both his feet

brought from Lodibah the kindness of God shown to him by David. That in the aboundings of grace toward this guilty man we read that he did eat bread as one of the king's sons. He did eat bread at the king's table continually. Now I think this is a very helpful reference. Was he always eating at the table? No. Had he the privilege of access to the table? Yes.

[00:13:07] And was his conduct at all times to be relative to this high dignity which had been put upon him? Yes. I think this really puts in a nutshell what we have in these passages. We have been brought into the very highest privileges. And I hope that this aspect of the teaching in 1 Corinthians 10 comes home to us very clearly. We have here a picture of what is available to us intelligently at the place of eating in the very strongest terms. Just notice please. Mention is made of the cup. It's mentioned first. The basis of the fellowship. And what do we read? Is it not the [00:14:02] communion of the blood of Christ? Now this expression, the blood of Christ, might come to those who are familiar with New Testament language as a little bit of a surprise. We're used to the blood of the new covenant. In all boldness and confidence we can say we've got something that goes beyond new covenant here. We have here the blood of Christ. Our communion is in relation to this grand foundation. And if I may put it briefly I hope effectively it's not only the matter of forgiveness. But we have the privilege of union with Christ. And in the spirit of power we know the truth of headship and sonship. We have here, I think briefly stated, that which lays the foundation for the very highest Christian privilege. Now there are three fellowships spoken [00:15:06] of here in 1st Corinthians 10. There's Christian fellowship. There is Jewish fellowship. And there is Jewish fellowship. If I may say it once, they are mutually exclusive. There is a certain analogy between Christian fellowship and Jewish fellowship. And may we just spend a little moment on this. Israel occupied a very special place of course in God's dealings with men. You remember in Deuteronomy 32 verse 8 that when God separated the inheritance of the children of Adam's race, the division was in relation to Israel. He set their boundaries according to his own people. [00:16:05] You remember again in Balaam's prophecy he said, Israel shall dwell alone. They shall not be reckoned with a nation. Israel was found in the midst of an idolatrous world as a testimony to the living God. They were brought into the highest privileges. They knew God as Jehovah. Now as you trace the history of Israel, you find that so long as they maintained their position, they were blessed. I'll quote a few scriptures. Jeremiah 2. Israel was holiness unto the Lord. In the early days of, in the history of David, you find that Israel again was giving the Lord the first place. [00:17:06] The ark was brought up to Jerusalem. In the early days of Solomon, you find likewise he stood before the altar. The measure of blessing to Israel, so long as they were maintained in purity and in separation, just could not be missed. The eyes of the Lord ran to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in the behalf of those his heart was turned to. But idolatry still remained a great mare in Israel. I don't know whether you've ever pondered that verse in the 13th of Nehemiah. Nehemiah speaking of Solomon, he says, even him, just notice that, even him did outlandish women [00:18:01] cause to sin. And I think this is in keeping with what we have in Corinthians. Wherefore let him that thinketh these standards take heed lest he fall. Even him, even as Solomon. And we know that chapter says, idolatry came into his kingdom. The consequences of that, as you well know, are seen in the divided state of the kingdom and the scattering subsequently. Now this matter of idolatry didn't only bother Solomon. You will remember in both Israel and in Judah, this was a constant plague. I could mention many instances. I'll just choose one to show how easily and quickly it came in. Jehoshaphat, 2 Chronicles 18. You remember it says, he had riches and honors in abundance and the very same sentence, he joined [00:19:07] affinity with Ahab. Even in the midst of this prosperity, he joined affinity with Ahab. And the towing in that verse meant a reaping in subsequent history for kings were devastated because of the link with Ahab. But on the other hand, it's interesting to see that when graciously the Lord raised up those who stood against the trend, who cleared out the idolatry, blessing immediately was the result. You can see how

