

Intro: What is fellowship? I remember hearing our former state rep, Bill Brock, once define fellowship as "two fellows in a ship." We get a roomfull of people, a pot of coffee, some chatter about the baseball strike, and say on our way out, "Wow, isn't it great to have some good, old fellowship!"

What is fellowship? There is perhaps no more vivid definition of fellowship than the one we SEE every month in our church. That's right, SEE. Jesus gave us an ordinance which pictures fellowship, that of course being Communion. The Communion service is a celebration of the fellowship we enjoy.

Proposition: Tonight, we're going to see from I Corinthians 10:16-17 that God has designed the Communion service as a graphic reminder that we enjoy fellowship on two levels.

I. Communion reminds us that we have fellowship with God (16).

READ v 16

This is not a passage we typically associate with the Lord's table (communion). In fact, it's not Paul's primary focus in I Cor 10. He's talking about pagan, religious meals in Corinth. But what he says about them gives us important truth about the Communion service we celebrate.

Context:

*Corinth--Paul established the church; ungodly atmosphere

*I Corinthians--a letter written largely to straighten out problems in the church

1. The problem of divisions (1:10)
2. The problem of immorality (5:1)
3. The problem of eating food offered to idols (8:1)

This problem provides the immediate context. 8:1 "Now as touching things offered unto idols..." What should a Christians attitude be towards food that was previously offered in false idol worship? The bottom line answer is given in 10:14, "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry."

Why?

Background: To understand, we need to know something about the accepted beliefs in Roman culture. In Corinth, or any other Roman city, after a sacrifice was made to one of the gods (like Aphrodite), the priests gave part of the meat back to the worshiper. Guess what he did with the meat? He had a feast. He invited his friends to participate in this meal with him. And don't miss this. It was a common belief that the god to whom the sacrifice was offered was himself a guest at this meal. And to top that, many believed that the god was in the meat and entered the bodies of those who ate the sacrificed meat. So participants believed that when they ate the meal, they were enjoying mystic communion with their god.

So what do you do if you are a Christian, and your neighbor, who has just returned from the temple of Aphrodite, invites you over for a party? Not just an

ordinary party, but a feast in honor of his god? Do you go? No, according to v 14. But why not? The answer is given in vv 16ff.

We're going to look at vv 16-17 in a moment, but first, let's consider the reasons that follow.

1. Idols are lifeless objects. Meat offered to an idol is still ordinary meat (19).
2. Demons are real, and the sacrifice was made to demons (20a).
3. As Christians, we have no fellowship (nothing in common with) demons (20b).
4. Those who sit at the Lord's table must not sit at a table which is the instrument of demons (21-22).

You say, "Why not? What is the significance of the Lord's table that is violated by participation in a meal to idols?"

The answer is fellowship. The Communion service illustrates fellowship in two areas. First, it reminds us that we have fellowship with God. V 16 "The cup of blessing, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?"

What does he mean? Let's examine the verse phrase by phrase:

"The cup of blessing"

Specifically, this phrase was a technical term used to depict the final blessing used at the end of the Jewish Passover meal. Remember, the Christian communion service grew out of the Jewish Passover meal. Jesus fulfilled the Passover as the Lamb of God. He heightened the Passover, and gave it new significance. He gave His followers a new ordinance. He commanded them to observe the Lord's table.

"communion"

The greek word is "koinonia." It is used 4 times in this paragraph. It's translated "fellowship" elsewhere. To fellowship means "to share with someone in something." Every time we gather for communion, a special sharing occurs. What kind of sharing?

"communion of the blood of Christ"

We share in the blood of Christ. That means we share in the results of Christ's atoning death. All of us who know Christ share in the results, the provisions, the benefits of Christ's death. Like what? Forgiveness, cleansing, acceptance, adoption into the family of God, and the guarantee of eternal life.

Key: Every time we participate in the communion service, we are reminded of the benefits we enjoy because of the new covenant Christ established.

There's another picture involved.

"the bread which we break"

In the Passover meal, matza bread was broken. So too in the Communion service. Bread was the staple of life. And most likely, the early Christians observed the communion service in a home, as part of a meal. They ate together. The elements of the bread and cup were part of this meal.

What is significant about the bread?

"is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

Communion. Fellowship. There's the word again. The bread is the symbol of our participation in the body of Christ. We all share equally.

What's the point? Communion is a fellowship, perhaps the highest expression of fellowship. In communion, we Christians share something. What we share is not a consensus on a bunch of issues. No. What binds us together is our identification with Christ. That means, when we gather together as God's people, especially for communion, it's not because of some social club mentality. Rather it's because we share something together. We all share this common experience: While we were sinners and hopelessly condemned in sin, God demonstrated His love to us. And because we have received God's loving offer of life through Christ, we enjoy fellowship with Him.

Communion reminds us that we enjoy fellowship with God, through His Son Jesus Christ. That's the first level of fellowship. But there's a second level, one that we're prone to overlook.

II. Communion reminds us that we have fellowship with one another (17).

V 17 "For we being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." As Christians, we have fellowship with one another. That fellowship is pictured in the communion service. Communion is a celebration of our union with Christ, and our union with each other.

Notice Paul says that "we" (that's Christians), though we are "many," are "one bread and one body." Though we are many, we are one. Why? Because if we have been brought into fellowship with God, as individuals, we have also been brought into fellowship with each other, as a group.

Key: Our common participation in the person and work of Christ makes unity possible. I didn't say "uniformity" but unity. We are united in the same person.

We are "one bread" (better "one loaf"). We miss the symbolism with a plate of wafers, but in the Passover, and in the early house churches, a loaf of bread was used. A loaf symbolizes the oneness we have in Christ. In the meal, they would take this piece of bread, break it (as a reminder that the Living Bread was broken for us), and distribute it. V 17 "We are all partakers of that one bread."

No wonder it was inappropriate for the Corinthians to participate in meals associated with demonic practice. As Christians, how could they? They were already united with Christ. And so are we.

Every time we observe communion, we ought to be reminded that, because of Christ, we have fellowship with God, and fellowship with one another. Communion is designed to be a beautiful, intimate service.

Our problem: Our observance of communion often is patterned after a Catholic mass than the model of the early church. We have made it a very individualist, very personal thing. Just me and God. We sit in pews, isolated from each other. We bow our heads, and try to block out everything and everyone else in the room. Reflection is Ok, but isolation is not.

Think about it: At church potlucks, we have great interaction, great fellowship. I want to suggest that some of the dynamics at a potluck are just as appropriate in the communion service. We ought to enjoy the Lord and each other! The early church communion service was actually connected to a meal. Perhaps we'll try that some time, and move our communion observance to the fellowship hall as part of a church-wide meal.

Challenge: Be aware that God intends real fellowship to take place in the communion service. Think about it as you participate tonight. We have fellowship with God, and with one another. That's why in 11:28 Paul says we should "examine" ourselves before taking communion, to make sure there are no unresolved conflicts with fellow-Christians.

After Communion:

Discuss discipline situations--those in need of restoration ministry.