

The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective
"Thanksgiving and the Lord's Supper"
I Corinthians 11:17–34
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This will be a homily as we come to the Lord's Table and prepare to receive it. I Corinthians 11:17–34 says [17] *But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. [18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, [19] for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. [20] When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. [21] For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. [22] What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. [23] 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, [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 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." [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

[27] 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. [28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

[33] So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— [34] 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.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We call this text the words of institution because in this passage there is such clarity about the Lord's Supper being given by the Apostle Paul. Like so many things, this is not only historic as Paul is in Ephesus, writing a letter a letter where he had ministered for 18 months and that was to the church at Corinth, but in his absence some things have fallen apart. This letter will address seven issues. In the letter to the Corinthians Paul gives an introduction in chapters 1 and 2 and then you will notice a phrase 'Now concerning (this)...' that shows up seven times throughout the letter. Paul is correcting seven issues there at the church of Corinth and one of them was there abuse of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a divinely designed instrument as a means of grace and when it is celebrated it is to be for the better and not for the worse but the way they were doing it, it had become worse.

What had made it worse? They had come to the Lord's Supper and instead of humbling themselves at the level ground of the cross, they attempted to exalt themselves even in the midst of Holy Communion. One of the practices that was very prevalent of the early church was the

practice of having a meal that was generally called the Agape Feast. The Lord's Day for them was not an hour here or an hour there but it was a whole day. They would come together for worship, then have a meal and after that meal they would finish with the Lord's Supper. Then would have more preaching, more fellowship and more worship. In the meal preceding the Lord's Supper after worship, people had begun to use that meal to show off their means – what they had access to, the wine and food they brought. They would look down on those who would have very little to bring. So instead of sharing at such a moment they began to exalt themselves. Then it was carrying over into the relationships and the divisions.

Paul knew there were going to be divisions in the church because in every church there is a mixed multitude. There were some there by false profession so God will approve those who know Him and those who don't but Paul was telling them that this kind of division was of the flesh. It was so bad that where God had designed His blessing to flow, He is now having to come in judgment and discipline. Note the difference. It is not the judgment that the world gets apart from Christ for that's called the judgment of condemnation. This is the judgment of a Father disciplining wayward children who are in rebellion against Him. It had extended to the point where the text says that some were weak where I think He is speaking of spiritual impotency. Some were ill which He is speaking of physical problems. Some of them had even died.

This was God's discipline of grace because they hadn't come to the Supper in a manner worthy. They are not to come as worthy for one of the points of the Lord's Supper is for us to tell the Lord we're not worthy but we're to come in a manner worthy which is to come prepared examining yourself and not promoting yourself. Paul tells them they are to come together for the better and not for the worse. So in this study I want to give you a couple of thoughts about how the Lord's Supper can be for the better. There are five principles/perspectives you need to have in your mind.

The first one is that when you come to the Lord's Supper you come as a congregation. The elders in our church have even ordained the call to worship so that our Pastor of Care, myself, some other elders and some members of the church to go to the homes where the people are shut-in and we'll have a worship service there, because the Lord's Supper is not a matter of private administration. Notice the times Paul says to do it – when you come together. Those who have been called out of darkness have been called together in Christ and we congregate as a family. We do the Lord's Supper ten times here at Briarwood throughout the year and we will tell you ahead of time when we do it that you may prepare yourself beforehand as we come together for the Lord's Day is a family reunion to sit at the banquet of praise and worship.

Paul doesn't tell us how often but he does say 'for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup...' That gathering of the banquet of the family is topped off with a focused approach to the Lord's Supper. We don't do it superficially for then you will come in a manner unworthy. We don't treat it superstitiously either but we treat it with its sacred substance and sacred design as a means of grace and that means of grace begins with how you prepare to come. How do you come? You come with the family. This can be thought of as we will be celebrating Thanksgiving soon as you get the family together for table fellowship.

