

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Koinonia of the Lord's Supper
1 Corinthians 10:14-21

10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

10:15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

10:16 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?

10:17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

10:18 Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?

10:19 What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?

10:20 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.

10:21 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.

1. Koinonia

Some words of the Bible contain meanings different from commonly used and more meaning than commonly used. For example, the word, "love," have a special meaning in the Bible. Buddhism is sometimes counted "love" as one of the desperation, so it is not received in a very good sense. "Mercy" is more important than "love," and in Bushido "Jin" is more honored than "love." In the old days, the word "love" was read as "mederu," "oshimu," "itsukuahimu," etc. It was read

“aisuru,” since the Meiji period, the word “love” in English came in. Today, “love” is to first mean “love for men and women.” However, since the “love” in the Bible is more than that, the New Testament writers distinguished it from the commonly used “love” by using the word “agape” (αγάπη) which was not often used at that time.

First Corinthians Chapter 13 is known as the “Chapter of Love.” It says that “love never ends....So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13: 8, 13) “Love” at this place, King James Version uses “charity” for “love.” That’s because First Corinthians 13 talks about God’s love, not men and women’s or husbands and wives’ love. There is nothing as casual as love for men and women. Unless love is supported by God’s love, there is a danger that even a couple’s love will collapse someday.

Biblical words, the times when it was written, the cultural background, is quite different from this place and the present age. Besides, since the Bible is the Word that comes out of God’s mind and mouth, we should not read it only from a human and earthly perspective, but read and study as the Word of God. Otherwise, we cannot understand the true meaning. We may capture the words of the Bible in a different meaning and leave it misunderstood for a long time.

Even among Christians there are several misunderstood Bible verses. I think that the word “majiwari” is one of them. This word is rarely used in everyday life, but if used it is used to mean “association,” “relationship,” “connection,” “communion,” and so on. To say hidden, it means “companionship.” The word “majiwari” is “koinonia” (κοινωνία) in original language, and it first comes out in

Acts 2:42. “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

In the Japanese Bibles, “koinonia” is not translated as “companionship,” but it is using the word “majiwari” which is not commonly used. In a old Japanese translation, the kanji for “companionship” is used, but it reads “majiwari” by using ruby. The colloquial translation translates the “fellowship of believers.” Though the word “of believers” does not exist in the original text, but the translator added it. In another Japanese translations, it is translated into “mutual fellowship of believers,” and “brotherly unity.” This is because “koinonia” tried to express what is different from “companionship.” “Koinonia” means more than that.

2. Importance of Listening

In the First Corinthians, “koinonia” was used in 1:9 and 10:16. In the First Corinthians 1:9, it says, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” This is the first “koinonia” chronologically in the Bible.

“Koinonia” means sharing. When you live in a house with others and share the rent, it is called “share house.” When you go to a villa and pay the fee for your stay, it is called “time share.” “Koinonia” means “to share one together with others.”

Then what do we share with Christ? We share the “life” of Christ. We live by His life. We share His “righteousness.” We can stand before God with the garment of His righteousness. We share His “holiness.” We become like Christ by it. We share His “sonship” with Him, the Son of God. We become God’s children. We share His

“Kingdom.” As Romans 8:17 says, We are also the heirs of the Kingdom with Christ.

This “Christ’s koinonia” is the foundation of mutual relationship of Christian; “koinonia of believer.” Without this foundation, the mutual relationship of believer ends up with “companionship.”

The First John also says that “Christ’s koinonia” is the foundation of Christian mutual relationship. In 1 John 1:3, it says, “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” John wrote a letter because he wanted to establish the mutual “koinonia” with the readers. We write a letter, send an email, or talk to someone because we would like to have a good relationship with the recipients. However, John wrote the letter not because he wanted to make friends. John wished that people read the letter, establish the “koinonia” with God and Christ, and then the mutual relationship will be established on the “koinonia” of God and Christ.

