

These were our examples

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[0 : 00] If you turn to the portion of God's Word that we read together in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 10, let's read again there at verse 16.

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, being many, are one bread and one body. For we are all partakers of that one bread. Now tomorrow we trust in God's providence that we'll be gathered round the Lord's table.

And it's only right and proper that we prepare ourselves for doing that by considering the significance and the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

And one of our main sources of knowledge regarding the Lord's Supper is this first epistle to the Corinthians. But as we look back and consider what Paul the Apostle was saying to the Corinthians, we must be clear that we're not taking the church in Corinth as our example.

[1 : 35] There was nothing in Corinth or in any other New Testament church that in and of itself constitutes a binding example, constitutes a norm for the church in subsequent ages.

Of all places that should be clear regarding Corinth. Corinth was riddled with problems, theological, moral, disciplinary.

Paul was writing this epistle to deal with those very problems. We shouldn't think that the church in any age has been problem free.

And certainly the early church has no claim to some higher virtue, no claim to some greater merit, just because it was closer in time to the age of our Lord, because it was under the direct discipline and supervision of the apostles themselves.

There were problems then, there are problems now, and there shall be problems until our Lord comes again. So in looking through this epistle at the situation that prevailed in Corinth, we are trying not to copy their example, but to avoid their mistakes.

[3 : 05] We are trying to benefit not from considering what they did, but from considering what the Apostle, inspired by the Spirit, taught ought to have been the case.

In Corinth. It's not the actions of the church that are our norm, but the teaching of the Apostle. And in a very real way, that's what Paul himself was saying to the Corinthians in this chapter, down to verse 14.

He was saying, yes, you can look back to your forefathers. You can look back to the even earlier church of Old Testament times. It had its sacraments.

It had its sacraments. It had its baptism. It had its spiritual meat and drink. And it had its problems. There was idolatry.

There was murmuring. Grumbling against the Lord's providence. There were all sorts of problems. Look back, he said. Those were examples, but not examples to be copied.

[4 : 15] Examples of what to avoid. To the intent, we should not lust after these things, as they also lusted. And Paul then focuses in and says, how does that apply to the Lord's Supper?

And he asks questions, so that he can make his points even more effectively. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?

The bread we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? He's not asking questions to get the information. He's asking the questions to bring the point home effectively.

There's no doubt about the answer. Yes, these truly are the communion of the body of Christ, the communion of the blood of Christ.

Let's then, first of all, ask just what is meant by this communion. Communion of the blood of Christ, communion of the body of Christ.

[5 : 26] Well, regarding this communion, the first thing I'd like to bring out is that it is speaking of renewed fellowship. The word that's translated here as communion has several aspects to it.

It covers the idea of receiving, the idea of sharing, of participating, and of fellowship in participation with others.

But there's really no warrant for the definite article that appears. It's been added by the translators. They thought rightly, but I don't think so. They talk about the communion. All that Paul said was, is it not our communion of the blood of Christ?

Is it not our communion of the body of Christ? It is a sharing in the body and blood of Christ. But it's not the only way to share in the body and blood of Christ.

[6 : 31] And the point I'm making is that those who would participate in the cup of blessing and those who would participate in the broken bread must have previously participated in the body and blood of Christ in a different way.

Jesus himself said, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Union with Jesus Christ is a precondition of communion with Jesus Christ.

He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him. The Lord's Supper does not bestow the capacity for faith as in regeneration.

The Lord's Supper is not concerned with granting a new standing before God as in justification. It is for those who have already been born again.

It is for those who are already justified through their participation in the effective benefits gained through the shed blood and broken body of our Lord.

[7 : 56] The Lord's Supper is a renewed fellowship that is based on a previously existing bond of faith, a previously existing work of God bringing life into the soul.

and those who would come and participate in this communion in this fellowship are those who are being called on to remember the rock whence they are hewn.

We are being called on to experience again to experience anew the significance and power of the Lord's sacrifice. it is our means of grace but it is not the means of grace.

It ought not to be the first participation in that power unto salvation but a renewed participation. It is that which will seal to us that which will assure us of our standing in Christ and strengthen us for what lies ahead.

So this communion is first of all a renewed fellowship. It is also the case that it is not primarily a physical fellowship.

[9 : 18] What is it that is shared in? How do we share in it? How well those are questions that have vexed the church on earth for centuries.

