

OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Fellowship in The Lord's Supper

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Over the past three months we have been engaged in a study on the subject of FELLOWSHIP that we've entitled OUR LIFE TOGETHER.
 - A. Our purpose in this study has been to learn ways we can ENHANCE and ENRICH our lives together as the family of God. And here are a few things we've learned:
 1. We learned that the fellowship of first century Christians was characterized by a real sense of ONENESS.
 - a. It was an INTIMACY in which there was not only a close, warm FRIENDSHIP, but where these disciples were so INTIMATELY INVOLVED in each other's lives that when ONE member suffered, ALL the members suffered with them, and when ONE member rejoiced, EVERYONE rejoiced with them.
 2. We also learned these first century Christians considered themselves as a FAMILY – as brothers and sisters in Christ. And because of that:
 - a. They NURTURED, CARED for, and PROTECTED one another.

- b. They learned to TOLERATE differences of opinions, but were solidly UNITED TOGETHER when it came to matters of doctrine.
 - c. And even though they occasionally had to WITHDRAW their fellowship from those who persisted in sin, and refused to repent, there were two reasons for this – to protect the church from the influence of sin, and to lovingly confront the sinner to truly repent and be completely restored.
3. And as we approach the CONCLUSION of this series of lessons, we've been examining ways these Christians of the first century fellowshiped together in WORSHIP.
- a. Last week we looked at how we have fellowship with one another in PRAYER and SONG.
4. And now, as we bring our series of studies to a close, I want us to turn our attention one of the most SIGNIFICANT ways we fellowship together, and which may ALSO be the MOST significant way we express our love and appreciation to God and to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
- a. We call this time of remembrance the COMMUNION or THE LORD'S SUPPER.

- b. And in New Testament times it was also referred to as simply BREAKING BREAD, and on occasion called a LOVE FEAST, or simply a FEAST.
- B. What do we REALLY know about the LORD'S SUPPER, or this time that New Testament Christians came together to celebrate a LOVE FEAST? In fact, I want us to consider THREE QUESTIONS about the Lord's Supper.
- 1. First, why was this time of worship SO IMPORTANT to first century Christians, and why did they take such special care to observe it in a very specific manner?
 - 2. And along with THAT question let's ask, HOW were some perverting the Lord's Supper during the first century, and WHY had it become the TARGET of those who were seeking to CORRUPT the worship of New Testament Christians?
 - 3. But perhaps the most IMPORTANT question we want to answer is this. Since the Lord's Supper is something we do on the first day of EVERY week – every Sunday – what keeps it from becoming COMMON and ROUTINE?
 - a. How do we avoid simply going through the MOTIONS and making this time of worship VAIN, EMPTY because it becomes REPETITIOUS – much like the worship of the

Israelites in the days of the Old Testament prophets, and even in the days of Jesus?

b. How do we keep this time of worship FRESH and ALIVE?

BODY:

- I. Most of us are familiar with the ORIGIN of the Lord's Supper, and understand that it was instituted by the Lord Himself on the night before He was crucified.
 - A. In fact, years after the Lord's death the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, reminding them of the manner in which the Lord's Supper was originally observed by the disciples of Jesus on that night in the upper room.
 1. **1 Corinthians 11:23-25** – ... *the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*

- II. But why was this time of worship SO IMPORTANT to first century Christians, and why did they take such special care to observe it in a very specific manner? I think there are SEVERAL reasons for this.
 - A. First, every faithful Christian in the first century understood this time of worship was set aside on the first day of the week – the day that Jesus rose from the dead – as a MEMORIAL.
 - 1. It was THEIR way of taking time to SOLEMNLY REMEMBER the GREAT and TERRIBLE sacrifice Jesus had made for each and every one of them.
 - a. Every faithful Christian knew they had been SAVED from their sin, and now had the promise of HEAVEN as their home, because Jesus gave HIS life and shed HIS blood to pay the DEBT of their sin.
 - b. They knew they had been saved by God's extending His GRACE and MERCY, wiping out their sins, when they gave their lives to the Lord in complete and faithful obedience.
 - c. They didn't have to be TOLD to remember the sacrifice of Jesus – it came NATURALLY.
 - 2. But the Lord wanted His followers to remember His sacrifice in a very special and unique way.

