

Sermon 53: The Sacredness of the Lord's Table: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. 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. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come..."

Part 1: Paul's critique: 11:17-22 "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not..."

- **Introduction:**

- **A change from his former commendation: 11:17** "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not..."
- **A warning that the practice he is about to address is very serious: 11:17** "Ye come together not for the better, but for the worse..."
- **The repetition in the passage indicates the fundamental problem:**
 - **11:17** "Ye come together not for the better, but for the worse..."
 - **11:18** "When ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you..."
 - **11:20** "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper..."
 - **11:33** "When ye come together to eat, tarry one for another..."
 - **11:34** "If any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation..."
- **There were unscriptural divisions: 11:18** "I hear that there be divisions among you..."
 - **Some divisions are necessary while some others are unscriptural: 11:19** "There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you..."
 - **Scriptural:**
 - Those who identified with the gospel and were recognized by the church.
 - Those who had been removed from the church communion due to unrepentant sin.
 - **Unscriptural:**
 - Divisions based upon ethnicity/ culture
 - Divisions based upon societal differences (rich and poor/bond or free)
- **They were making a mockery of the Lord's Table: 11:20-22** "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?"
 - **They formally assembled.**
 - **They ate the elements.**
 - **They went through the motions but in a way that contradicted its purpose.**
 - **The Table came in two parts:**

- **The Table:** What we typically call communion or the Lord's Table.
- **A Feast:** What was commonly referred to as a love feast.
- **Some people were excluded and treated with disdain.**
- **Some people were flaunting their wealth and were getting intoxicated or being gluttonous.**
- **Paul called their actions spiteful and shameful.**

Part 2: Paul's reminders: 11:23-26 "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come..."

- **This is an ordinance passed down by Christ through the apostles: 11:23** "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you..."
- **The elements served an important function:**
 - **The bread was to be eaten with gratitude as the observer reflected on the body of Christ broken for them: 11:24** "Given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me..."
 - **The cup was to be drunk with gratitude as the observer reflected on the blood of Christ which was shed for them: 11:25** "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me..."
 - **The focus of the ordinance was to give thanks in remembrance: 11:26** "Ye do shew the Lord's death till he come..."
 - **The gospel is literally preached through the ordinance:**
- **The elements call us to reflect on a deep spiritual reality, but do not become something other than physical elements of bread and wine: 11:26** "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come..."

Part 3: The Background of the Passover and the Lord's Table:

- **A general overview of the Passover: Exodus 12:1-14** "And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel,

saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house...⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year...⁶ And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it...¹¹ And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever..."

- **Each family prepared their home by removing all leaven:**
 - It reminded the people of the haste of the first Passover.
 - It symbolized the removal of defilement from the home.
 - It reminded the people of the need for renewal as they entered a new year.
- **The Pascal lamb was selected on the 10th day of Nissan and then killed on the 14th.**
 - It was selected because it was spotless.
 - Its blood was shed to remind them of the first Passover Lamb which died in the place of the first born.
 - Its blood was sprinkled on the altar, visualizing that this sacrifice was to God for the condemned.
 - This picture pointed forward to the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.
- **The Passover meal during the time of Christ:**
 - The meal began with **Psalm 113-114**
 - During it, the family would tell the story of the Passover to connect the celebration to the events they were memorializing.
 - They would then eat the roasted lamb with unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and wine.
 - At the end of the meal, they would close with **Psalm 115-118**
- **Highlighting the scriptures read during the meal:**

- **Opening:**
 - **Psalm 113:1-9** "Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore...From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD'S name is to be praised. The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill..."
 - **Psalm 114:1-8** "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back...Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters..."
- **Closing: Psalm 115:1-9** Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield..."
- **Psalm 118:21-29** "I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD...O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever..."
- **The significance of Christ's final Passover: Luke 22:14-16** "And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this

passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God..."

- **Timing: 22:14** "When the hour was come..."
- **Focus: 22:15** "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover...before I suffer..."
- **Fulfillment: 22:16** "I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God..."
- **Elements: 22:17-20** "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you..."
 - **"My body given for you"**
 - Our sin was placed on Christ.
 - He was punished for our sin.
 - **"The New Testament in my blood which is shed for you"**
 - His blood "remitted" our sins.
 - His blood established a New Covenant.
- **The significance of the transition from Passover to the Lord's Table:** We are coming to "proclaim the Lord's death" until He comes.
 - Remember His body that "bore our sins," "was wounded for our transgressions," and "bruised for our iniquities."
 - Remember that the "chastisement of our peace was upon him" and that He has "redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us..."
 - Remember that we have "forgiveness of sins" through the "redemption of His blood."
 - Remember that we are the recipients of a better covenant because "by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Part 4: Paul's correctives: 11:27-34 "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. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. ²⁹ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the

Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come..."

- **Problem:** The people were partaking in an unworthy manner.
 - "Unworthily," is not an adjective describing the character of the person coming to the table.
 - It is an adverb, describing the manner in which the one participating came to the table.
 - The Corinthian disregard for the sacredness of the Lord's table was treating what it pictured with disdain and contempt.
 - "Guilty of the body and blood of the Lord..."
 - "Not discerning the Lord's body..."
- **A few comments:**
 - We desperately need to look at this issue in a healthy way.
 - There is severity in the text, but that severity is not without a just cause.
 - The problems in the church at Corinth were severe and demeaned the sacred in many significant ways.
 - We can react to this text in an unhealthy manner.
 - We can get our eyes off the purpose of the Lord's Table and fixate on the warnings.
 - The Lord's Table should be a positive not negative time.
 - The focus should be on Him, not on us.
 - We are not declaring anything about what we have done, but rather entirely what He has done for us.
 - We should see this as a sweet, comforting, and worshipful time.
- **Solution:** They needed to personally examine the manner in which they were coming to the table.
 - **Examine and repent if necessary:** "Let a man examine himself..."
 - **Come to the table in the right manner:** "And so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup..."
- **Warning:** People who were mocking the sacredness of this ordinance were in danger of severe temporal judgment.
 - **Guilty of publicly demeaning Christ's sacrifice:** "Guilty of the body and blood of the Lord..."
 - **In danger of facing a severe temporal judgement:** "Eateth and drinketh damnation to himself..."
 - **This judgment is incremental and visible:** "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

- **This chastisement is an evidence God's Fatherly care:** "We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world..."
- **Comfort:** This chastisement is a confirmation of God's care for His own children.
 - "That we should not be condemned with the world..."
- **Final Exhortations:** Treat one another as brothers in Christ and act like a body under the authority of Christ.
 - "My brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another..."
 - "If any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation..."
 - "The rest will I set in order when I come..."

Putting everything Together:

- **We need to understand the Lord's Table:**
 - It is an ordinance passed down by Christ through the apostles.
 - It connects two covenants, the Old and the New.
 - It is for the church and is meant to be a time of worship, fellowship, and reflection.
 - It directs our attention to the body that bore our sin and the blood that was shed to remove the sin.
 - It is a sacred time not to be treated with disdain.
- **We need to understand the danger of mocking the sacred:**
 - Christ's sacrifice is sacred.
 - He loves and defends His church.
 - His judgment can be severe.
 - We must examine the way we approach worship.
- **We need to delight in the gift of the Lord's Table:**
 - Let's not react to this text in an unhealthy manner.
 - Let's not get our eyes off the purpose of the Lord's Table and fixate on the warnings.
 - The Lord's Table should be a positive not a negative time.
 - The focus should be on Him, not on us.
 - We should see this as a sweet, comforting, and worshipful time.