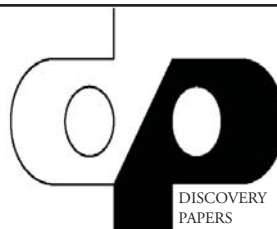


MY BODY WHICH IS FOR YOU

SERIES: BODY. LIFE.



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1 Corinthians 10:14-17,
11:17-34
3rd Message
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Last Wednesday, our neighborhood had a marvelous time celebrating the 4th of July with a block party, a late morning potluck brunch. There were about 80 attendees—aged ninety to nine months, some new to the neighborhood, and some old-timers. I counted 11 countries of origin among the folks I talked to. Conversations, eye contact, handshakes, laughter and then strangers become neighbors. It was frequently mentioned, especially by newcomers, how welcoming and affirming it was to share this simple meal together. And then wistfully, “why can’t we do this more often?”

Unfortunately we live in a culture that downplays the importance of shared meals and the connecting power of table fellowship. We’re good at fast food and gourmet excesses; we have food channels on television and nutrition debates in legislatures. But, unlike most other cultures across the globe and throughout history, we don’t often appreciate deep human connections established at a shared meal.

This message returns to a study of sections of 1 Corinthians, selecting passages that contain the Greek word, *soma*, translated ‘body’ in English. Here, in chapter 10, we encounter believers at what Paul calls ‘the Lord’s Table’. As we will discover this meal is more significant than any other. The Lord’s Table had two parts: 1) An unhurried common meal intended to deepen fellowship among believers and 2) The memory-meal (communion) in which Jesus’ sacrifice was brought into focus with bread and wine. The communion loaf signifies Jesus’ broken body (*soma*).

1 Corinthians 10:14-16:

¹⁴Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵I speak to sensible people; judge for yourself what I say. ¹⁶Is not the cup of blessing for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?

The word translated participation is *koinonia*. The cup of blessing, received with thanks penetrates our hearts. We enter into an experience of Christ that is deeper than we can describe with words. This participation in the sin-forgiving blood of Christ at his memory-meal becomes a source of strength when we are attacked with powerful feelings of failure and guilt, when God’s love seems no match for our

wretchedness.

I have a strong recollection of an evening around a campfire that occurred the summer before my senior year in high school when I was very young in the Lord. A group of six or so guys my age and a couple of youth leaders ate a simple meal and then one of the leaders read a Psalm. We sang some songs and, spontaneously another portion of Scripture was read. We began to share our struggles and hopes, fears and longings. Finally one of the leaders reached for a loaf of bread and a canteen of water and we shared the Lord’s table together. I did not learn new truth that night, but nearly fifty years later I remember that night’s ‘participation in the blood of Christ’ and know that I have not been the same since.

Further observations

1. These verses are found as part of an argument against idolatry. The Lord’s table is set in contrast to meals that honor idols. The work of idolatry in every age is to create and then inflame a desire for the wrong thing, followed by a promise to fulfill such a desire. And a choice is required—double mindedness is not an option. We must choose whom we will serve, which path we’ll pursue. “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.”

But let me add a caveat here: we should distinguish between double mindedness and love of outsiders. Jesus was rejected by his enemies because he associated with ‘sinners’ and embraced lepers. Jesus ate at the table of Matthew the tax collector because he came to seek the lost, not in order to honor Caesar. Those who are secure in Christ may well be called to minister in unholy places.

2. Again, observing the context, we note that the ‘cup of blessing’ is offered as part of an extended fellowship meal. Jude uses the beautiful phrase, “love feast.” “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor. 10:17). Connection with each other and intimacy with Christ are intertwined.

I want to jump ahead to verse 20 of chapter 11 where *soma* appears again. These verses contain further instruction regarding the Lord’s table—here with respect to selfishness

not idolatry.

1 Corinthians 11:20-22:

²⁰When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. ²²Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

"It is not the Lord's Supper you eat." The Lord Jesus has no place in this travesty. Selfish grasping, me-first gluttony, despising the poor, a 'love feast' without love—our behavior denies his Lordship.

Drunkenness in church and gluttony at meals is not common among us, but selfishness can take a more subtle form. For example, studies report that many Christians feel loneliest when they are at church. Do we steer clear of families in crisis, those who suffer from depression, the socially awkward, the teary new widow, the brother who has been unemployed for too long, the friend whose son has just come out as gay? Does our behavior betray our oneness?

A final challenge to 'love feast' selfishness occurs in the next few verses.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29:

²⁷Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

For a long time I understood this call for examination as having to do with the search for secret sin in myself that might render me personally unworthy to partake of communion. A willingness to look at what is hidden inside has its usefulness, but I don't think that's what Paul is talking about in this context.

In verse 29 the apostle says anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. The 'body' in this sentence is the community ('we are one body because we all partake of one loaf' [10:17]). The sin that he's concerned about is the sin of division among the saints. If I contribute to or ignore rifts and loneliness and abuse of the poor among the saints then I am guilty of denouncing Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. We have a special responsibility to encourage healing in the community when we come to the Lord's table.

So, we conclude by reading the familiar verses of invitation for Jesus' disciples to eat his memory-meal.

1 Corinthians 11:23:

²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

A phrase in v.23 might serve as final encouragement to unity. Jesus took bread "on the night he was betrayed." Why this detail? Paul might have spoken of the upper room, foot washing, or some other aspect of that last night—yet he mentions betrayal. May we heed this subtle warning and take seriously our call to oneness in worship.

1 Corinthians 11:24-26:

²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Amen.