

OPEN EYES AT THE LORD'S SUPPER

I Corinthians 10: 16, 17 and 11: 17-33 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

If there is anything that stands out in this awesome passage of God's Word today, it is God's solemn warning for no believer, no brother or sister in Jesus, to dare eat this bread or drink this cup in an unworthy manner, without discerning the Lord's body. Any unrepentant believer who refuses to repent of sins against the Lord or sins against others, should run from the Table of the Lord. To trivialize the sacred body and blood of the Lord means, Paul says, that we "drink judgment to ourselves," and Paul adds that many of those in Corinth, trivializing the body and blood of Jesus were already "weak, sick, and some already had died." Charles Colson in his book, "The Body," tells the story of a pastor, Pat Novak, pastor in a church just outside of Boston. He was serving as a hospital chaplain intern. Pat was making his hospital rounds one summer morning a few years ago, when he was called to visit a patient admitted with an undiagnosed ailment. The sick man, John, a man in his sixties, had not responded to any treatment; medical tests showed nothing; psychological tests were inconclusive. Yet his body was wasting away; he had not even been able to swallow for two weeks. The nurses tried everything. Finally they called the chaplain's office. When Pat walked into the room, John was sitting limply in his bed, strung with IV tubes, staring listlessly at the wall. He was a tall, grandfatherly man, balding a little, but his sallow, grayish-yellow skin hung loosely on his face, neck, and arms where the weight of his skin loosely dropped from his frame. His eyes were hollow. Pat was terrified; he had no idea what to do. But when Pat walked in, John seemed to brighten a bit as soon as he saw Pat's official chaplain badge. John invited this young chaplain intern to sit down.

As the two men talked, Pat sensed that God urging him to do something specific: "Ask John if he wants to take the Lord's Supper." Chaplain interns in this Boston Hospital were not encouraged to ask this type of thing for this was a public hospital but Pat did. Pat listened to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and soon he realized as is always true—God's promptings are right on. John instantly broke down. "I can't!" he cried. "I've sinned and I can't be forgiven." Pat paused a moment, knowing he was about to break policy again. He went ahead and told John about 1 Corinthians 11 and Paul's admonition that whoever takes Communion in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself. And he asked John if he wanted to confess his sin. John nodded gratefully. To this day Pat can't remember the particular sin John confessed, nor would he say if he did, but he recalls that it did not strike him as particularly flagrant or terrible. Yet this unconfessed sin had been draining the life from this man. John wept openly as he confessed. Chaplain

Pat laid his hands on him, then hugged him, and told John to confess to the Lord and assured John of the truth of I John 1: 9, telling him his sins were forgiven by Jesus. Then Pat got the second urging from the Holy Spirit: He asked John if he wanted to take Communion now. John did. Pat gave John a Bible to read I Corinthians 11 and he told him he would be back soon. Already John was sitting up straighter in his bed, with a flicker of light and hope in his eyes. Pat visited a few more hospital patients and then he ate lunch in the hospital cafeteria. When he left, he wrapped an extra piece of bread in a napkin and he borrowed a coffee cup from the cafeteria. Then he ran out to a small store and bought a container of grape juice. Then he returned to John's room with the elements symbolizing the body and blood of our Lord. John and Pat celebrated Communion together, Pat again reciting 1 Corinthians 11. John took the bread and chewed it slowly. It was the first time in weeks he had been able to take solid food into his mouth. He took the cup and swallowed for the first time in two weeks. He had been set free. Three days later, John walked out of that hospital. The nurses were so amazed they called the newspaper, which later featured the story of John and Pat, appropriately, in the paper's "LIFE" section.

Beloved, this blessing we have today before our Agape (Love Feast) upstairs, our Soup and Pie Meal with our special gifts of love to RIM and to Diamond Philus, this blessing of Communion, the Lord's Supper is something God wants us to understand, and He has pointed me to four looks that every believer needs every time we celebrate the broken body and shed blood of our Lord. This message is simple, but I have prayed to Jesus that this message would be life changing for us. What are these four powerful looks we need before taking the Lord's Supper?

LOOK BACK! (I.) Look at I Corinthians 11: 23-26a. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, 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." In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death..." This week I read a true story that is very descriptive of why Jesus calls us all to a gratitude meal to remember His death for us. It happened in 1993. Three times a month Jermaine Washington, a man, and Michelle Stevens ate lunch together at work in a lunch they call "a gratitude lunch." Why? Jermaine met Michelle at work where they hit it off as friends. One day Michelle started weeping and told Jermaine about waiting on a kidney donor list for 11 months. She was living at that moment on dialysis, but she was suffering chronic fatigue and blackouts and plagued with joint pain.

