

Communing with Christ: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

OUTLINE

Not a sin offering
Not a physical eating
Not a mere remembering

INTRODUCTION

People have died for the issue of how Christ is present in the Lord's Supper. And this is a good thing. It is not good because people are dying but because people are willing to die to uphold biblical truth. Christ commanded His church to remember His death by means of the Lord's Supper, this is a non-negotiable for His Church. I love to remind us that people died for these truths because we are so lackadaisical. In our politically correct climate we are scared off having conviction about anything and would rather go soft on any distinctive that might cause Christians to differ. When it comes to the issue of how Christ is present in the Supper it not only negates the bible's teaching to deny soft pedal these things but also robs us of the knowledge of great blessing and grace being poured out upon us by God. Today as we remember the Lord's death we will prepare our hearts by looking at Paul's words to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 10:14-22.

Paul is writing to the Corinthian church on a number of issues that have arisen in the congregation. They have been asking certain questions on specific topics as they try and negotiate how to be the church in a sinful city like Corinth. One of the issues was marriage, 7:1; but another was food offered to idols, 8:1. It is fascinating to see how Paul answers a question, he teaches us so much by his theological method. He uses so many other doctrines to answer this one question. He touches on the true definition of love, the reality of other gods, the unity within the Trinity, the Creatorship of Christ, teaching on conscience, the Christian's freedom to be a servant, cross cultural ministry, the relationship of the OT to the NT, God's sovereignty over trials and many other things. All of these he employs to shine light on the question of can a Christian eat food offered to idols. In laying out all these other truths in order to help the Corinthians think Christianly and doctrinally about their situation he also touches on the spiritual nature of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 10:14-22.

Remember now that there were three main ways in which a person would be exposed to meat offered to idols, there was eating at the temple of the idol, buying it at the meat market or eating it at someone else's home. Well, Paul gives his answer to these three different scenarios. Regarding eating food offered to idols, and participating in the feast at the temple, Paul gives a very solid and definite no, verses 14-22 deal with that particular scenario. Regarding buying meat at the meat market, must the Christian be like the Jews and become vegetarians when there is no kosher butcher, or can they buy the meat. Paul tells them that in the privacy of their own homes they are free to eat the meat bought at the meat market (v23-26). And thirdly, what if one is invited to a friend's house, who is not a

believer, can a Christian eat that meat? The answer is eat it unless you will cause someone else to stumble or question your dedication to Christ (v27-33). So the answers are, no, yes, depends!

So why is it wrong to eat in the temples? Now the 'strong' believers would not have liked to hear this for meat was a luxury, and the temple feasts were major social events, they would lose out on these things by not going. But Paul is adamant, and he wants the Corinthians to think through it for themselves (v15). His main reason is that just as we have fellowship with Christ when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, so we have fellowship with demons when we participate in the feasts and ceremonies at the idol's temple. If you have ever wandered whether you are allowed as a Christian to go and worship at a mosque, or a Buddhist or Hindu temple, the answer is, No! There are demonic forces there, these grant experiences, and hold the people in blindness and bondage. This is the very thing from which we have been saved and should not be entangled in again. Paul is pointing out to the Corinthians that being involved in the temple services are not neutral they are spiritual affairs. And in the discussion he gives us insight into the question, how is Christ present in the Lord's Supper. The doctrinal teaching of the bible does not come to us in the abstract form of a theological textbook but as truth applied to the issues of the day.

The language of this section is difficult and has encouraged many wrong understandings. So as we proceed I want to clarify the question at hand by looking at three negatives as a way of decluttering the text. We will show that the Lord's Supper is not a sin offering, it is not a physical feeding upon Christ and it is not a mere remembrance.

Not a sin offering

You will notice as you read through these verses that Paul speaks about food being *offered* to idols, v19-20. The language of offering indicates sacrifice. But also notice that Paul never uses this language to discuss the Lord's Supper. In fact he studiously avoids such descriptions. Instead he speaks of the Lord's Supper in verse 16 as 'the cup of blessing that we bless.' The language seems to lend strength to the Roman Catholic notion of the priest consecrating the elements so that transubstantiation occurs, that a re-enacting of the sacrifice takes place and we receive the blessing of forgiveness by this sacrifice. This is an anachronistic reading where we read the concerns of later debates back into the text. 2 major ideas that would have occurred to the first century mind were 1. The cup of blessing is a cup of thanksgiving and blessing towards God. This understanding seems to find support in the fact that Jesus Himself gave thanks for the cup at the Last Supper, Matt. 26:27, 'And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you.'" 2. The language could be language of consecration, when something is blessed, it is set apart for religious use, in other words separated for exclusive religious use towards God. This idea finds support in the fact that Paul emphasizes the necessity of not being associated and partaking of the table of demons while also being consecrated to the Lord. There is no question that we do indeed receive a blessing by the cup and the bread, but this is not likely the concern of the language here in Paul. Paul is laying out reasons with which the Corinthians can come to the obvious conclusion that they are to have

nothing to do with idolatry and idolatrous feasts, the God we worship, and the purpose of being set apart for Him, and things spiritual things we interact with make it obvious that any participation is wrong.