Indeed that is very often the question that has turned what should be a symbol a visible symbol of the unity of Christ's church turned it into a symbol of discord made it a focus of theological dispute. And while men good men many of them have argued over it Satan has been quietly laughing away. But there is no doubt that in reformed teaching there is no notion of a physical participation participation in the body and blood of Christ.

That is a childish notion that can be easily refuted. If you think about what happened that first night in the upper room when our Lord instituted the supper. There he was standing himself in the totality of the humanity he had assumed and said this is my body broken for you and said this cup is the new testament in my blood and he was standing there.

There is no question of it being really his body or really his blood. He was saying these represent my body and my blood. These are vivid symbols of what I am going to do for you.

[10 : 53] I am going to die. And our participation is in the benefits that his death has procured. Our participation is a spiritual fellowship.

It is a fellowship that not only is inward but a fellowship that can be effective inward only as the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts making real to us what it is that we are outwardly symbolizing and granting to us the benefits that we require.

We remember Jesus Christ and he by the Holy Spirit whom he has sent uses the act of remembrance and the outward form to work inwardly to work spiritually to stir up faith not to impart it for the first time but to stir up our faith that so often flags to increase our trust in him that so often oh we forget about and to convey to us that spiritual feeding that we so desperately need so as to go on.

It is fellowship that is renewed it is fellowship that is spiritual and it is also fellowship that is with informed faith.

You see this spiritual nourishment doesn't come about magically. Just being at the table just eating the bread or drinking the wine doesn't of itself convey blessing.

[12 : 45] the outward action has to be accompanied by an inward reception before there is blessing and what we receive are the gifts that God bestows on us and to receive a right God requires he requires the faith that recognizes what he has done in Christ it requires the faith that gives assent to the facts of revealed religion what's termed historical faith but it requires more than that it requires also that there is the faith that recognizes what God has given to me as an individual because I am in living union with Jesus Christ it requires appropriating faith saving faith to be able to benefit from what is being imparted at the supper but you know to receive what God is given in the

Lord's supper requires more than historical faith and requires more than saving faith you may wonder at that more than saving faith because it's not the case that every true believer feeds on Christ every time at the Lord's table put it in another context it's not the case that every true believer is spiritually edified and built up every time by all the other means of grace there is prayer have you never prayed found it was as if you were addressing a blank wall there is reading of the word and meditating on it a means of grace have you never found that you can read the word and it's dry and dead to you the means of grace in and of themselves even for the true believer can often be dead can often not impart the spiritual blessing that ought to be there and that's because something more is needed we need a clear understanding of what's being offered in the sacrament and we need to be hungering and thirsting for what is offered in the sacrament to share in what is there we must by faith acknowledge that God is presenting on the banqueting table great gifts and our appetites must be ready for it faith is the empty hand stretched out to receive the gift of Christ and faith fed is receiving

Christ by the hungry soul and it doesn't come about magically perhaps the words needed about that phrase the cup of blessing which we bless doesn't that seem to imply that there's something in the cup or the contents of the cup that almost inevitably will convey blessing not at all that phrase the cup of blessing which we bless reflects the original situation in the upper room the night before our Lord's crucifixion the disciples were celebrating the Passover and the father the person who was presiding at the table at the Passover when it came to the third cup of wine that they drank used certain words that third cup of wine after the Passover meal was known as the cup of blessing and we know the words that were prescribed for the father of the household or whoever was presiding at that table we know the words that were prescribed for him to use and he didn't say we bless this cup he didn't even say we pray the

Lord to bless this cup not at all what he said was blessed art thou O Lord our God who givest us the fruit of the vine it was the cup of blessing because the blessing was pronounced over it but the blessing was not of the cup and the blessing was not of the contents of the cup the blessing was of God who had given the cup to enjoy and so Paul here speaks of the cup of blessing which we not the Jews bless and he's saying it's blessed by thanking God for what he has given us in Christ what he has given us that has made us what we are or what he gives us that enables us to go on being what we are the blessing that we now are in a position to participate in there is communion in the saving benefits of

Christ so it is a fellowship that is renewed a fellowship that is spiritual and a fellowship that has to come to the soul that is hungering and thirsting for what is an offer and that's related to the second thing I'd like to bring to your attention this communion this fellowship is an exclusive fellowship Paul spells it out in verse 21 ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils or perhaps more precisely the cup of demons ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of demons he's spelling it out he's saying to the Corinthians you say you have a share in what has been procured by the death of