In the family I grew up in when we sat down to the Thanksgiving meal and it was over we all stayed around the table to talk and fellowship. We seemed to tell the same stories that we told the previous year except perhaps a little bigger and better (smile). When we get together for this Table fellowship we tell one story and this story gets better every time for it's the old, old, story – the body and blood of Christ given for you. We do this with the family.

Secondly, we come to the Table with a celebration. We don't have this superstition that when the pastor says these words that these elements change into the body and blood of Christ physically. When Jesus did the Lord's Supper with His Disciples and said 'this is My body' where was His body? Jesus was right there at the table so it's that you spiritually by faith participate in feeding upon the blessings of Christ's body where He bore all of your sins in His body. That unleavened bread tells you He has removed your sins – that is texture ingested – and you are now spiritually ingesting the blessings of Christ that were preached to you to bring you to the Table.

Then you take the cup. I have a number of people who will ask me 'do you all use grape juice or real wine?' If you have to ask then I think you're missing the point. The cup is the fruit of the vine which what God chose carefully and the point is not the alcoholic content, but the point is the taste, for it's bittersweet. We are reminded of our sins and the bitterness. We are reminded that Jesus' blood has forgiven us and His grace is so sweet and greater than all our sins. So when we come to the Table we are celebrating our redemption at the cross.

We are to proclaim the Lord's death as we come to the Table because there at the cross is ground zero for us for there the love of God met the holiness of God to satisfy God, to save sinners by the grace of God, to the glory of God. This what we are celebrating. If you are serious about Jesus then you get discouraged because you find yourself doing that evil that you don't want to do and say 'Lord, how do I get free from this body of death' and He keeps reminding you, 'Get back to Me.' Keep your eyes on Jesus and remember that the Gospel is the Word of the cross where the atonement was made and Christ's righteousness is sent to us. When you know you're saved by grace this takes us to number three.

Thirdly, when you come to the Table you now have a time of contemplation. We can examine ourselves. If you think you are going to heaven because of how great your works are then you will not be able to examine yourself for you'll keep covering up your sin. This is what Adam and Eve did when they went to find fig leaves to sew together and cover themselves but when Jesus came calling on them to ask why they had covered up they said 'we were naked' and Jesus says 'no you weren't for you have fig leaves' but they didn't work for what they were really trying to cover up. Our 'works righteousness' never works because we can't cover up our sins. When you know you're saved by grace through the finished work of Jesus then now you're free to examine yourself.

So where do you do contemplation and examination? You do it in two directions. First, you examine yourself vertically in your walk with the Lord and you're intimacy with the Lord. Ask God to show you any of the sins that are separating your intimacy with Him. Secondly, ask God to show you your sins in the body – your immediate family, God's family – where do I have ought against my brother and I need to do away with it? Where do I need to forgive? Then forgive. It is glorious when we confess our sins to the Lord because then He says in I John 1:9, *[9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* In other words, He doesn't say 'Ok let's try again.' Justice demands you're forgiven because Jesus paid for it. Now that means I'm free to examine myself and my relationships in the body. One of the greatest blessings from this is when somebody comes to you and says 'forgive me' and you say to them 'I forgive you because Christ has forgiven me.' The body gets unified and reconciled instead of divided.

The fourth thing when we come to the Table is we confess. As we do our contemplation we arrive at our confession to the Lord and to each other which leads us to the fifth principle of the Lord's Supper.

The fifth principle in coming to the Table is consecration. Now I'm refreshed, renewed and I can recalibrate. So when you come to the Table it's revival time, reconciling time, renewal time and recalibration time. If you're serious about following Jesus it's very easy to get detoured to again to start relying on ourselves. Here He is bringing you back to rely upon Him. It's also very easy to get discouraged so He is bringing you back you that you are not who you are because of what you do but you are who you are because of what He did for you so that sets you free to do what you do not to be somebody but for your Savior. Now you're free to grow in Him and for Him and this becomes a time of consecration.

