



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Christ
Makes
Free!

True
Fellowship

Fellowship
with Christ
and with
Each Other

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

2020

January

Session 1 – Christ Makes Free!

Hello and welcome to our first small group session of the new year! I hope that everyone had a joyful celebration of Christmas and a peaceful entry into 2020.

In the first divine service of this year, Chief Apostle Schneider gave us the theme, “Christ makes free!” This is to be the focus for all New Apostolic congregations worldwide in 2020. To help underline this theme and to really set the pace for the year ahead, “Christ makes free” is also the topic for our first small group discussion of the year.

Freedom is often the result of a victory. We simply need to look through history and see many examples of countries seeking their freedom and fighting for liberation. While the freedom we hear about in our church isn't political or geographic, it is the result of a victory. Christ is the ultimate victor! With the death on the cross, Christ conquered sin, having lived a perfect and sinless life, yet receiving the punishment for sin... our sin. Christ's eternally valid sacrifice is the event and act that makes salvation possible because He bridges the separation between man and God as a result of the original sin of Adam and Eve. And through His resurrection, Christ conquered death and the grave. Apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, reminds us of this essential foundation of the gospel, *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive* (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Again, Christ makes us free. He invites us into this freedom as a free gift of God. No one can deserve it. There is no amount of divine services we can attend, prayers we can pray, or hymns we can sing in order to earn the freedom and salvation brought through Christ. Please don't misunderstand – those things are wonderful expressions of worship and essential ways we learn more and more about God in our striving and preparing for Christ's return. But, ultimate freedom, freedom from the consequences of sin, the only freedom that truly matters in the eternal picture, comes from Jesus Christ.

Yes, we strive for ultimate eternal fellowship with God, when we'll be perfectly and eternally free. This freedom from Christ isn't just something for the future though. This isn't a “waiting time” until the Lord returns. During this time of grace, Christ works on our freedom through the Holy Spirit. We can read about this in Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

Perhaps a phrase you may have heard in the beginning of the year service was that the Lord “makes us free by allowing us to be masters of our own destiny.” This phrase isn't something we normally hear in divine services, but it is true! I can't blame the minister if I'm not happy with the condition of my soul, nor can I blame Satan because he can't make us sin. We are responsible and in control of our destiny. **God has given us the freedom to choose for Him or against Him.** Only we control ourselves. It is up to us to fight against temptation and other influences, whether internal or external. We don't want to get carried away by rage, envy, or our earthly desires.

Fighting to keep an eternal perspective in mind helps us to realize that Christ makes us free and that the Holy Spirit is helping us in this fight. The Holy Spirit can have more and more influence on our decisions every day, if we decide to let Him. The decisions we make, and our reactions to them, can help us transform our nature when we rely on Jesus as our example. It is for this reason, God, the Father, gave us the original commandments, and God, the Son, didn't abolish them or even replace them, but rather summarized them in Matthew 22:37-40, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*

Further, we should always remember what Jesus said in John 13:34-35, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

In the proper perspective, the will and commandments of God are not overbearing. Rather, those who live in the will of God live a life of freedom already here on earth because they are following Jesus' example. We want to strive to be more and more like Jesus, because, remember, only through Him is freedom possible.

The Lord does not impose this freedom upon us. He only liberates those who want it. Let us allow the Lord to make us free by submitting completely to the activity of the Holy Spirit, so that for 2020 we can, as the beginning of the year Bible verse exhorted, *stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free...* (Galatians 5:1).

Session 2 – True Fellowship

Welcome! Last week, we discussed our 2020 theme, "Christ makes free!" For our next two sessions, we'll be looking further at the sermon theme for January, which is, "Fellowship with Jesus Christ."

What is fellowship? We use the term for so many things, most often when we talk about eating together. Even the room in our church where we eat together usually bears the name, "fellowship hall." Eating together is not a bad thing, it builds relationships and gives us opportunities to share and spend time together.

However, true Christian fellowship is found with Jesus Christ, particularly in communion with Him.

In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul is addressing this very issue – fellowship in regards to eating and fellowship with Christ in communion. It seems that over time, the lines began to blur between these two. Let's take a look.

We can read this rather strong reprimand in the 11th chapter of 1 Corinthians: *Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 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. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 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* (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).

Wow – it seems that Paul was rather unhappy with them! Let's explore some historical context to see what is happening here.

In the early church, Christians often celebrated communion in the context of a meal. Large meals were also a place when social status and divisions were made very evident. Those of a higher class came to the meal earlier and were served lavishly in the dining room, while those that counted less would arrive later, and would be given the leftovers in the atrium or overflow room. Since the poor would only receive what was left, they were still hungry, and it is possible that they may have started to eat the bread meant for communion to satisfy their hunger. It seemed the congregation was not mindful of the value of the Lord's Supper or cared about the discord and divisions among them. With these actions, the unity of congregation was broken, and the purpose and meaning of the Lord's Supper was forgotten.