The next phrase we must consider is, a 'participation in the blood of Christ.' What does Paul mean by this and how have Christians understood him? In the early Church the Church Fathers did not have a single way of interpreting these words. They did believe that they physically partook of Christ's body and blood but there was no real attempt to explain the mechanics of how this all worked. All the medieval views up until Luther fell into the trap of taking these words to be describing a physical partaking of the physical body and blood of Christ. The Roman Catholics following Aquinas who was influenced by Aristotelian philosophy believed in transubstantiation. This view believed that they bread and wine were changed and became the body and blood. In order to prove this, because it was obvious to all that the wine did not taste like blood and the bread did not taste like flesh, they had to borrow imaginatively from Aristotle. Aristotle made the distinction between a thing's accidents and its substance. Outwardly bread is white, fluffy, spongy etc., but these are not the substance that makes bread what it is. So then, the bread and wine has every appearance and taste of bread and wine but are miraculously changed into the blood and body of Christ by the priest's consecration. The accidents remained the same but the substance was changed. Because the host was thought to actually become Jesus it was lifted up for adoration during the service and many worshipped the host as Christ, this is obvious idolatry and sophistry and not what Paul intends here.

Not a physical eating

Although Paul uses the language of participating in the body and blood of Christ we must make very clear that this is not to be confused with eating and drinking the physical body of Jesus. Reading participation as physical eating and drinking is probably the greatest error in this issue. While Luther rejected the teaching that the substance of the bread and wine change while the accidents remain the same, he did still teach that Christ is physically present, that His literal physical body and blood are present. This was believed because Luther took the words of Christ 'this is my body' literally. Luther came to develop a view which was novel in the history of the church which tried to find a happy place between Christ being physically present with the bread but without the bread ceasing to be fully bread in any way. His view came to be known as consubstantiation. This was not a word he embraced but rightly describes his view.

He argued that the bread and wine do not become the body and blood, however the body and blood are coupled with the bread and the wine. So much so that all who feed upon the elements feed upon Christ by the mouth as well as by faith. This literal feeding upon Christ by both the saved and the unsaved led to the view that Christ was received either for blessing or for cursing, but He is received by all.

Here is Luther's reasoning behind his construction. In the early church there were various tendencies that led to heresy when considering the dual natures of Christ. Some would

separate the natures and some would confuse them, but the trick was to affirm that Christ was both 100% God and man without the one cancelling out the other. Nestorianism was a view that tended to separate the natures and create two persons with two natures instead of one person with two natures. Now with this concern to not separate the persons Luther applied this concern to the question of Christ's physical presence in the supper. He reasoned that since Christ is God and the divine nature is everywhere present, but Jesus is also man, then His human nature must likewise be everywhere present. In essence he taught a divinization of the humanity, what has come to be called the *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of divine properties to the human nature of Christ. So that just as the divine nature can be everywhere present the human nature can now be everywhere present. This ability of Christ's human nature to be everywhere present was the grounds for Luther's teaching that Christ's humanity was not the bread but could be with, in and under it, coupled with it without changing it, because Christ's humanity is omnipresent. Ironically what began as a desire to keep the natures unseparated resulted in them being confused.

As we look at Paul's words in 1 Cor. 10 we see that Paul contrasts partaking with demons with partaking with the blood and body of Christ. Some have tried to say that partaking means to outwardly align oneself in open identification with something. This is indeed one possible understanding of the word, but it is evident by Paul's concerns that he is not merely worried about Christians being openly identified with demons but spiritually interacting with them. And as we do not literally eat the demons bodies and drink their blood if we were to go into temples but rather have a spiritual interaction with them, in the same way we have to reject that participation in Christ is a physical eating.

