

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

### Episode 14

### The Lord's Supper and 1 Corinthians 8-11, Part 1

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This episode transitions the discussion of a biblical theology of the Lord's Supper to the primary passage in the New Testament on the topic: 1 Corinthians 11. The episode focuses on the context of 1 Corinthians 8-10 for informing what Paul says about the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. The "fellowship context" of the Lord's Supper is shown to be important for understanding the issues Paul will get into in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul wants believers to know that they "partake" of a meal by which they enjoy fellowship (*koinonia*) with the Lord. His context for that thought is the partaking of OT priests in sacrificial meat (though not of the sacrifices for atonement or sin offering), and the demonic "fellowship" that is the result of pagan sacrifice — his primary concern in the disputation over meat sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 8-10.

### Transcript

Welcome back to the Naked Bible Podcast. In my previous Lord's Supper podcast episodes, I went through John chapter 6—the chapter that often causes a lot of the confusion that I described when introducing this topic. That's the chapter that has Jesus talking about the need to "eat his flesh" and "drink his blood," since his flesh and blood were the bread and wine. In the course of discussing that chapter, I tried to telegraph a few points about the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

1. I don't really care to articulate a doctrine of the Lord's Supper on the basis of what is *not* said in the text. Biblical theology derives from the text, not our imaginations or our traditions. We shouldn't do theology by speculation, even when that speculation turns into denominational traditions.
2. I briefly made the case that John 6 doesn't really belong in the discussion of the Lord's Supper, anyway, no matter how often that connection is made by church traditions and theology books. The reason is simple and straightforward: John 6 is not an account of the Last Supper (the event upon which the Lord's Supper is based, at least according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11).
3. Although John 6 isn't the Last Supper scene, Jesus is making important points about how belief in him is what brings salvation in that chapter. To do

so, he creates an analogy between his body and blood and the bread and wine. His body and blood would soon be given on the cross for the sins of humanity, not at a meal. People would have to believe that his death and resurrection really could bring them eternal life. In making this point, Jesus says that hunger and thirst would be satisfied by "coming to him and believing in him" not by eating bread and wine.

Now it's time to move to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians about the Lord's Supper. The main chapter for that is 1 Corinthians 11. To a great extent, this is really the heart of the matter. I think you'll be surprised at some things you'll see. 1 Corinthians 8-11 will be our focus in this podcast and the one following. Let's start with chapters 8-10, since understanding what's going on in those three chapters is crucial to following what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 11 (the chapter where he actually writes about the Lord's Supper).

1 Corinthians 8-10 is recognized by all New Testament scholars as being a large chunk of material covering basically one subject: the matter of how to handle matters of dispute among Christians, especially where there doesn't seem to be a clear textual basis to make a decision. The issue Paul focuses on is whether it was okay for believers to eat meat sacrificed to idols. That's the subject of 1 Corinthians 8. This issue takes Paul into all sorts of issues: foreign gods, idolatry, sacrifice, and how to deal with disagreements. Paul addressed the same broad issue in Romans 14 (you can look at that later, since we're sticking to Corinthians here). Let's read 1 Corinthians 8.

**Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup>If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.<sup>3</sup> But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.**

**<sup>4</sup>Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” <sup>5</sup>For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— <sup>6</sup>yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.**

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**<sup>7</sup>However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. <sup>8</sup>Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. <sup>9</sup>But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup>For if anyone sees you who have**

**knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? <sup>11</sup> And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. <sup>12</sup> Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.**

In a nutshell, Paul says, "Who cares about the meat sacrificed to idols?" According to verse 8, we're no closer to God if we eat or abstain, so eating is not of itself wrong. The real issue is how the eater treats the non-eater, and vice versa. The eater should avoid eating so as to not prompt the abstainer to defile their conscience. The abstainer shouldn't look down on the eater as though he's doing something wrong. As for Paul, he'd choose to abstain for the long run for the sake of a brother.

Why bring this up? What does it have to do with the Lord's Supper? Stay with me.

Right after Paul makes his self-sacrificial comments in chapter 8 (sacrificing his own liberty in the eating issue for other believers), he launches into a defense of his apostleship in chapter 9. In the course of his own defense, Paul justifies the notion that even though he won't take advantage of it, he has a scriptural right to be supported as an apostle. He says so in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, which reads:

**<sup>13</sup> Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.**

In the Old Testament, part of the way an Israelite priest was paid for their service was receiving a portion of certain sacrifices. It's significant that the sacrifices of which the priest could partake were *not* sacrifices of atonement for sin. The priestly food came from the peace offerings in Leviticus 7:33-36. Israelites were instructed on what to bring and how much the priest could take. Paul's point is that, just as the Mosaic law called for priests to share in the Lord's sacrifices for their own sustenance, so should an apostle be sustained by the people to whom he ministers. I know it isn't clear how this context relates to the Lord's Supper, but it does play a role. We'll get there.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul returns to the eating of the meat sacrificed to idols issue and makes another statement about it. This one seems completely at odds with what he said earlier in chapter 8. In chapter 8 he basically said, "Who cares if you

eat that meat?" Here it sounds like a different story, but there are hints in the text that clarify Paul's concern in this new chapter. Listen to 1 Corinthians 10:14-25.

