

LET A MAN EXAMINE HIMSELF
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2010

SCRIPTURE READING – 10 COMMANDMENTS; 1 COR. 11:17-34

INTRODUCTION

Our monthly communion service probably only lasts 10-15 minutes. It is a very small portion of time each month. And if you are not careful, it can be something that you only think about once a month.

But one of the important things we see from 1 Corinthians 11, is that the Lord's Supper is something that you should not just think about once a month. Just as we speak of the gospel as being important for all of life, so in a similar way the Lord's Supper is not just a symbolic meal that lasts for a few minutes on the first Sunday of the month, but it should have implications for every day of your life. Your participation in the Lord's Supper is to be a pattern and encouragement for how you live every day. **Your participation in the Lord's Supper can also have consequences good and bad every day.**

Two years ago on the first Sunday in September we looked at 1 Corinthians 11. In God's Providence, I would like us to again consider this important passage.

We will consider again verses 17-32 in two parts: First, I would like to review verses 17-26. Second, we will give greater attention to verses 27-32, Let a

1. REVIEW OF 1 COR. 11:17-26

The Corinthian Church had some major problems. In God's Providence Paul in dealing with those problems has given to us very important instruction on a number of issues including the Lord's Supper. Outside of the gospels, the most important instruction on the Lord's Supper is found in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11.

In verses 17-22 we see what Paul said about the celebration of the Lord's Supper by the believers in Corinth. This church had some serious problems. **First**, in verse 17, Paul stated that they were coming together **not** for the better but for the worse. **Second**, in verse 18 he stated that he heard that there were divisions among them. They were far from being united as congregation. **Third**, in verse 20, he declared that their problems were so serious that they were not even really eating the Lord's Supper, even though they claimed that they were. **Fourth**, in verse 21 he described the situation in greater detail. As people gathered, and they of course gathered in individual homes to meet as a church, there was shocking behavior taking place. Instead of being a meal celebrating the unity of the church, it became a meal emphasizing division. Some either were eating their food even before others came, or the word translated **takes ahead** in verse 21 can be translated as **devours** his meal. One person coming for the meal and Lord's Supper would be fed basically nothing while another person would be fed lavish amounts of food and drink to the point of drunkenness. **Fifth**, Paul in

rebuking them stated even more seriously that they were despising the church of God and bringing shame on those who were poor and had very little.

Some commentators have pointed to the fact that making this problem even worse may have been a famine that affected the city of Corinth perhaps about the time Paul wrote this letter.¹ While some in the church were wealthy enough to live it up, others truly had nothing to eat. A mockery was being made of the gospel and the Lord's Supper when they came together.

Paul began his correction by repeating the true tradition that he had received from the Lord and had shared with the church in Corinth previously. Paul did not speak on the basis of his own authority but returned to the original source. And Paul was not simply reviewing the reason why we celebrate the Lord's Supper but the focus of what the supper is about. The Corinthians through their abuses had totally undermined the focus of the Supper.

Let me again review three important points from these verses.

First, Paul says that the Lord Jesus instituted this meal on the night in which he was betrayed. The last supper that Jesus ate with His disciples was a Passover meal, where Israel's deliverance from Egypt was celebrated. But at this last Passover meal, Jesus used it to establish a focus on the ultimate redemption that would come through His death. Instead of the focus of the Passover being on the **bread of affliction** that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt, Jesus stated the bread now represents his body given in sacrifice, the cup, the new covenant in His blood. And this connection between the Passover Meal and the Lord's Supper shows how ridiculous it is

¹ Thiselton, 852.

to think that the bread and the wine in any way can be thought of as turning into the actual body and blood of Christ.² Jesus was calling attention that the ultimate deliverance from the bondage of sin is found in his body and blood.

Second, in receiving the bread and wine, which represent the body and blood of Christ given for us, we are enjoying a covenant meal and in so doing we take an oath each time we eat and drink together. And so when you receive the bread and wine, you are not only declaring that your trust is in the Lord, in his body and blood, but also saying, Lord judge me if I am unfaithful to your covenant. If I seek to break the covenant which has been made, then let judgment come upon me. **Paul speaks in greater detail of this judgment in verse 30.** But in humble reliance upon Christ and His work on the cross, you also then have confidence that the Lord will do as He has promised as surely as you hold in your hands bread and wine. And this is again one of the many reasons why the Lord's Supper has significance well beyond the 15 minutes or so it takes to eat the symbolic meal. There are serious blessings and judgments that come from the short time that we spend together in celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Third, note again verse 26. **For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.** Here Paul is not speaking simply to the fact that the bread and wine remind us of the death of Christ. But the whole process is part of our proclamation as individual believers and as a body. This is why it is so important that we be in right relationship with each other as much as possible. For when we end the

