

Communion

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to I Corinthians, Chapter 10. Tenth Chapter of I Corinthians and our text is found in verses 16 and 17. I Corinthians 10:16 and 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? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.”

One of the most significant things about my early contact in Africa with the Moslems was the fact that they furnished fellowship for those that were pagans, savages, worshipping at shrines dedicated to evil spirits, groveling in filth and vile practices. The Moslem trader, business man, government official, came as a missionary; and he offered to them not only a testimony of doctrine, but he offered a fellowship. They provided clothes for them, and they provided a dish; that is, they shared in the common dish. Can you imagine that has been standing in the background, in his nakedness, with beads, and the tribal marks carved in his face, bonding him as the chattel of the evil spirit of a particular tribe, as he looks upon this scene there in the little African village. And the men gather, and come, and sit down at this large dish; and then they begin to break the flat, thin bread, dip out of the common dish, and they eat together. This is “koinonia,” this is sharing, as it is practiced by the Moslems in Africa.

The amazing thing about it is that this is probably one of the great reasons why nine people are being converted to Islam for one being converted to Christ around the world today.

Yet, in the early church “koinonia” was a very practical matter; fellowship, sharing, communion was a very practical matter, and it marked those early days. On the Day of Pentecost, with three thousand converted, many of them being Rabbis who were disenfranchised, who lost their income, lost their homes and families, ostracized from all source of livelihood and fellowship, you can find the sweet meaning of that verse in Acts the 2nd Chapter, and 42: “And they (that is, converts) continued steadfastly in fellowship, in the apostles’ doctrine, in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” This is the word, communion, “koinonia”. Communication comes from it. To communicate comes from it. It is a word that is also been used of any kind of fellowship, but we apply it to the Table that is before us. We are gathered this Lord’s Day morning in communion.

The point that I wish to make with you today is this, that if you have not had communion during the days of the week past, you cannot have it in 15 minutes from now. Communion is not something that you can turn off or on, as you would a light switch, and its flow of electricity. Many of you will be here today that will take the Bread and eat it, and drink the fruit of the grape, but you will say, We have been to a communion service. Yes. But can you honestly in your heart of hearts say that you have been to communion. For communion is sharing. It isn’t just receiving. This is when it is nothing more than an ordinance; it is nothing more than something that is presented to you that you eat-than it could be a type of Protestant Mass. One might so view it. It could be a Protestant ceremony of some lesser significance. But it cannot be communion. What you are to do when you take the Bread is to testify by the lifting of it, by the holding of it, you are testifying that you had communion, up until that point; you were having communion at that point, and you propose to continue to have communion after that point. And so my point, I said, is this, that if your communion begins when the service of communion starts then it isn’t that of which the Scripture speaks. Communion, of course, has to be on three levels.

First *it has to be with God*. And it is that is the supernatural work of the Spirit of God, taking us out of our death and estrangement, and alienation, and enmity; and uniting us in Jesus Christ to Himself. We were born of God, born of the Spirit of God, made partakers of His nature, and of His life, and we were brought initially into fellowship with God through the new birth. And the way you know that you are sharing in the work of Christ is the witness of the Spirit of God to your heart. The Witness of the Word has told you how; but my dear, if all you have in your Christian life is what you derived as a mental process from the Word, then you may have been sharing the Word with the teacher, but you have not been sharing life with the source of life. It is through the new birth that you are born of God, and the testimony that you have shared in the effect of

Christ's death is evidenced by the witness of the Spirit of God at the time of receiving faith. And you know that you are born of God, not because you have assumed it, not because you have inferred it, but you have experienced that infusion of life, that invasion of life that enables you to know that you have passed from death to life. And sharing in the Christian pilgrimage begins at the point of the new birth, when He tells you that you are His. (06:39)

Now you have told Him you want to be His, you have told Him in repentance that you are renouncing all other gods but Him, that you are renouncing all other hope but His death, and that you are receiving Him. And so you are sharing in a sense your sin with Him, and yourself with Him. But the question is, has He shared Himself with you? Do you have the witness of the Spirit that you have passed from death to life? Do you know by that inner knowing, or is it merely an assumption, something that you have presumed because you have constructed this system of thinking on the basis of verses taken from the Word of God. Have you had communion which began back there when you were born of God? There is a second level of communion. It is, *Have you experienced the purging work of the Spirit of God through the Word?* "Every branch in Me that beareth *fruit*, He purgeth it." (John 15:2) This is communion, when God begins to share with you His mind, and says, Now I don't want this attitude, I do not want this action; and now He is sharing to you His disciplinary love. He is sharing to you His will, and His purpose, and you are responding by saying, Yes, Lord. If You do not want that, neither do I. If You are not in this, neither am I. If You cannot have that, neither can I. And there is communion. It is the communion of discipline. Have you experienced this? Has the Spirit of God spoken to your heart in the discipline of His grace?