[19 : 24] Jesus Christ you're saying that he's bought you you're calling him Lord Jesus and Lord there means that you are acknowledging that he has the right to rule over you he has the right to tell you where you are to go and how you are to behave because he has bought you and you are his and Paul saying if that's truly your confession you cannot compromise on your loyalty to him that's why the non scriptural word sacrament came to be applied to the Lord's Supper sacrament was the word for the oath of loyalty that a soldier swore to his general and if two armies are set one against

the other you can't fight on both sides at the same time that's why we fence the table it's a clarium call it is saying who is on the

Lord's side perhaps more than that tomorrow there's an illustration I'd like to give it's a nourishing meal and she's taken a lot of trouble to get it ready and she puts it down before them on the table only to find out that her children have no relish for it because their appetites have been spoiled by eating sweets all afternoon and the fact is that the devil would spoil our spiritual appetites those who are the

Lord's he cannot draw over to his side the Lord has guaranteed that he will keep those who are his but oh the concessions the devil would have us make the way he'll use pressure from family the way he'll use pressure from friends pressure from the world the fashions of the day society at large and how often it is that we've been eating the tifflets that the devil has provided we've been eating the world's confectionery and then we wonder why nothing happens when we're at the Lord's table it's because we've spoiled our appetites we're just like the children who've been gorging themselves in bars bars and then are expected to eat a nourishing meal there's no true nourishment in what the devil provides but oh he wraps it up so cleverly and we so easily fall for it it is an exclusive fellowship it is a fellowship that demands that we put from us that which will be found in the devil's cup and on the devil's table we ever need to be forsaking our sin and not indulging in what the devil would provide and if we come with the hunger and the thirst there is not been anesthetized by what the devil will use we'll see

Christ at his table we'll want him there and the provision that he makes for us will be sweet to our taste but I move on to the third aspect that I bring before you regarding this communion it's a sharing in the benefits of Christ's death it's a communion that debars us from compromising our faith we're making an open profession of being exclusively bound to the Lord and in that fellowship in which we would participate we must make every effort not to be deflected by anything else but it is also a fellowship one with another being at the Lord's table is not just an individual act of fellowship with Christ this communion is a joint fellowship it is an expression of our individual faith in him but it's also an expression of our union one with another through

Christ and Paul's actually emphasizing that in this passage here he talks about the cup we bless and the bread we break now that we is not we the apostles and it's not we as Christian ministers it's the same we as we find in the following verse the we who are the many the congregation oh the minister may pronounce the blessing and he may break the bread but he's not doing that as a priest of any sort he's no special power he's no special standing in the matter all that he does is done by the united company of worshippers of the same savior the minister is just the instrument by which their prayer finds expression that's always so in public worship and it's so too it's true too at the lord's table and paul goes on in verse verse 17 to emphasize the oneness of believers in communion that's probably why he mentioned the cup first and the bread second the wrong way around as it were because he wanted to go on to to bring out something that was made much clearer by the bread there being one bread perhaps the church in

[25 : 48] Corinth was so small there was actually only physically one loaf there but that's not essential what's vital the point paul's bringing out is that that bread is broken and distributed to the many and as the many share in that bread they're forging a link one with each other in the common action in which they're participating and the outward action should just be a mirror should just be a reflection of the common inward spiritual reality in which we are all sharing looking to Christ as our saviour trusting in him and what he has done so that we are all brethren in him and that means that if we are going to prepare ourselves to benefit from the means of grace we have to make sure not just that there is no impediment in the relationship that exists between us as individuals and our saviour we must also make sure that there is no impediment in the relationship that exists between ourselves each other because that is also part of what is being manifested what is being made real in the Lord's supper we are to put aside all malice and guile and hypocrisy and envy and all evil speaking one toward another we are to recognize how easy it is for our relationships to become distorted for our relationships within the body of

