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Recapturing the Purpose of the Lord's Supper; 1 Cor 11:17-34

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Introduction – A spiritual pitfall we must avoid is losing the purpose of spiritual things. Once the meaning and purpose is lost to us, the exercise itself, though practiced regularly, is actually of no spiritual avail. We derive no spiritual benefit from simply going through the motions of any spiritual endeavor. That's because the benefit comes not from the act itself but rather from the faith that is displayed underneath the act. If you remove the faith, the act becomes meaningless. When you have the faith, the act is immeasurably meaningful.

Take Bible reading for example. The purpose of Bible reading is to see the glory of God, take to heart what God reveals to us, and grow in the likeness of Christ. If we lose that purpose, Bible reading becomes nothing more than a notch on a checklist. Another example is baptism. The purpose of baptism is to publicly identify with Christ. It is not to make us right with God but rather to announce that we who were once dead in sin have now been raised to new life in Christ. If we lose that purpose, baptism becomes an empty ceremony that results in no change in life and is void of true salvation.

The same can be said of the Lord's Supper. If we lose the purpose of the Lord's Supper it becomes nothing more than a religious ritual void of the spiritual nourishment for which it was intended. If you don't know the purpose, you're just going through the motions. III. Christmas ham

- I. The Lord's Supper is for Building Unity in the Church (vv17-22)
 - a. Paul immediately diagnoses the problem at Corinth as division in vv17-18. When division prevails, the Lord's Supper is entirely nullified. In fact, Paul says, "It is not the Lord's Supper that you eat." You can have the right motions and the right elements, but if you've lost the purpose, you've lost the meal. It's just crackers and juice; it's not the Lord's Supper.
 - b. The lack of unity is evident because the members are not there to serve one another, they are there for their own selfish interests.

- c. Yet this meal is meant to display and enrich unity. You can't have unity if you only think of yourself and your wants. That's why if you lose unity, you've lost the meal.
 - d. The meal is designed to foster unity.
 - i. Unity in the focus – the focus is Christ, not self. Our focus is on the Savior and what He has done to save us from sin. When we gather around this table as sinners, no matter what our differences and backgrounds and viewpoints may be, we gather around One person and one salvation that is of such gracious magnitude, it overrides our differences and makes us one in Christ.
 - ii. Unity in the taking of this meal. No matter your social status, education, ethnicity, or income, we eat this meal together, in the presence of one another. The ground becomes unmistakably level at the foot of the cross. We share in the same Christ and in the same salvation.
 - e. The purpose of gathering around the table of Christ is that we might be reminded we are one in Christ.
- II. The Lord's Supper is for Grounding the Church in Christ and the Gospel (vv23-26)
- a. To refocus the church in Corinth on the point of the Lord's Supper, Paul goes right to the beginning. Christ instituted this meal for our good. Paul is saying, "Don't take my words for it. Listen to the words of Christ." This supper is about Him, and if we keep the focus on Him, we won't veer into meaningless ritual.
 - b. The Supper is about Remembrance.
 - i. V23 – we remember that He was betrayed. Christ came to die for God's people, but you don't just kill Christ as if man has power over Christ. Christ is God. He is sovereign over His death and it's timing. God so designed the events around the death of Christ so that at the right time, the right trigger would result in the arrest and crucifixion of Christ. And that trigger was betrayal by one of His own disciples. One thought to be among His friends, His companions, but yet would betray Him. As we noted in Matthew, Christ suffered in more ways than just physical pain.

- ii. V24 – we remember His body was broken on our behalf. He absorbed the punishment that our sin deserved. He took our place. He was wounded for our transgressions and endured God’s just wrath against sin. Broken bread signifies His broken body, innocent of sin but broken for our sin. His brokenness heals our brokenness.
 - iii. V25 – we remember His blood cleanses sin from our record. Sin can only be dealt with in one of two ways. Either we have to pay for our record of sin throughout eternity or by God’s grace, the death of a substitute can wash it away. That’s what the cup represents. So when we drink the cup, we remember Him.
 - c. This Supper is also about the gospel.
 - i. V26 – when we rightly remember the broken body and shed blood of Christ to rescue us from our sin, we are in effect preaching the gospel through the means of eating this meal.
 - ii. We proclaim to one another – Christ is the way of salvation. I believe in Him – we believe in Him. In His death, we have life!
 - iii. Paul says, “Keep proclaiming the gospel in this way until He returns and your salvation is complete!”
- III. The Lord’s Supper is for the Sanctification of the Church’s Members (vv27-32)
 - a. Paul warns us that because this meal is unlike any other meal, it is not to be taken lightly. This meal portrays that our salvation was secured by the death of God’s only begotten Son. In the Father’s eyes, there is nothing more sacred or precious. God doesn’t take it lightly when we take it lightly.
 - b. So how do we take the meal today in a worthy manner? Hold dear to the purpose of unity, keep the focus on Christ and the gospel, and because this meal represents our freedom from sin – confess and repent of any known sin in our lives so that the purpose might be reflected in the hearts of those who partake.
 - c. You see this meal, unlike any other meal, sanctifies the ones who take it in a worthy manner.

Conclusion – ill. Let's eat. It's ready! The meal has been prepared, not just because the elements are present but because Christ has given it its meaning. The question is are we ready to receive it?