In 1 John 1:6-7, it says, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” “Walking in the light” means staying in the “koinonia” with God and Christ. When we stay in “koinonia” of God and Christ, we can maintain the mutual “koinonia.” This is what the Bible teaches us. However, we can not do everything perfectly. We might commit sins and destroy the “koinonia” with God. How can we make up the destroyed “koinonia?” We can find the solution in the verse 8-9. First,

we admit our sins. Verse 8 say, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Secondly, we confess our sins and ask God forgiveness and holiness. Verse 9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God promises the forgiveness and holiness with the followers of His Word. We can recover and maintain “koinonia” of God and of the fellow believers by God’s forgiveness and holiness.

3. Koinonia of the Lord’s Supper

In today’s Scripture, there is a description of “koinonia” at the Lord’s Supper. Verse 16 says, “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?” Here, the word “koinonia” is used in the Scripture and the direct translations are “koinonia in the blood of Christ” and “koinonia in the body of Christ.” “Koinonia in the blood of Christ” means our sins are forgiven and we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, and the blood of Christ, which is His life, is poured into us and makes us live. “Koinonia in the body of Christ” means we are engulfed in the body of Christ and we will work for His as his hands and legs. Lord’s Supper is, same as Baptism, not just a ceremony but it is the occasion where each one of us become the body of Christ as we take the bread, and makes everyone who takes the bread a part of one body of the Christ.

It is indeed mysterious. Even without the Lord’s Supper, we can remember the cross of Christ by His Word, and we can understand that we are forgiven by Christ, cleansed and made to live. However,

Christ told us to remember Him not only by His Word, but also by eating and drinking. Through the concrete action of taking the bread and cup, Christ's grace which is taught in the Word takes the shape and enter into our body. And by that, we also remember His grace by our body and answer the grace using our body.

At the Lord's supper we spiritually eat Christ's flesh by faith. There was one problem regarding "eating meat" among Christians in early churches. The meat once offered to Greek and Roman gods and goddesses were sold in the market along with other meat. Therefore, one Christian insisted that "those who eat the sacrifices to idols are participating in the altar, so you should never eat meat," but other Christian thought that "we can eat it because any foods are cleansed by prayers and gratitude." Although Paul concurred with the latter opinion, he taught to consider the people with the former opinion. But some misunderstood "freedom" that Paul talked about and entered into the temple which worshiped idols. That's why Paul said in today's scripture "Flee from idolatry. 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." It means that those who receive the Lord's Supper cannot eat and drink the sacrifice dedicated to idols in the temple of idols.

There are no equivalent problems nowadays. However, there are occasions where those who received sacred blood and flesh of Christ through the Lord's Supper defile the body by sexual misconduct, being involved in fortune telling or cursing backed up by demons, or have unethical business. But you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. As 2 Corinthian 6:14 says, "Do not be

unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" it is obvious that there are no fellowships (koinonia) between light and darkness. We belong to "koinonia of Christ". We have to thoroughly understand it and observe "consecration".

"Consecration" does not mean you deny every single secular thing and live in seclusion. Even though you have such a life, you cannot be free from sins nor are affected by the world. Then, should we add the Kingdom of God and this world and divide by 2? Sometime people say that's a balanced Christian life, but does the Bible teach that way? There are no "koinonia" between light and darkness, God's kingdom and this world, or the Holy Spirit and demons. We cannot put on two shoes, one is the Kingdom of God and the other is this world. We must firmly stand on the side of light and seek for the Kingdom of God and walk in the Holy Spirit. But to deliver light and testify the Kingdom of God, we should "do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness." (Psalm 37:3)

The Lord Supper is "koinonia" with the body of Christ and blood of Christ. Let's stay in this "koinonia" and renew our determination at this Lord's Supper.

(Prayer)

Lord God, Thank you for teaching us about the importance and attitude of listening to the Word of God. We seek the deeper fellowship with You by listening to You by the Word and talking to You through our prayer. Our first step is listening to Your word humbly. Today we take that first. When we notice that we are away

from the way of the fellowship with You, please guide us to the repentance and help us to return the right way. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus, Amen.