Not a mere remembrance

The opposite extreme was found in the Swiss Reformer Zwingli. In 1529 Luther and Zwingli in Marburg to discuss their different views. They were able to agree on all points of doctrine except one, how Christ is present in the supper, it was their differences on this one point that led Luther to question Zwingli's Christianity and caused him to rejoice when Zwingli was killed when defending Switzerland against Catholic armies. Where Luther was to physical in his approach to Christ's presence Zwingli was too spiritual. Zwingli was guilty of a metaphysic that was dualistic in nature, that the physical is always separate from the spiritual. For example, faith can only be set on inaccessible and invisible things. This however fails to reckon with the fact that faith comes by hearing and not by contemplating the spiritual. This was developed so much by Zwingli, that faith contemplates the invisible and spiritual that he taught that we are not saved by Christ's humanity but by His divinity, 'We must note in passing that Christ is our salvation by virtue of that part of His nature by which he came down from heaven, not of that by which he was born of an immaculate virgin, though he had to suffer and die by this part.' (Horton p808). Zwingli emphasized the faith of the believer in the supper and our response not any giving of Christ by God to us. Zwingli rightly rejected both trans and consubstantiation but then went to the extreme of rejecting the resurrected humanity benefitting in any form, drawing our focus to the lesser part of our faith and not to God's part in offering Christ somehow to us in the Supper.

Calvin was the one who rejected both the views of Luther and Zwingli. He progressed the discussion of how Christ is present in the supper by addressing it in terms of the doctrine of union with Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Calvin disagreed with Zwingli over what was received in the Supper. For Zwingli nothing but a reminder is received in the Supper, and the meal signified what was not present and to be received. For Calvin the meal was the appointed place of God to meet with us in Christ by His Spirit. Christ Himself in His humanity was not present, for He is seated at the right hand of the Father. However, by virtue of the Spirit of Christ, who takes that which is Christ's and makes it ours. Who takes Christ and all His benefits, Christ in His resurrected humanity, the Spirit unites us to the resurrected humanity of Christ and benefits us thereby. Calvin argues that this engagement with the resurrected human Christ is had by the Spirit in the supper. It is not a case of Christ in His humanity coming down to the supper but rather the believer being lifted up into the heavenlies by the Spirit to partake. The sign of the meal signifies what is to be received not what is absent. Christ is not present in the supper for He is at the right hand of the Father but He is received by the Spirit. Calvin writes, 'We must hold in regard to the mode, that it is not necessary that the essence of the flesh should descend from heaven in order to our being fed upon it, the virtue of the Spirit being sufficient to break through all impediments and surmount any distance of place.'

Friends I say all of that as a way to helping us see what the Scripture is indeed emphasizing. Just as we are one body in the Lord by the Spirit so we are one with Christ by His Spirit. The Lord's Supper is a very important time when we enjoy what is signified. We experience in our spirits a true union with Christ and feed upon Him, not with our mouths, but by faith. As a meal we sit down to commune with God, as with many official covenant moments, God Himself resides at the feast Ex. 24:9-11. As with the peace offerings of the OT we eat with joy in God's presence thanking Him for His provision. As with the Passover we remember the great deliverance from Satan, sin and death. It is a solemn occasion like ANZAC Day when we remember the war dead. It is not a light casual setting but sombre and reverent. It is a time for purity where we purge the old leaven. It is a time for unity where we re-examine our relationships with one another, in light of the fact that we are one loaf in the Lord. It is a time of assurance because as surely as we eat, so surely do we benefit from Christ. It reminds us that by our access to the bread and partaking of it, we are also part of His body and one of His people. It is a time for looking ahead as we contemplate the marriage of the Lamb, it is a time for looking back to the sufferings, and the resurrection of Christ as our substitute. It is the Christian's Waitangi day where we remember the new legal covenant established by Christ, and the new status we have as children of God by that covenant. The Supper is a pledge and token to us like an engagement ring that we are Christ's and that He will return for us. The supper is a visible word that declares the future coming Christ, but also a word to us of our union with Him, even now while He is in heaven and we are here on earth. It is a type of wormhole for it is a time when the powers of the age to come are present to take things that belong to that age and make them real now. But not only does it make things future now but things far off like heaven near.

It is the high point in our preaching of the gospel when the one who is poor, who knows that he has nothing but sin to offer to God come and remember that he has Christ's free riches. When those who are dressed in nothing but the filthy rags of their own righteousness can come and remember that the one who comes in faith can freely receive the garment of Christ's righteousness. It is the point when the one who is hungry because he has been feeding on the ashes of sin can come and remember feast in Christ and His bounty. It is the point when the wounded can see that there is healing by Christ's wounds. It is the time when those believers who have stumbled but are clinging to Christ and are under the dread of condemnation can come and receive the repeat of their pardon. The lonely are reminded of God's eternal fellowship, the tempted of Christ's beauty, the weak of His strength, the doubting of His faithfulness, those near death are reminded of their hope, and those despairing of this life the new creation that is to come. This humble meal like the humble manger brings Christ to your hearts by faith to meet every need.