² See the comments of Calvin, Fee, and Thiselton on this.

communion service, we are then called to live in terms of the confession we have made. In the meal you proclaim that you not only trust in Christ but you will seek to live in a sacrificial way as He did. And this profession must continue long after the meal has finished. And this way of living and proclaiming will and must continue until the Lord comes at the end of time. The Lord's Supper is to be a pattern for your entire life

2. THE APPLICATION OF THE SUPPER, v. 27-32

1Cor. 11:27 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. **28** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. **30** For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. **31** For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. **32** But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

These six verses give important instruction in light of both the abuses of the Lord's Supper by the Corinthian church and what is the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper. I would like us to look at these six verses, one verse at a time.

Most children do not find grammar classes to be the most exciting, but hopefully you appreciate what you did learn, because grammar is very important for interpreting and understanding the Bible correctly. **Verse 27** in the King James Version reads, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Several of the commentators I read have called this an

unfortunate translation, because of the word ‘unworthily.’³ But the real problem is that many people do not know the difference between an adverb and an adjective. Unworthily is an adverb; it speaks not about a person’s worthiness to partake of the Lord’s Supper but rather about participating in the Lord’s Supper in an improper way. Most modern versions now read, **in an unworthy manner**, which means the same thing but is perhaps more understandable.

I don’t know for sure, but I suppose many people have not understood verse 27 properly and have been filled with uncertainty and anxiety where there should not be.

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 in the way that they were coming together and celebrating it – drunkenness, gluttony, lack of sharing, divisions. Their attitudes and actions were far from fitting as we have seen. Now nearly two thousand years later, the same challenge applies to us though our situation is much different. We don’t face the same cultural and economic issues that the church in Corinth had to deal with. And yet Paul’s words of instruction still must apply to us.

What does it mean for us to eat and drink in an unworthy manner? There could be several applications for today. First, 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.

³ Fee, 560.

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 the 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?

Let me read Question and Answer 172 from the Westminster Larger Catechism.

Q. 172. May one who doubts of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord's supper?

A. One who doubts of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly [honestly] desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity: in which case (because promises are made, and this sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians) **he is to bewail his unbelief, and labor**

to have his doubts resolved; and, so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's supper, that he may be further strengthened.

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. So again we see that the Lord's Supper has significance much beyond the few minutes of our celebration.

In verse 28, Paul commands that you examine yourself and in this spirit of examination eat of the bread and drink of the cup. The translation here sounds somewhat awkward because in English we usually do not give direct commands in the third person. **Let him do** something is one way of translating a third-person imperative or command.

To examine means to determine if something is real; put to the test your faith, attitude, and actions to other believers.⁴

Some of you remember the last time that Francis Nigel Lee was with us. His practice of the Lord's Supper required a very extensive time of preparation and examination. I don't think that Paul is calling for hours of extended prayer and examination before you come to the Lord's Table. But I think this examination should be more than simple prayer you pray before you eat the bread and drink the cup. This examination is something that you seek to do both before and after you come to the Lord's Table. It means that you

⁴ *BDAG*, s.v. "δοκιμάζω," 255.

sincerely try to live your life according to the pattern the Lord's Supper provides. Your only hope is that Christ has given His body and blood for you. How are you responding in terms of faith and in terms of how you treat and relate to other believers?

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.

Verse 29 is similar to verse 27. There is a question in translating this verse because of differences in some Greek manuscripts.⁵ 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 various 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.⁶ But more likely, the word body is not here referring to other believers but the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ **Celebrating the meal**

⁵ The ESV reads, "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself."

⁶ Gordon Fee among others holds to this position. See Fee, 563-564.

⁷ 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.

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.⁸

In verse 30, Paul made clear to the Corinthians that there were severe consequences for their abuse of the Lord's Supper. 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. We don't have statistics on this matter to know what percentage of the congregation this applied to. 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,

⁸ See again the Larger Catechism.

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.⁹ 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.

⁹ Wallace comments on the grammar of this passage. There are two types of second class conditions: *present* contrary-to-fact and *past* contrary-to-fact. The *present* contrary-to-fact condition uses the *imperfect* in both the protasis and apodosis. It refers to something that is not true in the present time (from the speaker's portrayal). A typical translation would be *If X were . . . then Y would be* (as in "If you were a good man, then you would not be here right now"). Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: an Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 695.

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

CONCLUSION:

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

But 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.

The seriousness comes from the fact that in this meal we are dealing with the body and blood of Jesus Christ – not in a literal way of course.

Not going to be able to consider the full range of meaning in any single communion service.

Necessity then for preparation, examination, and continued reflection after our short time together is finished.

Hymn: 357