Then, of course, there is the more intimate level of communion than simply His teaching, and His disciplining. The not-without-which, however, is the *discipline*. You are never going to go into the most intimate fellowship until you pass this discipline period and have submitted to it whenever time God may bring it again, and I am confident that we will never outgrow the need for discipline. We are constantly experiencing it from His loving hand.

But there is an experience in the Word of God for which this Society has stood. It is called the deeper life, if you wish; it is called, the fullness of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit-filled life, the anointed life, the endued life. I would not bicker with anyone over terms, but I would simply say that beyond knowing that you have been born of God, and knowing that you have experienced the discipline that comes from His Word by His Spirit, *there is an experience of the fullness of God*. I have related personally to Ephesians, the 3rd Chapter, that wonderful portion, "that Christ may take up His lasting dwelling place" — the difference between renting a room, and owning the house — "may take up His lasting dwelling place in your heart, through faith," that you might know the fullness of God, "that you might be filled unto all of the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:17-19) But, whereas it is absolutely true that there is a crisis of being filled with the fullness of God, (and one cannot go into that relationship without it), so there is that there is a crisis of marriage. But many a home that began very happily when bride and groom kissed each other in the presence of happy spectators has in the months and years that followed become a place of great misery and grief. And frequently we discover that the happiest anticipations and plans have gone astray or failed, because there is lack of communion. Maybe they didn't talk, maybe they didn't share. It takes an awful lot of talking to have a happy home, of opening up, of sharing. And so it is that with the Father, it takes an awful lot of expressing what is on our heart. It takes time in praise, and time in waiting, and time in worship, and time in unfolding. It is absolutely imperative that we take that time.

Have you spent time alone with the Lord this week? Have you heard Him speak to you? Have you had communion with Him?

There is a second kind of communion that I touch quickly in passing, and that is the communion with others. Are there those to whom the Spirit of God has joined you in fellowship where you talk about the things of the Lord? Many times you know we have less than that. I have related in some other connection in the past an experience that I had back in Little Falls, Minnesota, the first Sunday after being installed as Pastor. One of the deacons said, Would you come to our home. We have a time of fellowship after the service. Fellowship? Sharing? Communion? Oh, certainly, I would be delighted, Brother. Went to the home, and when I got in, I smelled coffee cooking as one does nowhere else but Minnesota, and looked at the table laden with cakes and cookies, and I thought, Communion?, well. We'll have to eat, I suppose. And so we went to the table, and sat down, and they began to communicate about how the people looked in the congregation, and about other things. And I felt at the time as though I were going to, you know, say, Hurrah for Jesus; I wanted to get something religious into the conversation, because for all practical purposes it could have been a group of salesmen, sitting down in a nice restaurant, talking after a

meal. And here were deacons, and here were people, and they were having fellowship. But the next time they asked me to come; I was just grief stricken, because this was not in any wise my concept of what the communion should be. We were there to commune about Him, we were to talk about Him, we were to share Him, what He had shown us, what He had done, what He had said, what He brought, what He was. Our fellowship was to be in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not just in compatibility of one another, and not just in the fact that we enjoyed each other, and we enjoyed being in one another's homes. No. I believe that communion, as it is intended to be in the church, between believers, was a communion where heart matches heart, and shares that which is. Is it hard for people to start talking about the Lord in your presence? Is it difficult for them to begin to open up about their hungry hearts, and their spiritual needs? Is there something about you that wants to keep the conversation light, and on a rather frivolous tone? You do not really want to come to grips with your heart? Do you know what it is to have spiritual fellowship with a group? Do you know what it is? I have wondered sometimes why it is that (it is not only here) but why it is that it seems so terribly difficult in some areas of evangelical, fundamental church to get the kind of groups that I have been pleading for so many years. I wonder if it is not that we are rather afraid to share our fears, and afraid to share our failures, and afraid to share our deepest longings. Have you had communion? Is there someone, somewhere, with whom you can have communion? in sharing the things of the Lord? Oh, you ought to covet this. You ought not only to covet to have it, but to afford it to someone else. Have you been having communion with Him? sweet, intimate fellowship in worship, in praise, and in adoration? Have you been having communion with others in some kind of level of ministry? But what about the church visible as we are in it today? We have communion in the service.