**<sup>14</sup>Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup>I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup>Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? <sup>19</sup>What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup>No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. <sup>21</sup>You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup>Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?**

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**<sup>23</sup>"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. <sup>24</sup>Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. <sup>25</sup>Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>26</sup>For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."**

I want to go back to verse 14 and point out a few things. Paul says:

**<sup>14</sup>Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup>I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?**

The word "participation" there is the Greek word *koinonia*, which is often translated "fellowship"—some sort of solidarity. He continues:

**The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?**

Again, the word is *koinonia*. Now, he says in verse 18:

**<sup>18</sup>Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?**

Once again, the word is *koinonos* (related to *koinonia*—same word family there). Paul says this one more time. He says in verse 20:

**I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.**

You guessed it—the word there again is *koinonos*. It's like *koinonia*—this idea of fellowship or solidarity. So Paul's big concern is that what's going on creates some sort of fellowship or solidarity with demonic entities. Paul is well aware that his words here might seem inconsistent with what he said in chapter 8, when he clearly didn't really care about eating the meat. He specifically anticipates that question in verse 19 when he says, "What do I imply, then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?" He knows people are going to be wondering that. So how is he consistent? How does he answer his own question? And for our purposes, what is the applicable point to the Lord's Supper, which Paul turns to in the very next chapter (1 Corinthians 11), right on the heels of this issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols and having fellowship with demons?

What Paul is concerned with in 1 Corinthians 10 is fellowship (or participation) either with God or with demonic entities. The Greek word translated "participation," again, in all these instances is *koinonia* or *koinonos*—elsewhere translated "fellowship." And here's where Paul's illustration about the Old Testament priests sharing in the offerings back in 1 Corinthians 9 becomes important. Paul argues, based on the Old Testament sacrificial system where the priests ate part of the sacrifice as their payment for their service, that when one participates in the sacrifice and partakes of a portion of the sacrifice, then solidarity or fellowship with God is established. Such sacrifices were essentially communal meals between the priests and God. Paul says that the same is true when pagans sacrifice their sacrifices. There is solidarity established. Consequently, he wanted believers in Jesus (and we remember that in the New Testament, believers are called "priests"—it's the priesthood of the believer) to avoid any connection to the actual ritual of sacrifice. This is why he adds that believers could eat the meat that was later sold in the marketplace. This created a disconnect between the ritual and the meat. There would, therefore, be no fellowship with demons and no confusion created as to whether or not the eaters were in fellowship with the demons to whom the pagans offered sacrifice.

All this is the context for 1 Corinthians 11—Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper. As we'll see, Paul casts the Lord's Supper as a communal meal, and that's the way it's portrayed in 1 Corinthians 11. The body of Christ was not re-crucified in a symbolic ritual since, as Hebrews 7:27 tells us, his sacrifice was done once for all. We don't get grace from eating the bread and drinking the wine. The Old Testament priests didn't receive any grace from the Old Testament sacrifices, either. Paul is drawing a correlation between what the priests did (how they partook of sacrifices) and what's going on in the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. There's absolutely no scriptural justification for the idea that someone gets sanctified (in the sense of saving grace or something that helps

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you be saved) by partaking of the Lord's Supper. That didn't happen in the Old Testament context, and Paul links that Old Testament context to the Lord's Supper. Additionally, the fact that no portion of the atoning sacrifices in the Old Testament were shared by the Old Testament priests for consumption reinforces this point.

So what do we get out of the Lord's Supper? Well, we get what the Old Testament priests got, by Paul's analogy. We have fellowship with God, which ought to cause us to grow in gratitude and thanksgiving that our sins have been forgiven already, on the basis of the death of the sin offering. Again, the sin offering was a different offering from the one the priests ate of. What the priests were partaking of was distinct from the sin offering. This was a distinct event from the bread and the wine now being consumed in the Lord's Supper. So again, Paul—by virtue of analogy—is distinguishing the event that saves (Jesus' death and resurrection) from the Lord's Supper. That isn't what contributes in any way to salvation, to forgiveness. This setting (the Lord's Supper being a communal meal to celebrate what Jesus has already done for us on the cross) is the key to embracing a biblical theology of the Lord's Supper.

I'll describe that theology in detail in the next episode of the Naked Bible Podcast.