

Partaking at the Lord's Supper – 1 Cor 10:16-17

Introduction – Our weekly partaking of the Lord's Supper is a blessing. But do we see it that way? With the practice of communion have come many questions and controversies throughout the history of the church. While this sermon will not address everything there is to say on the Lord's Supper, the intention is to address a couple of often misunderstood issues within the reformed community and therefore allow the Word to accompany this wonderful gift to us. For a more thorough study on the Lord's Supper, I commend to you "Given for You" by Keith Mathison.

What's it Called? – Paul refers to it in our text as "communion" – "*the communion of the blood of Christ*" and "*the communion of the body of Christ*" (10:16) and so we often refer to this as Communion. In 1 Cor 11:20 he refers to it as "*the Lord's Supper*" and so we are to think of it as partaking in some respects like we partake at other meals. In fact, this meal should inform our other meal times as well. It is called "*the Lord's table*" (10:21) which also points to ideas of a meal, of fellowship around a meal, of a time of rest and peace, and of feasting and celebration. In Acts, it is referred to as "*the breaking of bread*" (Acts 20:7), an activity that was occurring every Lord's Day. Finally, when Jesus delivered His instructions to Paul, it was called "*the cup of the new covenant*" (1 Cor 11:25-26).

What Does this Mean? – Let's make a couple of quick observations. First, it is the Lord's Supper and not ours. He owns it and He summons whom He desires. If you are summoned, then you must come. Second, 10:16 says it is a cup of *blessing*, and so the activity should be one of receiving a blessing and not an act of shame or feeling bad about oneself. It is a means of grace, of blessing, and so we should come expectantly and full of faith. Third, Jesus gave thanks as He instituted the practice while breaking the bread and pointing to His body broken for us – and this is why we call it a Eucharist, or a thanksgiving. It is a time of thankfulness.

Covenantal Partaking – When Jesus said, "*This is My body*" He meant something and He meant for it to affect the way we come to His Table. The Roman Catholic error has been to interpret these words in an overly literalistic manner and bestow a power of transubstantiation through the words of a priest. The good work of the Reformation included a rejection of this error and the idolatrous practices associated with it. Many modern evangelicals have grown up, however, in another tradition thinking that it was the only other option. Actually, it is another extreme, this time interpreting Christ's words in an overly symbolic manner. For them, the act of taking communion is simply an act of remembering Christ's death and the bread and wine are illustrations to help us in that act. What they do not know is that this was not the view of the vast majority of the Reformers. What Calvin and others taught was a doctrine of covenantal partaking.

Our Service of Worship – This is connected to understanding what happens when the Lord summons us here for worship. Many, again, think of it as not much more than a lecture about Christ with some singing thrown in. But Eph 2:6 teaches us that we have been seated together with Christ in the heavenlies, and Heb 12:18-29 describes this gathering as an assembly in heaven with Christ. This occurs covenantally, by faith and through the power of the Holy Spirit – but that doesn't mean that it does not *really* occur. In the same way, when we come to the Table by faith we covenantally partake of the body and blood of Christ *spiritually*, that is, by means of the Holy Spirit. We see the same idea in 1 Cor 10:2-4 where the Old Testament saints ate *spiritual* bread and drank *spiritual* drink and they were partaking of Christ.

The Communion of the Blood and Body (1 Cor 10:16) – This all helps give a deeper understanding of what Paul is saying in this verse. The communion (*koinonia*) is the participation, the fellowship, the mutual partaking, in the life of Jesus Christ because of His once for all sacrifice. "*We receive and eat the bread and, through the miraculous action of God's spirit, we are as a community (re)formed as His Body. We drink from the cup and we are, through the blood of the covenant shed for our forgiveness, made into living sacrifices*" – Meyers, "The Lord's Service."

Discerning the Lord's Body – This phrase (used in 1 Cor 11:27-29) has come to mean in some circles that the nuances of the Lord's Supper must be understood (and one must pass a test) before one can come to the Table. But that is wrenching this phrase out of context. The first application of this at Corinth was looking for the Lord's body in the bread in and the cup instead of the place where we truly neglect the Lord's body, which is up and down the pew where we are sitting; the brothers and sisters we live among. Notice again 1 Cor 10:17, "*For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*" We are the body of Christ that is to be discerned. And so the question for us all as we come to the Table is – do you discern Jesus all around you in your brothers and sisters? This means that taking communion is a communal act and not an individual act. Your baptism was your individual initiation into the covenant people of God. Communion is our ongoing participation in the benefits of being in Christ's body. And this is why it makes no sense at all, as an example, to withhold communion from little saints. Often, they get it far better than we do (Luke 18:15-17).

Some Take-a-ways – There are actually many - and I hope you hear them in exhortations at the Table each Lord's Day. Fundamentally, we are to come prepared; and the service does that for us. We are to partake by faith (and not by feeling), and we are to partake communally – with Christ and with one another, - *both* very present, very real, and very connected to you. Think of the time at the Table as a time where you are saying, "I am all in" because Jesus is saying "I am given for you." It is our time of reformation and revival.