

The Lord's Supper

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-29
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1 Corinthians 11, let's go there and let's talk about the Lord's Supper this morning. It's been quite a season since we have looked at the foundations or basics of what we as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ believe and mean when we take the Lord's Supper together. I was just reading an article in my office this morning where they did an extensive survey of 20-24 year olds who grew up in church and they found that only 10% of kids who grew up in church when they reached their early 20s had any idea what doctrine their church believed and taught, 10%. And you wonder why we stay on a crusade about a true church, a healthy church, a church that believes right, has a biblical theology and a biblical methodology for what you do and practice. It's because churches today are colossal failures. If 90% of our active evangelical kids go into their early adulthood and cannot tell you the basic things their church believes, we have failed.

I do believe that's not the true statistic here but it reminded me in my heart and spirit that we have to go back and repeat things. It's interesting, being here 33 years with you, how many things we've looked at, we've studied, we've preached, we've developed policies on it, we voted it in as church practice though it caused people maybe to talk about us or be opposed to us, whatever it was, and then you forget that that's been 25 years ago since you've looked at some of those things. So, let's renew our hearts again on the Lord's Table and what it means and how special and wonderful and holy it really is.

1 Corinthians 11, beginning in verse 23. Paul writing to instruct the church at Corinth and really to straighten them out for all the errors and excesses and immaturities they had. He says,

“23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat

of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.”

Kind of a cornerstone, maybe the keystone in the arch, if you will, of observing the Lord's Supper is that simple phrase “do this in remembrance of me.” He talks about the bread being his body. He says, “You take the bread,” and in ancient custom they, of course, served their bread as loaves and you broke off a piece so that you could partake of it and your body receive the physical nourishment. If you didn't break it, you didn't get a piece, you didn't get the nourishment. So that prefigured, that is a symbol of his body which hung on the cross and was broken under the wrath of God for us. And from his sacrificial body and life, we receive spiritual nourishment and nutrition.

He talks about the cup representing the blood of the new covenant. Of course, to the Jewish mindset, that was prominent even though this was a Gentile area, the Jewish mindset was very prominent. They had for generation after generation after generation practiced bringing doves and turtledoves and bullocks and goats and lambs to their priest that the blood might be shed as a part of the covenant God ordained with Abraham. But now there's a new covenant, one that makes all of those sacrifices and all of those rituals now absolutely – here's the Hebrew word – obsolete. All of those old sacrificial aspects are now gone. They are all fulfilled in the blood of Jesus Christ.

There's a figure in the ancient world that's common in the Old Testament and it's talking about a winepress and how the men would take off their shoes and they would tread out the winepress and stomp on those ripe, ready to burst grapes and as they would step on them, the juice would be released from the skins and it would flow down the little chute down into the containers they had to collect the juice. Well, that's what happened to our Lord on the cross. The heavenly Father took his feet of divine jurisprudence and just wrath and he trod literally upon his Son on the cross in our place. His blood was spilled and Jesus said, “When you eat the bread, that's symbolic and should remind you, remember my body that's broken that you might have spiritual sustenance and healing. When you drink the juice, remember my blood that was poured out for you as the wrath of God crushed me for you as I died in your place.”

Just a few thoughts here on what we should keep in our minds as we take the Supper and be remembering. First of all, we must remember that this is a joint memorial. In other words, you cannot have the Lord's Supper apart from the local church, the body of Christ, it's a church ordinance. Now, I know there are sincere people who may in immaturity get a group together here and a group together there but that kind of independent spirit and they go off and have a retreat and they take the Supper together, I would caution against that. I don't think that's good. The Supper should be when the church is communing together as a whole under the leadership of God-ordained elders to commune together one with another and with our Lord. We come together to partake of this Supper because we are not independent ones and you have to wrestle with that in this western, rugged, rogue, proud, independent spirited culture we live in. Modern church life today is where every man does what's right in his own eyes and if the pastor don't help us do what we think is right in our own eyes, we'll just get rid of him and get one that will. Successful

pastors are sometimes defined as a pastor who can somehow keep all the independent spirits happy within the church. That is radically contrary to the spirit of true Christianity and radically contradictory to the spirit of the Lord's Table.

We come to this Table today – now listen to your pastor – willingly and humbly repenting and putting aside anything and everything that might separate us or divide us, getting over issues, disgruntlements, disagreements and offenses. About 98% of the time when you're offended as a Christian, you ought to just say, “Look, I offended God far more greatly than my brother or sister offended me. I'm just going to get over it and forgive it and forget it.” Amen? Well, the Supper is a time when you must especially have that spirit. That's the spirit of Christianity all the time in the body of Christ but of all times, you must lay that stuff aside. This is an interdependency, this is a community moment, this is a body life moment. If there are any differences, they must now be set aside. You be the judge of that. You just in your heart today say, “Lord, I will not partake of this Supper where you, the deeply offended one, you the one I wickedly have sinned against and still sin against, fully forgave me. I choose today to fully forgive that brother, that sister,” whoever it may be, somebody in your own family. This is a joint memorial of communion with God and one another.