Jermaine couldn't stand the thought of watching his friend die, so he went through the necessary testing, his kidneys were acceptable, and finally he gave to his co-worker one of his kidneys. Jesus gave His life for not one of us but for all of us. I read this week that it is estimated that Americans took 880 billion photographs last year. Why? It is to augment our memory. Jesus knew about you and about me. He knew we have a short memory and that's why He calls us back over and over to His Table-Look back, Look back, look back. Look at the symbols of His broken body and shed blood. Most of us try to forget how our loved ones died, but Jesus wants us to remember how He died. Why? It's because everything we are and have as believers, centers in Christ's death. We must remember that He died for us, how He died for us, and at the table, by eating the bread and drinking the cup, we fellowship with our living risen Savior, as our hearts reach out to thank Him by faith. How could we ever forget Him who never once forgot us? Forget Him who poured out His soul unto death and poured out His blood for our sins? Forget Him who loved us even unto death? No, may we not forget. Look back. Look back. Look back, look back! Secondly,

LOOK AHEAD! (II.) Notice afresh I Corinthians 11: 26: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, **until He comes.**" We observe the Lord's death by eating the unleavened bread and drinking the cup **until He comes.** The return of Jesus Christ is the blessed hope of the church and of each of us as individual believers. John the beloved disciple who leaned on Jesus' bosom told us in I John 3: 2, 3, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure." Pastor Donald Gettys told a story that moved me this week. He spoke of a married couple who had a very good marriage. They had a little girl they so loved, a beautiful young daughter. One day that little girl was tragically killed in an accident. The happiness in that home was shattered and the dad and mom grieved. As time passed, the couple grew apart. Their love for each other wasn't the same any more since their little daughter was killed. Finally, their love grew cold. A bitter hatred entered their hearts for each other. Finally they agreed to separate and they made plans to divorce. As they were in their home one day dividing up their belongings accumulated over all their marriage, they got tired and sat down a moment to rest. Their eyes suddenly fell upon a pair of "little red shoes" which had belonged to their little girl. This reminder of their precious daughter softened their hearts. Soon they were weeping in tenderness. God convicted them of their mistake. They got back together. Their marriage was saved. That little reminder-little red shoes was the turning point in their lives. I want this service to be a turning point in your life, beloved, in your marriage, in

your family. We have this opportunity month after month to look back and then look ahead. When we look back and then look ahead, Jesus shows us how to remember His death until He comes. May it happen in all our lives today! 3rdly,

LOOK WITHIN! (III.) Notice I Corinthians 11: 27-32! “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” To adulterate the Lord’s Supper without examining ourselves is like polluting a pure well of wonderful refreshing cold water. It’s like bringing tons of stones to spread on a fertile field. When we come to the Table of the Lord, we need to ask ourselves, do I wear the wedding garment of the Bride of Christ? To bring bitterness to this Table is to be an intruder at the Table. It is as dangerous for us as Uzzah reaching out to steady the ark of God when God struck him down. We don’t have to be worthy to partake of the Lord’s Supper. None of us are. Rather we are to partake in a worthy manner. At a Communion Service in Scotland, the pastor noticed a woman in the congregation who didn’t take the bread and the cup from the serving elder. Rather she sat weeping. The pastor went quietly to her and said, “Take it, my dear, it’s for sinners.” Indeed, it is for sinners, but beloved, never forget, that sinners saved by God’s grace must never treat the Supper in a sinful manner. Rather, God is calling us as we look within to judge our sins for what they are, transgressions against our holy Lord. We must confess them to God and to each other, or God will begin to discipline and judge us until we confess and forsake our sins, or He will take us Home to heaven early. This is never God condemning His sons and daughters, but chastening us until we are willing to cooperate with Him and His will. 4thly,

LOOK AROUND! (IV.) Notice lastly I Corinthians 11: 33, 34. “So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.” God is calling us to look around to criticize each other as believers, but in order to discern the Lord’s body-v. 29. This discerning has a dual meaning. We should discern Christ’s body in the unleavened bread or loaf, but also in the body of Christ around us for the church is the body of Christ. Remember I Corinthians 10: 17. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread—symbolizing the one body of Christ broken for us as the unleavened bread

has been broken for us all to share. The Lord's Supper is to be a living demonstration of the unity of the church. The Corinthian Church was at fault greatly. The Lord's Supper for them only emphasized their disunity. The Lord's Supper is the church's family meal, and the Lord of our church family desires for His children to love one another and care for each other. It is impossible for a true Christian to get closer to the Lord while at the same time being separated from a fellow believer. John said in I John 4: 11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." No one ought to share the elements of the bread and the cup who knows he or she is not a believer. But most of all, no true believer should dare to come to the Lord's Table if his or her heart is not right with God or with a fellow believer. There are times when a sin is known only to God, and confession needs to be no wider than that. There are times when only a very few people know of a sin, and the confession need be no wider than that. But beloved, there are times when the body knows of a sin, and the only right response is to first confess that sin to God, and then at the Lord's Supper to others. This is a perfect spot to confess a confessable sin in a concise, quiet manner at the Lord's Supper. When the Holy Spirit is in such a confession, a Holy Spirit wave of love can sweep a congregation and lead to revival and open weeping over sin. At such a Supper, we come to truly discern the Lord's body. Yes, the Lord's Supper is time for thanksgiving, joy, and anticipating of Christ's coming, but let us first look back, ahead, within, and then around. With these four looks—back, ahead, within, and around, may God give us open eyes today at the Lord's holy Supper, representing Jesus' body and His shed blood for us! Bow your heads.