Christ to fall away from the norm that scripture would require and just as we use a communion season should we not to renew our pledges to Christ to renew our vows to him our vows to endeavour to be more faithful to what he requires of us our vows to give him thanks for the many benefits he's bestowed on us we look back over the period of since the last communion season and think of the many times the Lord has answered our prayers think of the way in which the Lord has

given us health or recovery from illness has blessed us and our families in so many different ways yes these are all vital things to bring before the Lord in spiritual exercise at this time but there's the other dimension we should also be using it as a time to determine to act in love to act in consideration to act in sympathy to act in genuineness one toward another we should be asking the Lord for grace even to put up with loss so that we may see a brother or a sister in Christ move forward our Christian communion our Christian fellowship has to have the hand of love and covenant loyalty not just uplifted in loyal oath to Christ our King but that hand has also to be outstretched in service to our brothers and sisters in Christ if any man say I love God and hateth his brother he is a liar for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen how can he love God whom he hath not seen and this commandment have we from him that he who love he that loveth God love his brother also will

I'm asking you especially to expect and to pray that we would have this gift of awareness of our oneness in fellowship with Christ I'm asking that you seek that this time of communion nourish feed enable us to grow in our awareness that we and Christ and his people are one not a false thing there are real distinctions in this life there's male and female there's bond and free there's barbarian and sithy and poor and rich young and old there are a great many distinctions we're not to pretend that they're not there but what we're to rejoice in is the fact that in Christ there is a bond of union there is a oneness that transcends them all a oneness that will outlast them all a oneness that reaches back into eternity and the father's determination to extend his love to a sinful world and that reaches forward to encompass the whole father's family in heaven and on earth on that day when we will gather around the throne of

God and of the Lamb so it should be that as we petition the Lord for blessing on the morrow we should ensure that that blessing is not just focused on ourselves we know our own needs oh there are many oh we know how much we ourselves as individuals need to receive I don't deny that but there is also the need that we recognize that we do not come on our own this is a communion this is a sharing a participation a fellowship and we must ensure that our brother and our sister's need as part of our prayer because the Lord is not so straightened that he cannot meet their needs as well as ours but ah we are the impoverished ones if the Lord's bestow of goodness upon them is not in response to the prayer that we have made and we recognize here that that oneness in Christ transcends the boundaries of denominations we recognize that at this time it's not just the free church that has a communion season and our prayers should go beyond even the bounds of those who will physically gather with us at the

[32 : 30] Lord's table we should remember and seek the Lord's blessing wherever the name of Jesus is going to be upheld and wherever those who are his are going to gather around his table and seek his blessing his presence with them we are to come not only thinking of our own locality we are to come as those who rejoice that the Lord has a cause that encompasses the earth that the Lord recognizes not the boundaries of nations when it comes to calling to himself those whom he would constitute his people and we are to be found bearing in our spirits especially at this time the needs of those who are his people to the ends of the earth is it not the case that so often we come and we find we have received little because we have been coming selfishly thinking only of ourselves let us come let us prepare to come to the table of the

Lord recognizing that there there is renewed fellowship to faith in Jesus recognizing there that there is exclusive fellowship there is a statement of our loyalty to the Lord the only Lord whom we would seek to serve and let us come recognizing that it is joint fellowship not just between us and our Savior but between us and all those who recognize and honor our common Lord and let us come seeking that he would bestow his blessing upon us all that we might grow in knowledge and in grace and that we might be prepared for that grand feast in heaven itself where there will be no distinction of denominations there will be no distinction of nations where all that we make so much of and are so aware of now will be done away and there will be just one common bond there will just be one reality looking at and being like the Lamb who is in the midst of a throne let us come prepare us oh Lord especially where we are not yet ready prepare us that we might be given a healthy desire a true appetite for that which we would undertake on the morrow give us clarity of understanding regarding what we are about so that we might not blunder so that we might not be frustrated through coming and going away empty we know

Lord that thou will be there we know that thou had promised thy spirit to those who were thine grant that we would be found gathering in such a way that we would not grieve or offend thy spirit grant

that we would not be found marrying the occasion of fellowship by holding grievance one against the other but rather oh Lord our God give us grace and wisdom from an eye that in seeing Jesus Christ and all that he did we might rededicate ourselves to him that we might come with confession of sin and endeavour after new obedience asking that thou wouldst provide for us one and all that sustenance that we require until we reach the Father's home we pray not only for ourselves but for all those who would gather both in this place and in other places throughout this town round the table of the Lord grant that they too would be helped on their way that they would find thy presence and thy spirit's blessing that there might be times of true Christian unity and vitality oh Lord how good it is when brethren dwell together in unity serving common common Lord help us in our way forgive us where we fall short build us up where we are in heat and feed us as thou alone canst do in Jesus name Amen