Secondly, it's also a distinctly personal memorial. He's talking to the church, of course, at Corinth but he talks to the individuals in the church. He says, verse 25, “In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'” In other words, you individual ones, you must do what you must do in your own hearts. You must determine in your own hearts to focus on the Lord. You must determine in your own heart to remember his body broken for you. You must dedicate and be committed in your own heart today to remember and show gratitude for his blood that was spilled as he endured the wrath of God for you. I cannot commune for you in that sense and you cannot commune for me. You must do that. In that sense, it is an individual memorial. Only you can deal with whatever issue in your heart might cause you to have ought against another brother or another sister. But whatever else we do as we individually take responsibility for where we are, there cannot be any known unrepented of sin in your life. You must take the Supper with a clean heart before our Lord. Be done with all the independent rogue spirit. God saved you to be a part of the body in an interdependency within the body. It is a joint memorial, but it's an individual memorial in the sense that only you can check your own heart. Only you can commune with God in the right spirit.

Let me say also it's a distinctively happy memorial. When the Lord first instituted the Supper, he changed the Jewish Passover into this memorial Christian Supper ordinance and it was quite an informal time. Be reminded today, this is not a funeral, it's more a feast. Feasting spiritually on the rich glories and grace and goodness of our God. We're not here to sing a dirge over his mangled body, we are here to celebrate the glory and the victory of his resurrection and his saving grace. The Bible tells us that after the Supper, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn. The Scripture teaches in the tradition of a Jewish feast, they would be laying around just sort of laying back propped up on pillows. It was

a very relaxed, a very informal atmosphere. It's a Supper of rest. It's a Supper of joy. It's a Supper of peace.

Let me just add a couple of things here as we look at the remainder of this particular text. He says in verse 27, I'm really going back to what I was earlier emphasizing but I don't want to leave this out. Verse 27, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." In other words, if you come to this Supper like the Corinthians were coming. The text tells us that some of them were getting drunk when they came together to observe the Lord's Supper. The text tells us that some wealthy people were bringing lots of food and gorging themselves and poor people could not bring that kind of food and were actually going hungry and Paul said, "You're missing the whole spirit of this thing and when you come and you're not serious and you're not consecrated and you're not focused on what the Supper means, then you are sinning in a unique and significant way against Christ himself." That's a powerful point. Now, all sin is sin and all sin is against Christ but since Jesus died for the church, there is a sense in which he didn't just die for you, you do understand that, don't you? He died that his church might be together, that we might have this oneness and all these various backgrounds and all these unique personalities and all these various likes and dislikes, all of that is absolved into insignificance once we know Christ because we have more in common with people who are radically, socially, culturally different from us if we know Christ together than any other way.

So he says when you come together, be right with each other, have a right hearted mind about the preciousness, the holiness, the wonder, the glory, the joy of Christ dying for you because if you do not, you're taking the Supper in an unworthy manner. Now, be very careful here. There have been churches and groups, the Catholic Church has taught wrong on this, where they basically talk about if you're an unworthy person you can't take the Supper. That's not what this is saying. We're all unworthy persons. This is not saying if you're an unworthy person, it's saying you cannot take it in an unworthy manner so when you come today, we all come to this Supper as a radically, wholly unworthy person but we come humble, we come thankful, we come repentant, we come with all of our hope and faith in Jesus Christ. That's coming in a worthy manner even though we all agree we're unworthy persons.

He also says as we continue, verse 28, "But a man must examine himself," there's that individual mandate. I can't examine your heart, you can't examine mine but you must examine your heart. "And in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly." The word "judge" there is a root word which actually has the idea of "discern." In other words, he said, "You came and took the Supper that's to point you back to my body and you didn't discern what my body is about rightfully. You missed the weightiness. You missed the glory. You missed the wonder. You missed the grace. You missed how wretched and wrong and sinful you were and how wonderfully he's cleansed and helped you. It's not a Supper," to the Corinthians, "where you're to come and get drunk. It's not a time for you to feast and forget your brother and sister. Come with the right understanding." He goes on to talk about many are sick and weak and a number

sleep because they didn't take the Lord's Supper in a right manner, with the right heart attitude.

He tells us in verse 26 that as long as we take this Supper, we show forth his death until he comes. I've said this to you before but I think it's a good reminder as we take the Supper today: first of all, we show forth his death to ourselves. This is a means of grace. It is a part of our sanctification to take that bread and to take that juice and preach to ourselves and say, "Self, we must have Christ. If his body was not broken and judged in your place, Self, if his blood was not spilled under the avenging wrath of God for us in our place, then we would be lost forever." So we proclaim it again to ourselves.

Secondly, we show it to God. We tell our heavenly Father that we unashamedly and whole-heartedly place all of our hope, all of our confidence, all of our faith, in the death of his Son for our standing before him. Amen. Father, we embrace your Son and particularly his death for us, his body broken, his blood shed.

We show it to ourselves, we show it to God, we show it to our fellow brothers and sisters. Again, this is a joint memorial. As you take the bread and drink the wine and as the brothers or sisters around you take the bread and drink the juice, then you are saying to them, "We together agree. We're unashamed. We encourage each other. We admonish each other in this time by taking the Supper, that we are yielded, committed to the Lord Jesus Christ."

Fourthly, not only do we show it to ourselves, not only do we show it to our God and show it to one another, we show it to the world. Let the world know, let the world see that our hope is in Christ and Christ crucified. They call it slaughterhouse religion. They deride and ridicule and mock the notion but we don't care. We show it to the world, our hope and our faith is in Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Lastly, we show it to sinners. Those who may be here, who may not yet know Christ, we say to them, "You should also turn and put your faith and your hope and your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Let's pray together.