with Habakkuk, he had a revival, the rubbish was cleared out and God blessed. You find the same thing with Josiah, he had a revival, the rubbish was cleared out, he was [00:20:07] blessed. And you find with Ezra and Nehemiah, they had a revival, the rubbish was cleared out and they were blessed. In each case smaller, but the spiritual enjoyment subsequent to this action was brighter in each case. Now the lesson we have to take is, that if there is an analogy between Christianity and with Judaism, when we come to Theism, what is portrayed in Theism is an exact spiritual opposite to what we've been engaged in. They had their cup. They poured it out. And that's one reason why the cup is mentioned here. And there were some in Corinth who thought that they [00:21:07] could, with impunity, not only eat what was sacrificed to idols, but more, they could go into an idol temple and sit down there and still come off scot-free. Now he says to the apostles, I speak as to wise men. Judge what I say. These Corinthians were spiritually indwelt. They had intelligence to take account of the matter. So the apostles said, those who were in their temples, certainly the idols are non-entities. They've got power neither human nor divine. But the one who's behind the scenes, who's pulling the strings, is none other than the devil himself. It's absolute folly for you to say that you can go into an idol temple and your heart isn't in it. If you go into [00:22:06] an idol temple, you will taste the consequence. And it's sad to say exactly what was happening in Corinth, because we have to write, sadly, over the situation in Corinth, a ruined testimony. Associations decamped. And because they were careless in regard to them, the public testimony was dead. I can't but go on now to the next question, which I wish I could just quietly sit down with everybody in this room, every sister too. I'd like to ask you a question. I don't want [00:23:04] it to quibble from the person that's gone. This is a question I'd like to ask you. Tell me, where is the table of the Lord today? How would you answer that question? Now before you come up to the answer, I'm going to just discourse upon something where I at least have been misled. I have heard in a meeting, I was bowled over by it I can tell, that that bread on the table, to this brother anyway, spoke only of the sacrificial body of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm going to tell you tonight, I don't think that that is correct. That bread upon the table certainly does speak of the sacrificial [00:24:10] body of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we can back it up by this, it's the bread which we break. But I read here, for we being many, are one bread and one body. For we all, we are all partakers of that one bread. As putting our hand to that loaf, as receiving the broken bread, we become a testimony to the truth of the one body. Now this was truth that burned brightly at the start of the Brethren movement, at the beginning of the past century. The consciousness of the Saints is this, that the [00:25:03] Spirit that linked them with Christ, linked them also with every believer on earth. And there was a very definite awareness of the truth of the one body. I think it should come home to us too, on the table of show bread, 12 loaves, Israel's fourth. To us on the table, one loaf. And in that one loaf, I think we can say categorically now, I believe it's a teaching, the correct understanding of the word. That loaf, in the primary sense, speaks of the sacrificial body of our Lord Jesus Christ. But in a secondary sense, it speaks of the truth of the one body. Now I say that is preliminary, to my own answer to the question, as to what is the table of the Lord. And these, I believe, are the four features, that will mark the [00:26:07] presence of the table of the Lord. In the first place, there is room at the table of the Lord, for every member of the body of Christ. We come to a large upper room, for instance. And there is room, at the table, for every genuine believer in our Lord Jesus Christ. Point one.

Secondly, everyone who is not a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ, is excluded from that table. Wrong indeed. Damaging to souls, to admit to the privileges of the Christian circle, those who have neither part nor lot in this matter. [00:27:13] Now the third section, the third consideration, in connection with the table of the Lord, is this. That table, dearly beloved brethren, that table is not yours. And that table isn't mine. And nor is it ours.

That table is the Lord's. It is the Lord's table. And at the Lord's table, it's his authority which will be felt. Sometimes you hear it said, that those who are born again, real Christians, they have a right to the table. No, dearly beloved, they have a privilege. It's their privilege to be at the table. [00:28:07] The only one who has rights at the table is the Lord. And therefore, if I'm looking to the table of the Lord, I want to ask certain questions. Is the authority of the Lord only? I mean, in worship? I mean, in ministry? I mean, in discipline? Is place given to the Spirit of God? Do the brethren come together on the first day to break bread? What is the character of the meeting? Is the authority of the Lord owned? That's the third feature in connection with the table. And the fourth feature is this. There's no room for independency at the table.