3. For example, He gave His disciples UNLEAVENED BREAD and told them when they eat this bread it would bring to remembrance His BODY.
 - a. I'm not sure I completely understand why the Lord chose unleavened bread to represent His body.
 - b. I know leaven, or yeast, was often used to symbolically represent sin in Biblical times – just as leaven or yeast permeates a lump of dough, sin spreads its power among the people of God if it isn't confronted and dealt with.
 - c. So it could be that UN-leavened bread represents the Lord's body in that He committed NO SIN in the flesh.
 - d. But then, in **Exodus 13:8-9**, when the children of Israel celebrated the annual FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD, God said: *tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.' 9 It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.*
 - e. In the same manner, perhaps Jesus wanted His disciples to think of His BODY on the cross, and while partaking of the

unleavened bread think to themselves, "*This is done because of what the LORD did for me...*"

4. And, in addition to the unleavened bread, the Lord gave His disciples FRUIT OF THE VINE (actually wine diluted with water) to symbolize His BLOOD shed on the cross.
 - a. In Old Testament times, the blood of a sacrificed animal served a couple of purposes.
 - (1). The blood was the means by which the Israelites were forgiven of their sins.
 - (2). The blood was ALSO to remind every Israelite of their OWN sin, and that this sacrificial animal is dying in THEIR PLACE.
 - b. In the same manner, the blood of Jesus Christ is the means by which we are saved from our sins, and should remind us that Jesus died in OUR place, paying the debt for OUR sins – a debt we could NEVER repay on our own.
5. So, unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, when used in the Lord's Supper, served to REMIND those Christian of the first century of the horribly painful and agonizing sacrifice Jesus PERSONALLY made for them when He allowed His body to be nailed to the cross,

and His life-giving blood to flow – and to know He did it all for THEM.

6. The Lord's Supper became the most SOLEMN and SACRED MEMORIAL to the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross of Calvary.
- B. But in addition to being a MEMORIAL, the Lord's Supper also became a way of showing SPIRITUAL UNITY with GOD and with ONE ANOTHER – and this is where the word COMMUNION comes in.
1. **1 Corinthians 10:16-17** – *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? (17) For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*
 2. I think Paul was trying to stress a COUPLE of things by these comments:
 - a. I think Paul was saying that when they partook of the fruit of the vine and of the bread, they were in COMMUNION with the body and blood of Jesus Christ – meaning they were establishing a spiritual LINK between themselves and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

(1). In other words, they were COMMUNING WITH GOD!

- (2). They were IN FELLOWSHIP with the God of heaven, and
IN FELLOWSHIP with Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior.
 - b. But I ALSO think Paul was saying that when they partook of
the ONE BREAD together it REMINDED them of their
ONENESS – their FELLOWSHIP TOGETHER as believers in
Jesus Christ.
 - (1). Partaking of the one bread together brought them
CLOSER TOGETHER – it STRENGTHENED their sense
of ONENESS.
3. Therefore, the Lord's Supper was not ONLY a means of having
VERTICAL FELLOWSHIP with God and Christ (or of being in
COMMUNION with the Lord's body and blood), it was ALSO a
means by which of having HORIZONTAL FELLOWSHIP, or of
being in COMMUNION with ONE ANOTHER.
4. This helps us to better understand why "*...the disciples came
together to break bread...*" (**Acts 20:7**), and why Paul told the
Corinthians "*...when you come together to eat [implying eating the
Lord's Supper], wait for one another...*" (**1 Corinthians 11:33**).
5. The Lord's Supper was a means of worship that was designed to
be done COLLECTIVELY by the WHOLE CHURCH.

- a. The Passover during Old Testament times was always celebrated as a FAMILY gathering.
 - b. And, in the same manner, the Lord's Supper in New Testament times was, in a sense, a FAMILY gathering of first century brothers and sisters IN CHRIST.
- C. So we can safely say the Lord's Supper was so IMPORTANT to Christians of the first century because it served as a MEMORIAL to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, AND because it was a time when they came together to FELLOWSHIP, or COMMUNE, with God and Christ, and to FELLOWSHIP, or COMMUNE, with one another as God's FAMILY.
- III. This leads us to the next question. How were some PERVERTING the Lord's Supper during the first century, and why had it become the TARGET of those who were seeking to CORRUPT the worship of New Testament Christians?
- A. The answer to the FIRST part of that question is some were perverting the Lord's Supper by perverting its whole PURPOSE.
1. The Lord's Supper employed two elements that were designed to represent the body and blood of Jesus Christ – they were the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine.