I am convinced that as you have come today, that as you partake in just a few moments now of the Bread, that you are going to have to do one of three things. You are going to have to pass it by and say, I am utterly out of fellowship with God, I am out of fellowship with His people, and to partake now until I deal with the things which are there would be to partake unworthily. And this is what the Scripture says and means when it says, "Judge yourselves." (I Cor. 11:31) Because you are testifying, when you take that little morsel of Bread, part of a larger loaf, you are saying, I am one of a body, I am a member of a body, I have been brought into that body, and I have love for that body, and I have interest in that body, and concern for its welfare, the desire for its fellowship. It might just be necessary for you to be honest with your heart to pass it by, and simply say, No. This is not the case. There are those in the body that I despise. There are those in the body that I just simply can't. And it would be far better for you than to compromise your heart.

But oh, there is something infinitely better than that. If you find the stubbornness of your spirit is such that you are not prepared to do this second thing, then I think that it is only fair to warn you and press you not to do the first, but oh I plead with you to do the second. And that is, to break, to utterly break before the Lord, and realize that everyone who takes that morsel is saying, In me and my flesh there is no good thing. I came utterly bankrupt, to stand at the foot of the Cross, I brought nothing but a world of guilt, and a mountain of iniquity, I offer Jesus Christ nothing but my poor lost estate, and there is no one that ever came to Christ any worse than did I. And, therefore, when you take that Bread, you are saying as did Paul, "I am the chief of sinners." (I Tim. 1:15) For nothing could have atoned for my sin but Jesus Christ on the Cross. And if you look around the congregation, you will find that everyone that holds the morsel is saying to everyone else who holds the morsel, I brought nothing, to the Son of God, but bankruptcy, emptiness, sin, uncleanness, unworthiness, and condemnation. That is what you say when you hold that little fragment of Bread.

Then you are saying something else. When you hold it, you are saying, But I have repented of my sin I abhor sin, I detest it, I loathe it. The heart cry beyond all others that I might be free from its stain and its dominion and its power, that is what you say when you hold that little morsel. You are testifying to the brokenness of your spirit, and the repentance of your heart, and the abhorrence of yourself, and every failure is the source of fresh grief.

Furthermore you are saying, when you hold that little loaf, I know that in me and in my flesh there is no good thing. Try as I will, and seek as I have, I have been unable to lift myself by my bootstraps. And, therefore, I recognize that it does not lie within me to be all that Jesus Christ wants me to be, but by holding this Bread, I realize that when He died not only did He die for me, but I died with Him. This is what you say when you hold it.

And then furthermore as you eat it you say, I'm asking Him, the Wheat that was pure, and spotless, and sinless, ground under the Law, and brought over the fire of God's condemnation, I am asking Him to become the Life of my life. And when you eat that Bread, you are saying, I know that only Jesus Christ is enough for me, Only He is enough, only He can live; only He can walk; only He can stand. I have nothing in myself. And now you are in the midst of a people that said, I brought nothing but bankruptcy, utterly unworthy, I offered Him nothing but condemnation, I have repented of my sin, I have deplored of any strength in myself, and my only confidence is that this One represented by the Bread I eat will live in me His Life; and as this Bread becomes flesh of my flesh, I am asking the risen Christ to become Life of my life.

This is communion. What are we sharing? We are sharing our lost estate. We're all in the same door. There's no second-story entrance into grace. What are we sharing? We are sharing our repentance. What are we sharing? We are sharing our helplessness. What are we sharing? We are sharing the wonderful Lord that loved the unworthy and the unclean, loved failures, loved people with nothing to offer Him, loved them enough that He was willing to die in their place and stead. Loved them enough that He was not only willing to die for them, but He was willing to condescend to come and live in them. We are testifying to such a wonderful Lord when we eat the Bread, and we drink the Wine.

Are you sharing this today? Are you sharing here? Shall we bow in prayer.

Now, our Father, we have gathered, eternity bound men and women. We are nearer to the gates than we have ever been before, and possibly to some here this will be the last time they ever sit at the table of the Lord. It may be the eldest among us at all. Thou dost know our days are in Thy hands. And here we are a privilege that we are enjoying. To some it can be just rote, routine; they are just doing it because this is what is expected. O Father of Jesus, might it be that today as this communion, this sharing, sharing with Thee, sharing with each other, sharing with the church in its entire company, this testimony of Thy great grace and Thy love. Minister to us, as we minister to Thee, we will minister to Thee in thanksgiving, in confession, in brokenness. We will minister to Thee in our receiving faith, taking from Thy outstretched hand of love pardon, cleansing, and forgiveness, and deliverance, and Thou wilt minister to us. O Father, let this be communion indeed.

With heads bowed and eyes closed, Are you prepared to communicate, to commune, to share? Will you come on this ground to the Table of the Lord? Seal it, Father, for Jesus sake. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, September 9, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.