That truth of the one body cuts out sectarianism. But likewise, it cuts out independency. Now, let's proceed a stage further. Generalities don't purge. You can say, I've got your four points. I feel intellectually wonderfully set up. I've got the answer. Now let's apply it. [00:29:29] The Anglican, the Church of England. Now, have they got the table of the Lord? After all, you know, you admitted to the Anglican body by baptism. Sounds good, doesn't it? But the difficulty, of course, is that in their system, I'm not speaking against individuals. Please, everyone understand that. I've got dear friends amongst the Anglicans. I'm speaking of the system. But with the Anglicans, baptism is baptismal religion. Consequently, you'll find at their table, those who are not members of the body of Christ. They haven't got the table of the Lord. [00:30:16] How about all the sects in Protestantism? Have they got the table of the Lord? But they don't accept others from other sects. They exclude those who are real members of the body of Christ. Have they got the table of the Lord? Manifestly, they haven't got the table of the Lord. Or, but you say, I've got just the answer. I know the company nicely. Oh, such a precious company. They'll receive every real believer, and they'll have no room for those who are unconverted. Well, I've got a few questions to ask. Tell me now, do you own the authority of the Lord at your table? You're the minister, or is the spirit king? Do you come together on the first day of the week to break bread? Tell me, what is the system of ministering? Do the prophets speak two or three? [00:31:24] When discipline comes up, do you bow to the word of God? You see, it's the Lord's table. His authority. But then, there's the fourth group. Those who have a nice little wall around themselves. Excellent.

Ah, but dearly beloved, this matter of independence is complex. Are we in fellowship with others, who likewise have the table of the Lord? You see, it becomes very certain, doesn't it? [00:32:06] And may I say, that this affects us, each one of us, as to our personal walk. Have we got any understanding in regard to the table of the Lord? I'll put it further. Have we got any conviction, any conviction, in regard to the table of the Lord? I could spend a lot of time on this, but time doesn't allow it. But I'll just give you one example. When John Nelson Darby lost his father, I think it was, he was buried in the church.

Horror of horror, think you, he wouldn't go inside that church. I read in my Bible, that for the sons of Aaron, they could be defiled for a dead body. Father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister.

[00:33:12] A high priest, no. A Nazarite, no. And I ask you, each one, in the presence of God, carefully to guard, watch, watch your own steps. How do you stand in regard to your contact with other Christians?

I'm not saying, and please don't quote me, that those in other bodies are going to idle temples. I didn't say that. But the principle applies, and I haven't any doubt at all. In the presence of God, I say it with all confidence, that if there's carelessness in regard to our associations, the result is known amongst

us, as it is known amongst the Corinthians, a ruined testimony. [00:34:05] I'm reminded of church history. And may I quote you? The church persecuted is the church pure. And the church pure is the church powerful.

In the early days of Pentecost, in the early days of the Brethren history, when Brethren gathered to the Lord's name, they were persecuted. The world really gave them trouble, the religious world as well as the secular world. It purified their testimony and all the freshness that marked their meetings. Now, dearly beloved, are we losing that freshness? What's happened to our prayer meetings? What's happened to the supper? What about the gospel preaching, the open air? How about the outreach, our contact, our impact upon others? [00:35:10] I believe that this matter that we're now talking about is a matter where we've got to get to God about it, got to get to God about it. And that's why I was so careful to say it. At the start of the meeting, the Apostle brought this in all affection before the Corinthians. Judge what I say. And then he comes in with that gilded hammer touch at the end of his address. Do we provoke the Lord again to jealousy? Are we stronger than they? He wasn't talking about matters on a human level. No. He wanted to bring the heart and conscience of the Corinthians. As the Spirit of God will bring your heart and conscience and mine into the presence of God, so that we'll come to a right answer. And believe you me. Nay, believe rather what God says. This is the only antecedent to any absurdist laughter in the public space. [00:36:21] And now more briefly I'm going to talk about the supper of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11. This is the breaking of bread. Most of us know the blessedness of this occasion.

This last request of our beloved Lord. In circumstances most effective. There is to be a response from those that love him. An announcement in this world of his death.

[00:37:09] A testimony to the truth of the one body. In the light of the fact that soon he's coming again. Till I come again. We enjoy his company together. Warm isn't it? Sweet. The very moment of heaven upon earth. Now says the apostle. This is not only the breaking of the bread. This is the supper of the Lord. The Lord supper. As we've often heard this word Lord only occurs twice in the scriptures.