2. And as first century Christians observed the Lord's Supper they were to REMEMBER or MEMORIALIZE the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and they were to observe the Lord's Supper with such SOLEMNITY that it would serve as a means of coming into FELLOWSHIP, or COMMUNING, with God and with Jesus Christ, well as being a means by which they would FELLOWSHIP, or COMMUNE, with one another.
3. But it didn't take very long for false teachers to completely PERVERT the REAL, INTENDED PURPOSE of the Lord's Supper, and turn it into nothing more than a COMMON MEAL in which every OTHER kind of food and drink was introduced – much like a potluck.
4. So, who were these false teachers and why did they target the Lord's Supper?
 - a. During New Testament times a false doctrine began creeping into the Lord's church known as asceticism – which, among other things, denied that God the Son came in the flesh, and denied that God the Son actually died on the cross.
 - (1). In other words, asceticism denied the very basic truths concerning the deity of Jesus Christ.

- b. Asceticism believed God was PURE GOOD, and the flesh was PURE EVIL.
 - (1). Therefore, their belief was that God would NEVER take on the form of fleshly man.
 - (2). Good and evil would NEVER come together in the flesh.
- c. This is why the apostle John called these false teachers ANTICHRIST – they stood in opposition to the very basic truths that proved Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.
 - (1). **1 John 4:1-3** – *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*
 - (2). **2 John 7** – *For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*

- d. But why would they target the Lord's Supper and pervert its intended purpose?
 - (1). Think about it. The Lord's Supper was a MEMORIAL to the very thing the ascetic DENIED – namely that God the Son came in the flesh and took on Himself the form of man, lived as a man even to the point of experiencing temptation, and was eventually crucified and died on the cross of Calvary.
 - (2). So, it's only NATURAL that the ascetic would want to turn Christians AWAY FROM the REAL purpose of the Lord's Supper.
- e. Rather than see the Lord's Supper as a MEMORIAL to Jesus Christ dying on the cross, and a means of expressing our deepest LOVE and APPRECIATION for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, get these first century Christians to think of the Lord's Supper as nothing more than a common meal – a FELLOWSHIP MEAL, or sorts, celebrating ONLY our fellowship together as brothers and sisters.
 - (1). That's sort of what we do at potlucks, isn't it? We celebrate our fellowship together, or our association together, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

5. This, by the way, is what was happening at Corinth – this is what prompted Paul to write the following:
 - a. **1 Corinthians 11:17-22** – *Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.*
 - b. Therefore, Paul wanted the Corinthians to know: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim **the Lord's death** till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)*
 - c. Paul also warned the Corinthians that they were partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner and bringing judgment upon themselves.

6. Jude, the Lord's own brother, attacked these false teachers of asceticism by saying:
 - a. **Jude 12-13** – *These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; 13 raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.*
 - b. **Jude 16-19** – *These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. 17 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: 18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. 19 These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.*
- IV. This all brings me to our last question: How do we keep this time of worship FRESH and ALIVE, and avoid letting it to become COMMON and ROUTINE – where we just go through the motions?

- A. Do you remember when we talked about WORSHIP in a previous lesson?
1. We said our worship is an expression of DEEP LOVE and ADMIRATION to God the Father and to Jesus Christ, while at the same time showing DEEP REVERENCE and HUMILITY.
 2. The Lord's Supper is a time for THAT KIND of worship.
 - a. It's a time for expressing DEEP LOVE and ADMIRATION for God's love and grace in sending His Son to give His life on the cross of Calvary for US.
 - b. It's also a time for expressing DEEP LOVE and ADMIRATION for the love Jesus Christ showed to US in becoming our SACRIFICE, and paying the price for our sins with His own BLOOD.
 - (1) No wonder the Lord's Supper was also called a LOVE FEAST.
 - (2). In a metaphorical sense we are all FEASTING on the LOVE OF GOD that surpasses ALL UNDERSTANDING.
 - c. BUT, if we DON'T express our DEEP LOVE and APPRECIATION, but merely go through the motions of breaking off a little cracker and drinking a thimble-full of grape juice then we are ALSO guilty of partaking of the Lord's

Supper in an unworthy manner and bringing judgment upon
OURSELVES!

- d. We are no different from those who perverted the PURPOSE of the Lord's Supper from a MEMORIAL and time of REMEMBRANCE to nothing more than a common meal.
3. The Lord's Supper is ALSO a time for showing DEEP REVERENCE and HUMILITY.
- a. Perhaps this is why Paul told the Corinthians, "*let a man **examine himself**, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup*" (1 Corinthians 11:28).
 - b. The idea expressed by Paul is that we should examine our MOTIVES for observing the Lord's Supper.
 - (1). Are we doing this as an expression of WORSHIP, or are we merely going through the MOTIONS because it's something expected of us?
 - c. If our MOTIVE for observing the Lord's Supper is to express our DEEPEST LOVE and APPRECIATION, then we won't have to worry about the MANNER in which we observe the Lord's Supper.
 - d. It will be observed in DEEP REVERENCE and HUMILITY because we will not only be thinking about the GREAT

SACRIFICE of Jesus Christ, we will also be thinking about our own UNWORTHINESS to receive such a gift of unparalleled grace.

