

## The Blessing of the Lord's Supper (Sunday, July 4, 2021)

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**Scripture:** 10 Commandments; 1 Cor. 11:17-34

### INTRODUCTION

Two months ago, we focused on the wonderful subject of the Lord's Supper; today I want to return to this important subject.

Focus: **The blessing of the Lord's Supper.**

We have looked at 1 Cor. 11 before though it has been about 11 years.

I want to look at this passage from the viewpoint of **blessing**, even though the Corinthian church had some very serious issues.

1] The Blessing of Rebuke, vv. 17-22

2] The Blessing of the True Institution, vv. 23-26

3] The Blessing of Further Instruction and Encouragement, vv. 27-34

**We receive the blessing of the Lord's Supper in recognition of God's great patience, mercy, and judgment.**

### 1] THE BLESSING OF REBUKE, VV. 17-22

When you read the book of 1 Corinthians you are reminded of the great mercy and patience of God.

**1Cor. 1:4** I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, **5** that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, **6** even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,

Following this very positive introduction, we see the different sins and issues that Paul brought to the attention of this church.

There were contentions and divisions.

In chapter 3 they are described as being carnal and spiritual babies.

Chapter 5 deals with a very serious matter of immorality that was not being handled properly.

In chapter 6, the issue of going to pagan courts rather than correctly dealing with conflicts was addressed.

And then in chapter 11, Paul again brings serious rebuke over how they celebrated or rather were not celebrating the Lord's Supper.

It is a **blessing** to receive a godly rebuke when you are in sin or not walking as you should.

This is not the spirit of our age.

Our age wants everything to be positive. Everyone should get a trophy, except for those who don't think so.

And of course, we know that sometimes rebuke is not always brought properly, but we should always rejoice that God is gracious in rebuking and chastising us.

**Heb. 12:5** And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,

Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

**6** *For whom the LORD loves He chastens,*

*And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

Now obviously the rebuke that Paul gave to the Corinthians in this letter is not identical to how we are rebuked today.

But I see that one of the blessings of the Lord's Supper is that it is one of the means that God uses to awaken us to the **seriousness** of dealing with the living God.

God is patient; He is so abundant in His mercy.

The Lord Jesus Christ also does judge His people.

And should this not humble us?

We come to the Lord's table.

We recognize His sovereign authority.

This is part of the blessing of the Lord's Supper.

In a very profound way, you are coming into the Lord's house. Are you considering how you are living before Him?

What is the testimony and witness of the Lord that you are bringing to others?

How are we treating others?

Are we causing schism in the body or seeking true unity?

The word **division** in verse 18 is the word that could be translated from Greek as **schism**.

It is used three times in 1 Corinthians.

In verse 19, a similar word is used, **factions**, which in Greek is where we get the word **heresy**.

We tend to use the word heresy in terms of false teaching.

Its usage here is not directly related to false teaching but to dissension or a faction.

We see the same word used in Gal. 5:20.

What is the point of verse 19?

It is horrible to see factions, but the Lord uses factions in order to make clear who is approved by the Lord.

The ESV reads: **that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.**

John Calvin wrote:

The Sacraments have a tendency to exercise us in piety and love. The prayers, too, ought to be of use for promoting all these purposes. In addition to this, the Lord works efficaciously by his Spirit, because he wills not that his ordinances should be vain.

There has been debate and disagreement among faithful teachers about how much preparation should be given by the believer before participating in the Lord's Supper.

Some of you might remember the great scholar Francis Nigel Lee who spoke many years ago to our church on this subject.

He advocated a long time or period of preparation before participating in communion.

I don't find Scripture advocating that directly, but certainly one of the blessings of coming to the Lord's Table is hearing the rebuke of Scripture and responding appropriately.

This meal is not given to those who by their own effort earn it or deserve it.

**We don't make ourselves worthy!**

But we certainly don't want to turn the meal into something of our making such that like the Corinthians we are no longer even celebrating the Lord's Supper.

## **2] THE BLESSING OF THE TRUE INSTITUTION, VV. 23-26**

How do we know that we are still to practice the Lord's Supper today?

In the four gospels we have a description of the Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with His disciples.

In Acts there are references also to the Lord's Supper.

But we can say that it is 1 Corinthians that shows most clearly that Jesus' celebration with His disciples was the start of a new sacrament for the church today.

We use the words of verses 23-26 in all our celebrations of the Lord's Supper.

You have heard these verses hundreds of times.

They are so vital as we think of what we are called to do as a congregation.

When Paul was in the city of Corinth he taught these things to the church.

Paul **received** this instruction from the Lord.

He gave this instruction to the believers. He repeats this same instruction here in 1 Cor. 11.

What a blessing to know that the meal we celebrate has a connection with the past in terms of the Passover Meal.