The other reference is Revelation 1 10. The Lord's day. A lordly day. A lordly day. A lordly supper. And if you were to look down the passage. You'll find no fewer than 8 references to the Lord. Verse 20 the Lord's supper. Verse 23 I received of the Lord. That the Lord Jesus. The same night in which he was betrayed. The Lord's death. Verse 26. [00:38:22] The Lord. Verse 27. Twice. The Lord's body. Verse 29. Chastened of the Lord. Verse 32. What does it mean? We have heard this statement that 1 Corinthians 10 is the responsibility of the bread breaking.

In chapter 11 it's the breaking of bread. I'm going to add what I believe the teacher wouldn't have denied. That there's responsibility also in the 11th chapter. It's not only the breaking of bread in the 11th chapter. But it's a matter of responsibility. It is the Lord's supper. [00:39:08] When we put our hand to the loaf. When we take the cup. It becomes a vitally important matter as to whether we discern the Lord's body. Do we discern the Lord's body? Now the Corinthians weren't. They were taking the Lord's supper as if it were an ordinary meal. Their own supper. They had failed to discern that in that loaf there was a representation of the Lord. In that cup there was a representation of the blood. They were taking it I say as their own supper. Now what was the event? The Lord is present in the company. He's watching the house. None of us is worthy except through his precious blood. But here's the question of eating words of ease. Words of ease.

[00:40:11] How far think you have we taken to heart that the Lord is watching our hearts? Is there an

allowance with any other that which has come to an end at the cross?

Are we sharing his repressions? I'm comforted in the ministry of recent weeks there's been a talk on baptism. We're baptised to his death. Individual. Here at the supper we announce his death. Continuation of the subject you see. In recent weeks there's been a talk of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. How far do we enter into those sufferings? I don't mean intellectually but so far as our lives are concerned. Are we really sharing his reproach? Are we really walking in the same steps? I believe it's only in the measure in which we are interrupted is that we discern his body and we approve his lesson. [00:41:23] And, and this is the bit I have to add, the Corinthians came under the Lord's chastening hand. Now when we speak of the Lord's chastening hand we have to speak very gently with one another. Job said the hand of the Lord is chastening. Serious isn't it? Many are sickly among you. Weak and sickly and a good many sickly. I've had more than thirty years in medical practice and I know that there are some sicknesses the doctor can't get better. I'm not saying all sicknesses are in this chapter. God forbid. I'd be a joke to come to you if I did. [00:42:11] But nevertheless there are some sicknesses which can only be explained on the basis of the Lord's chastening hand. And therefore dearly beloved we do well to examine ourselves.

I'm glad that I come from a Stockton lineage where this examination was a serious matter. Scotland only broke bread about once a year. But when they approached the supper there was an examination that was intense. I wonder you know whether mere familiarity hasn't caused this word of preparation to drop out from our vocabulary. But it is a serious matter whether it's once a year or every week. And we have to face up to it in the presence of the Lord as to whether we're eating and drinking worthily. [00:43:16] You have to answer for yourself. I have to answer for myself. Blessed indeed. But all the consequences of not answering to it they carefully bear mentioning. Because it is with God that we have to live. Now that's all that's in my mind. Time's up. But I ask you quietly to take home these things. The table of the Lord. The Lord's supper. A very very practical matter.

So far as Christ was concerned a ruined testimony and personal baptism. How far do you think our meetings measure up to this? And our lives too? Is there prosperity? It is the Lord's hand upon us. And I believe it's exactly in this area where the victory is won or lost. [00:44:16] I repeat what I said at the start. The apostle had very great affection for these Corinthians. But more, he had very great confidence in them. I rejoice therefore I have confidence in you in all things. Who did he say that to? He said it to a company who had judged themselves. And where the feats of repentance had come in. And without that repentance. I'm afraid it's not confidence we'll have but the assurance that the Lord's hand will be upon us.

The hymn that's in my mind is 318. O Lamb of God who keep us close to thy pierced side. She's only there in safety and peace we can abide. With foes and snares around us and lusts and fears within. The grace that sought and found us alone can keep us clean.

[00:45:28] Soon shall arise the whole day with rapture face to face. And resting there in glory we'll sing thy power and grace. Thy beauty Lord and glory. The wonders of thy love will be the endless story of all thy saints. Let's sing the whole hymn 318.