People tend to ask me how I have been able to grow in the Lord so the takeaways I will give you from this study will tell you this. I haven't been able to grow perfectly or evenly for it's been up and down but praise God I'm still at it 40 plus years later, by His grace and for His glory. So as the takeaway for this study here are the five things I have done to keep growing in Christ.

One is to fix your eyes on Jesus and that's why the Lord's Supper is so wonderful because it helps us to do this. Jesus is your Hope, your Light and your life. Galatians 2:20 says *[20] I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Christ is my all in all. It is not that He is at the top of the list of all but He is my all and He is in all. He has not just given you your life but He is your life.

Secondly, after you fix your eyes on Christ remember to flee temptation. Don't resist temptation but flee it. Don't see how close to the cliff you can walk and keep your balance. Get on the highway that is away from the cliff. You don't walk next to it, but you get away from it.

Thirdly, get filled up with God's Word and God's Spirit. Fill up with this to overflowing. If you're a Christian are you still a broken vessel? Yes, so do you want to be filled up with Jesus? So what does a broken vessel do? It leaks. We have a tendency to come every once in a while to the Bible and prayer to fill it but it just empties out quickly. There is only one way to fill up a broken vessel and that is to submerge it, immerse it so then it fills up and around and loses nothing. Be submerged and immersed in the Word of God and the Spirit of God because that is what fills us up.

Fourthly, get models, mentors and motivators. Get models from the Bible and church history. One of the great blessings of this church is the mixture of people in this body so we can do Titus 2. Titus 2:1-8 says *[1] But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. [2] Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. [3] Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, [4] and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, [5] to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. [6] Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. [7] Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, [8] and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.*

This is where older men are teaching younger men and older women are teaching younger women. So if you're 28 then go get someone 38, 48, 58 or 68 to model after and be mentored by. Then go get someone 18 that you can be a model to and mentor. This how we are to be discipled and to disciple others. Then get motivators in our life. Men get other men who can surround you as a band of brothers, to hold you accountable, to love you and pray for you.

Women, get that circle of sisters around you that will hold you accountable, pray for you and work with you.

Fifthly and finally, every Lord's Day do a deep dive. I beg you not as a pastor, but from someone who learned this before I became a pastor, to make the Lord's Day special. Don't just wade in for an hour on Sunday morning for the Lord didn't say 'the Lord's Day hour' but He said the Lord's **Day**. Make the Lord's Day special for you and your family. That is why Christians historically dressed different on the Lord's Day. It's not to flaunt money but it was to dress different because the day is different. It's not every day but this is the day that sets the thermostat for the other days. It's the day I do a deep dive to hear God's Word sung, confessed, read, preached and displayed in the sacraments. I do the deep dive to get submerged in the Word and the Spirit and filled up to overflowing. Start preparing for worship on the Lord's Day the night before. Enter into the Lord's Day to rest physically and be renewed spiritually. That is how the Lord made you – 6 days work, 1 day rest and worship – and the Lord's Day says He is risen and coming again and He'll be with me until He comes again.

Now let's come to His Table – taste and see that the Lord is good. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the privilege to come to the Table. Would You come and minister to us by Your Word and through Your Spirit even in these moments? God, unite us together in Christ. Where we have wandered, renew us, refresh us and reconcile us to Yourself. Recalibrate us in our life and any ought that we have against each other help us at this Table to give it to You. Any place we need to forgive, help us from this Table to give what has been freely given to us – forgiveness. Then Father, at this Table fix our hearts, our minds and our souls on Jesus. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

FIVE PRINCIPLES

- I. Congregational
- II. Celebration
- III. Contemplation
- IV. Confession
- V. Consecration

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

- I. Fixed on Christ
- II. Flee Temptation
- III. Filled up with God's Word and Spirit
- IV. Models – Mentors – Motivators
- V. Lord's Day – Deep Dive