And most of all the blessing is that we are directed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know from the OT that the Passover meal had a number of different elements – lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs.

But here we are directed to two elements: bread and wine or the cup.

It is easy to miss, but we should not pass by the words **when he had given thanks...**

You know that it can be easy to simply offer an unthinking prayer of thanks before eating a meal.

Here there is attention given to Jesus giving thanks for the bread that He was to give to His disciples.

John Calvin comments correctly that this giving of thanks was not simply about food but **giving thanks to the Father for His mercy towards the human race and the inestimable benefit of redemption.**

Now we know that the sacraments are not magical.

You don't have to be celebrating communion in order to rejoice in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ to save sinners!

But certainly, in this meal we are given a special opportunity and blessing in considering all that Jesus Christ has done for us.

One of the key duties and blessings of this meal is to **remember**.

The word **amnesia** comes from the Greek word which means forgetfulness. The "a" is the Greek prefix that means opposite.

The word **remembrance** shares the same root but has a different prefix which means **to go back to something**, the opposite then of amnesia.

Amnesia and anamnēsia – to forget and to go back to something, to remember.

**Heb. 10:3** But in those *sacrifices there is* a **reminder** of sins every year.

Remember is a very special word found throughout Scripture often used of God remembering His people or His promise.

I think it is very obvious that Jesus Christ gave this meal to His church so that we would not lose our focus on the gospel.

Now we know that Scripture speaks to all areas of life.

But we know the great danger when so much of Christianity has been turned into self-improvement, self-help, living a better or happier life.

We want to see all areas of life recognize the crown rights of Jesus Christ.

But we must never lose sight of the foundation, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to ransom sinners and rescue us from God's wrath and our total bondage to sin.

And what specifically are we called to remember?

1] His suffering – my body broken or given for you

2] Our union with Christ in His suffering

3] The cleansing and forgiveness that we have in what our Lord accomplished for us.

**1John 1:7** But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Closely related to this is the truth that the Lord's Supper is given to us as a seal, something that in a special way shows the truth of what God has promised.

**1Cor. 10:16** The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

We know at the time of the Reformation the Lord's Supper also had been greatly perverted.

It was celebrated sometimes very infrequently, and the people were not given the bread for fear that since it was turned into the actual body of Jesus some of it might break off as spilled crumbs.

Now in our celebration the value is not how much bread and wine you are given.

The blessing is holding in your hands the two elements as a direct, visible, tangible reminder of what we have in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Now here is also where the discussion gets very deep in terms of the **spiritual blessing** we receive with communion connected with the physical body and blood of our Lord.

**WCF 29.7** Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.

Jesus Christ is now in Heaven.

Through the Holy Spirit He is with us, but His physical body resides in glory.

Our feeding on His body and blood in no way is physical but spiritual.

In summary, the view of the Lord's Supper emphasized in the Reformation is that according to the working of the Holy Spirit, **we spiritually are strengthened through all that Jesus Christ is – His divinity and humanity.**

We confess that Jesus Christ is **truly present with us** and that He **strengthens** us in the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Here we keep in mind something very important.

Although we have duties that God has given to us that we must never ignore, we also rest in God's sovereign and merciful work in our lives.

The spiritual fruit we produce is never the result of our own hard work.

Spiritual fruit comes through the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with our union with Christ.

**John 15:4** Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

### 3] THE BLESSING OF FURTHER INSTRUCTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT, vv. 27-34

In these final verses of the chapter, we go back to theme of both blessing and warning.

This section resembles what you see in other places of Scripture where God sets forth blessing and also judgment.

Verse 27 speaks of eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

What does it mean to partake in an unworthy manner?

In the context of the Corinthians, the most obvious way that they were celebrating the supper in an unworthy manner was through their **drunkenness, gluttony, lack of sharing, and divisions.**

What does it mean for us to eat and drink in an unworthy manner?

There could be several applications for today.

It means to come to the table **without true faith** in Jesus Christ as your only hope of salvation.

Further, it is to come without **true reverence** for what is being done.

For someone who is truly a believer, I believe it can also mean to come with a **sin that you are not willing to confess or repent of.**

In this case, the solution is not simply don't partake, but rather as quickly as you can, you must deal with that sin before the Lord brings you to the point of serious judgment.

Now since we all fall short of God's perfect standard, perfection can't be the criteria for celebrating the Lord's Supper.

But it does mean that you are **honestly seeking to turn from known sin**, though you certainly will not be perfect in doing so.



And another way that you might eat and drink in an unworthy manner is when you come to the table with **bitterness** in your heart toward another a person, a believer especially, that you are not willing or seeking to resolve.

How can we proclaim that we are one if we are not seeking to live in that unity?

This is not a meal for the perfect but for the needy who realize their need of Jesus Christ and are sincerely seeking him, though they are fully aware of their failures.