4. Observing the Lord's Supper in THIS MANNER will most CERTAINLY keep it from becoming COMMON or ROUTINE.
- B. But allow me to suggest some other practical things we can all do to make this time of worship EVERYTHING the LORD intended for it to be.
1. This needs to be a time of QUIET REFLECTION.
 - a. That means WE not only need to be quietly reflecting on the SOLEMNITY of this time of worship, we need to make certain OTHERS can quietly reflect on the solemnity of this time of worship as well.
 - b. It's NOT a time to be whispering, passing notes, playing with babies, or thinking about everything EXCEPT the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the PURPOSE of this time together.
 - c. If WE'RE causing a distraction then WE'RE not worshipping in DEEP REVERENCE and HUMILITY, and we're keeping OTHERS from doing the same.
 - d. So, make this a time of QUIET REFLECTION.

2. This also needs to be a time when we FELLOWSHIP or COMMUNE with God and with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - a. So, during this time of quiet reflection it would certainly be appropriate to PRAY – to SPIRITUALLY CONNECT with our God and our Savior in private prayer.
 - b. It would also be appropriate to connect spiritually with God and our Savior through the SCRIPTURES given through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
 - (1). Open your Bible and read about the events surrounding the cruel mocking and trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, or of Jesus being crucified on the cross, or of His glorious resurrection from the dead.
 - c. And in this time of quiet reflection, it would also be appropriate to open the song book (red or blue) to a psalm, hymn or spiritual song and sing by silently making melody in our hearts to God.
 - d. So, in this time of quiet reflection make sure you spiritually connect with heaven – that you truly COMMUNE with God and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
3. And don't forget that this also needs to be a time when we FELLOWSHIP or COMMUNE with ONE ANOTHER.

- a. Without a doubt, this time of worship is **INTENSELY PERSONAL** – a time when we **PERSONALLY** connect with heaven.
- b. But don't forget that we are **SURROUNDED** by our most beloved brothers and sisters in Christ who are sharing this moment with us in their **OWN** time of quiet reflection.
- c. We should sense the **POWER** in this place that comes for faithful saints coming together to **WORSHIP** and **PRAISE** the God of heaven and His Son and our Savior Jesus Christ.
- d. We should be drawing **STRENGTH** and **ENCOURAGEMENT** from one another.
- e. We're **BROTHERS AND SISTERS** in Christ who have come together in this place at this time to share one of the most **INTIMATE EXPERIENCES** Christians can share together – to lift our **HEARTS** and our **VOICES** to our Lord in **PRAISE** and **WORSHIP**.
- f. And we're doing all this **TOGETHER** because we're **FAMILY!**
GOD'S FAMILY!

CONCLUSION:

- I. I want to close this series with a quotation from of 17th century poem that I read at the conclusion of the first lesson of this series. Do you remember it?
 - A. Poet John Donne (“*Dun*”) penned these unforgettable words:
 1. *No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls it tolls for thee.* – John Donne
 - B. But Donne (“*Dun*”) wasn’t the first to express this thought.
 1. Two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul wrote, *For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.* **(Romans 14:7)**
 2. This simply means that each and every one of us touch the lives of others – whether in life or in death.
 - a. The question is not IF we touch the lives of others, but rather HOW we touch the lives of others.
 - C. How is YOUR life touching the lives of others?
 1. If you’ve never obeyed the gospel of Christ, your life is touching others in a very negative way by telling them that surrendering your

life to Jesus Christ in complete obedience is not all that important to you.

- a. Not only are YOU running the risk of being lost eternally, those you're influencing are also running the risk of being lost.
2. And if you're a child of God, but are doing things contrary to the will of God, your life is touching others in a very negative way as well – telling them that it's not all that important to remain absolutely faithful to the Lord.
 - a. Once again, you and those you are influencing are in danger of losing your souls.
 3. It's not worth it. It's not worth YOU losing YOUR soul, and it's certainly not worth being the cause for OTHERS losing THEIRS.
 4. While there's still time, why not do whatever you need to do to save your OWN soul, and be the right kind of influence in helping to save the souls of others as well?