Let's continue to read the explanation of the Lord's Supper as Paul presents it to the Corinthians:

...that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 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." 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." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Jesus established Holy Communion in the midst of the Passover meal, from which it draws some similarities that we can learn from.

The Passover meal was a celebration where you *received each other* and shared food and drink *equally and freely*. This division of have and have-nots goes against the very nature of the meal where everyone ate the same things at the same time. Divisions in the congregation also violate the fundamental meaning of celebrating Holy Communion, in that Christ's sacrificial death was and is for all.

Another purpose of the Passover was to bring participants into a personal experience of the first Passover, as if they themselves were coming forth out of Egypt. With the words, *Do this in remembrance of Me*, Jesus calls each of us to personally go back to the night of the Last Supper. The sacrament becomes a living actualization of the past, in light of the future return of Christ.

One of the blessings said during the celebration of Passover is: *Let all who are hungry enter and eat; let all who are needy come to our Passover feast.*

In Holy Communion, Jesus invites us to His feast; His body and blood given for us. This goes beyond just thinking about a past event. Rather, it is an invitation to participate in the event remembered.

This perception is so beautifully captured in the old spiritual that asks: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" These words implore us to relive the events at the end of Jesus' life. In the celebration of Holy Communion, the Last Supper and Jesus' betrayal, torture, and death on the cross become real for us.

A further juxtaposition is made with the words: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.* While we are present in the event of the past, *proclaiming the Lord's death*, we also, at the same time, look to the future – *till He comes*. In this one sentence, remembrance and hope come together, not in a wishful sense, but rather, hope as the confident expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises.

Next week, we'll finish looking at Paul's response to the Corinthians, and discuss some clarifications to understanding fellowship.

Session 3 – Fellowship with Christ and with Each Other

Welcome back! Last week we started a discussion on what true fellowship is and explored Paul's communications to the Corinthians on this very topic. Let's recap!

The Corinthians had set the Lord's Supper equal to a regular meal, and brought their social divisions into the celebration of this special remembrance. Paul first scolded them for their practices, and then laid out Holy Communion the way that it was instituted by the Lord Jesus.

Today, we're going to look at the end of Paul's response in the 11th chapter, and see what points are relevant for us today.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment (1 Corinthians 11:27-34).

In these verses, we can see the solutions to what misguided the Corinthians. Let's pull out a few main points to focus on:

...*discerning the Lord's body*. In other Bible translations, it says, *recognizing the body*. There are a few ways that this can be interpreted, of which each is beneficial. One way is we can recognize our fellow Christians as the body of Christ. Through His grace, old divisions break down, for we are all one in Him! A more important way is to recognize communion as the body and blood of Christ. The receiving of this gift should humble us – that Christ's body was broken for us. We are broken because of sin, but He allowed Himself to be broken for us, in His love. When we see ourselves participating in the past events of Jesus' betrayal, condemnation, and sacrifice on the cross, we will approach this sacrament with the proper solemnity and thanksgiving. Another point is to recognize that the Lord's Supper is common to all because it is His! It does not belong to us, but is shared by all who believe in Him.

Eating and drinking in an *unworthy manner... but let a man examine himself...* We must realize that we are never fully worthy to accept the gift that the Lord has given us. Because of this, we have a responsibility in the way we approach fellowship with Jesus Christ. As we have seen, the Corinthians were not taking the sacrament seriously. How can we do things differently? Through preparation and intentionality. Even before we come to church, we can prepare our hearts through reflection and prayers of repentance. Where and how have I sinned this day? Where are my thoughts and actions in contrast to His? Have I asked God for forgiveness and expressed my remorse to Him? In the divine service, God not only wants to talk to us, but, more importantly, He wants to have fellowship with us. He has made this available through the sacraments. Holy Communion is the highest moment in the divine service, and the whole service points to and prepares us for that moment. When we intentionally focus our minds on this meal and toward the One who has provided it, not only will the sacrament have greater meaning, but our whole experience in the divine service is enhanced, and we are mindful of Christ throughout the week. God has revealed Himself to us and made Himself available to us! The kingdom is amongst us, and we are invited to the feast!

Fellowship with Christ leads to transformation. We should be different after communion – there must be effects! We have to *examine* ourselves – have I changed? Is it evident? Fellowship with Christ also transforms our attitudes and behaviors towards each other.

Paul says, *wait for one another*. We can understand this to mean that there is value in coming together and sharing our experiences with Christ. In such gatherings, one can perceive a measure of His love and presence, such as in our small group discussions when we have the opportunity to learn and to grow together towards oneness in Him. As disciples of Christ, we share our lives together and form strong community bonds. Thus, our true fellowship with Christ in the Holy Communion is an influence in unifying our congregations and how we live our lives.

Thank you for your attention to this topic of fellowship. For the next few months, we'll be taking a deep look at our Creed – the articles of our faith. I truly believe this is important for us, and I encourage you to approach these sessions with interest, perhaps even inviting a guest or a new believer to attend. I am confident it will help strengthen our knowledge of what we believe in our church, and help us more easily share it with those around us.