Eating and drinking in an unworthy manner is a serious sin.

To do so is to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. **It means to be liable for the death of Jesus Christ.**

**In verse 28**, Paul commands that you examine yourself and in this spirit of examination eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

To examine means to determine if something is real; put to the test your faith, attitude, and actions to other believers.<sup>1</sup>

This examination is something that you seek to do both **before** and **after** you come to the Lord's Table.

It means that you sincerely try to live your life according to the pattern the Lord's Supper provides.

This examination isn't really some extra duty you are given.

In summary I think we can say, the command of examination is to **make sure that you are not living as a hypocrite.**

Seeking to be as consistent as possible in how you live your Christian life, **come then to the Lord's Table to eat and drink.**

It is not that you are good enough to come, but you are seeking to be honest and humble before the Lord and before others so that you are not making a mockery of what the meal represents.

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<sup>1</sup> BDAG, s.v. "δοκιμάζω," 255.

**Verse 29** is similar to verse 27.

Paul talks about **not discerning the Lord's body** and therefore eating and drinking in a way that brings judgment instead of blessing.

The phrase, **not discerning the Lord's body** has been understood in different ways in the history of the church.

Some today believe that it refers to the **body of believers**.

Not discerning the Lord's body means that we are not honoring other believers as the body of the Lord. A good argument can be made for this position.<sup>2</sup>

But more likely, the word body is not here referring to other believers but the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

**Celebrating the meal improperly is really a failure to take seriously the example of Jesus Christ.**

When you take the elements, you are declaring that you will live a life of faith, self-sacrifice, and obedience according to the example of Jesus Christ.

So again, the issue is not simply doing some wrong during our short communion service, though in Corinth that was part of their problem.

The issue is also what you do after you celebrate the Lord's Supper.

And this is why the Lord's Supper should affect you every day. It should be that incentive to reconcile with God and with others as quickly as possible. For to eat and drink is to proclaim the Lord's death and what that means for us as individuals and as believers together.<sup>4</sup>

In verse 30, Paul made clear to the Corinthians that there were severe consequences for their abuse of the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon Fee among others holds to this position. See Fee, 563-564.

<sup>3</sup> See Thiselton, 891-893. He understands this as being mindful of the uniqueness of Christ, who is separated from others in the sense of giving himself for others in sheer grace. John Calvin understood body to speak also of Christ.

<sup>4</sup> See again the Larger Catechism.

Paul through the guidance of the Holy Spirit was able to declare to them that many were weak and sick and many were dead because of their sin.

Of course, Paul is not saying that all sickness and death is the result of improperly celebrating the Lord's Supper.

On the other hand, I don't think we should think that this language only applied to the Corinthian church. It is a serious thing to abuse the covenant signs, which God has graciously given to us.

The third commandment says that God will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.

Verse 30 is saying something very similar.

The solution Paul gives in verses 31 and 32 is not to stop celebrating the Lord's Supper.

That is not an option.

If you are living in sin as a Christian, then the answer isn't simply, stop taking communion.

No, the answer is that you deal with the spiritual issues you may be having.

Paul says in verse 31 that if you would judge yourself, then you will not be judged by God.

If you are sincerely seeking to live a life of faith according to God's Word, if you are sincerely seeking to deal with your sin, and deal properly with others, then there is no reason for fear.

The Corinthians were not doing this and as a result they were coming under the judgment of God.

This duty of judgment is the same duty as self-examination.

Am I coming to the table as a hypocrite or as sincerely as I can?

Where am I living inconsistently?

What could I be doing to bring greater honor to my Lord and Savior in how I live my life?

And then in verse 32, Paul makes an incredible statement. The judgment of the Lord is not something that any believer would ever want to experience.

And yet the Lord Jesus Christ sends judgment to His people not as an expression of anger but His love.

Jesus Christ chastens His people, His sheep, so that they will not be condemned with the world. This is a sobering truth but a beautiful truth.

**Psa. 118:18** The LORD has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death.

**Prov. 3:12** For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

**Rev. 3:19** As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

#### CONCLUSION:

To summarize, what are the blessings offered to us in this meal?

- 1] Blessing of rebuke and the Lord's determination to not allow his people to be condemned with the world.
- 2] Blessing of examination and self-judgment.
- 3] Greatest of all - the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ offered for sinners!

The Lord's Supper is not a funeral service for Jesus Christ.

We remember His death and suffering. We celebrate His triumph.

And that which is serious and weighty doesn't exclude joy.

The Lord's Supper should be an occasion of great joy - you are given bread and wine reminding you that your sins have been taken away, though you have done nothing to deserve this great blessing.

Prayer

Hymn 77 - 3<sup>rd</sup> Tune

**BENEDICTION - HEBREWS 12:1-3**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.